

Inspection of Heath Farm School

Heath Farm, Charing Heath, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AX

Inspection dates: 3–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy and safe at Heath Farm. They say that they enjoy coming to this school because of the friends that they make and the caring staff. For many pupils, experiences of education in the past have not always been positive. They often arrive at the school with low self-esteem. Due to the caring pastoral support provided, pupils settle in quickly and start to flourish.

Pupils behave well. They enjoy taking on roles and responsibilities. For example, during the inspection some pupils were helping to check the maintenance of the school's fire extinguishers. When pupils become anxious, staff help them to regulate their emotions. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are infrequent. They feel confident that staff would deal with any issues should they occur.

Parents are supportive of the school. One parent summed up the view of others when they said, 'It feels like you are a part of a family when you have a child at Heath Farm.'

Throughout the school there is a calm and purposeful approach to learning. Staff have high expectations for pupils. In lessons, pupils concentrate hard to complete the set tasks. They enjoy following school routines such as the daily reading sessions.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is designed well. It is based on the themes of love, commitment and opportunity. There is an equal focus on developing pupils' social and academic skills. Staff develop warm and trusting relationships with pupils. They help pupils to build their confidence and self-esteem.

In lessons there is a clear focus on enthusing pupils and reigniting their interest in learning. Staff know pupils well, particularly the triggers that may affect their attention and learning. Effective support is provided to help pupils develop a belief in their own abilities. This helps pupils to make strong gains in their knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects over time.

Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the outdoor learning provision. They like the many 'hands on' opportunities that are provided with, such as in woodwork and horticulture. Pupils like taking the initiative. They enjoyed designing and building walkways, sheds and firepits in the new outdoor area.

Therapists play an important role in helping pupils to understand their own social and emotional needs. This includes therapies in areas such as art, drama and equine studies. Parents are particularly positive about this aspect of school life and say how much their children have benefited from this support.

Each pupil has a personal education plan. These are detailed and show the next steps planned for each pupil. However, some plans are not specific enough about how pupils' communication skills are to be developed.

Reading is a priority in the school. As a result, pupils develop a love of books. During World Book Day staff and pupils dressed up as famous fictional characters. They enjoyed reading aloud to others and talking about their favourite books. Staff are well trained to help pupils to become confident readers. During the inspection pupils worked together enthusiastically in the new outdoor reading area to develop an imaginative plot for a story.

In mathematics, many pupils join the school with gaps in their knowledge. Teachers ensure that pupils understand concepts fully before moving on to new learning. Older pupils are encouraged to develop their skills of using mathematics in everyday life, such as when buying shopping or paying bills.

In subjects such as art, pupils develop a good understanding of how to use different materials and mediums. They show a clear appreciation of the work of famous and contemporary artists.

Pupils enjoy learning about British values. They appreciate the need for rules in society. Pupils understand the school's behaviour system. They know how their actions have positive or negative consequences. Concepts such as democracy are well understood. Pupils told us that they like taking part in elections for the school council. Pupils say that their views and opinions are valued by staff. For instance, staff had allowed them to design the layout and apparatus in the new adventure playground.

Those few students who attend the friendly, post-16 provision say that they enjoy their learning. The curriculum enables them to study a broad range of subjects and gain accreditations. Students' social and emotional development is catered for well. They value the input of the onsite therapist. Trusting relationships are formed with staff, who take every opportunity to help students to develop their life skills. As a result, students are confident and have a good understanding of their individual talents and strengths.

The school provides older pupils with ample careers education and work experience opportunities. They say that this helps them to plan for the next stage of their education, training or employment. However, leaders recognise that the vocational offer in catering and hospitality and performing arts in the post-16 provision is not as strong as they would want.

The proprietors have ensured that the school is well led and managed. The new headteacher is well supported by a capable leadership team. Leaders all share the same high aspirations for pupils to make strong gains in their social and academic skills. Senior leaders and the proprietor have ensured that the independent school standards and the requirements of The Equality Act 2010 have been met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe in the school. They talk confidently about how staff help them to learn how to stay safe, including when using the internet and social media.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is given the highest priority. Staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities because they are well trained. They know what action to take if a pupil comes to them with a concern. Staff work well together to ensure that every pupil is protected from risk. The vetting and induction of new staff are thorough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Currently, leaders recognise that the breadth of vocational opportunity for post-16 students is not wide enough in areas such as catering and hospitality and the performing arts. This means that students do not get a full appreciation of what these areas can offer them. Leaders need to further strengthen these vocational pathways to give students a broader range of experiences.
- Targets for developing pupils' communication skills are too broad in some individual education plans. This means that pupils' communication skills are not as well developed as they could be. Staff need to provide greater clarity in specifying how pupils will develop these skills to enable more detailed monitoring and for pupils' communication skills to develop more effectively.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	119009
DfE registration number	886/6060
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10103831
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	91
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Craig Ribbons
Headteacher	Jason Pearn
Annual fees (day pupils)	£43,419–£63,176
Telephone number	01233 712030
Website	https://heathfarmschool.org/
Email address	jcromwell@heathfarmschool.org
Date of previous inspection	21–23 February 2017

Information about this school

- Heath Farm school is an independent special school set in a rural location near Ashford, Kent. The school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have additional needs associated with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils have often experienced disruption to their education prior to joining the school. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

- The school runs a post-16 provision at 17 Hardinge Road, Ashford Kent TN24 8HB.
- Since the previous inspection a new headteacher joined the school in January 2019. This position became substantive in April 2019.
- Heath Farm School is owned and operated by Heath Farm Family Services Limited. This is a fully owned subsidiary of Acorn Care and Education Limited, which is part of the Outcomes First Group Ltd, a provider of children's services in the UK.
- The school uses two alternative providers. These are MXCP (Motorcross Challenge Project) and Centre Stage.
- The school is registered for up to 85 pupils. Currently there are 91 on roll.
- The last standard inspection took place in February 2017 when the school was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with the proprietor's representative, the headteacher, other senior leaders, teachers, support staff, therapists and pupils.
- When considering the quality of education, we focused particularly on English and reading; mathematics; art; and personal, social, health and citizenship education. We visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- We took into account the 50 responses to the pupil survey and 59 responses to the staff survey. We reviewed 18 parents' responses to Ofsted's online parent survey and accompanying free-text messages. We also held discussions with parents on the telephone.
- We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection, including during breaks and at the start and finish of the school day. We assessed the school's culture to keep pupils safe throughout the inspection. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies, staff training records and documentation associated with the school meeting all aspects of the independent school standards. The single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children was also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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