

Birtley House Independent School

Fawkham Road, West Kingsdown, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 6AY

Inspection dates

6 July 2021

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g)–2(2)(i), 3(a)–4

- The school has been operating as an independent special school in all but name since its establishment in 2011. The proprietor has applied to formally change the school's status from an independent school to an independent special school.
- The school's existing curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced. It follows the national curriculum and is carefully tailored to pupils' particular needs.
- The mathematics curriculum provides a well-sequenced programme of learning. Teachers use a wide range of practical resources to support pupils' learning. For example, during the inspection adults supported pupils using cubes and metre rulers to measure and compare distances travelled by toy cars.
- Reading is given a high priority in the curriculum. Reading and phonics sessions take place daily in every class. The school's well-stocked library provides an attractive environment for pupils to enjoy books. Staff choose books carefully to appeal to pupils' interests.
- Some pupils are working within early years developmental areas in some or all aspects of learning. Leaders have adopted a suitable approach to teaching subjects such as literacy and numeracy to this group of pupils.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about pupils' needs and about the subjects they teach. Subjects such as music and physical education are taught by specialist teachers. The school also provides a number of specialist services, including play therapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.
- The school's personal, social, health and economic curriculum (PSHE) covers a range of topics in an age-appropriate way. Supervised trips and visits give pupils the opportunity to put their learning into practice. For example, pupils have the opportunity to order and pay for something to eat and drink in a café during the school's regular trips to a local shopping centre.

- Teaching in the school fosters confidence and self-esteem. For example, during the inspection adults' encouragement ensured that pupils spoke out clearly when explaining their answers to their classmates during mathematics lessons. Pupils want to do well. They listen to their teachers carefully and work hard. Pupils respond very positively to adults' high expectations of learning and behaviour.
- Well-established assessment procedures ensure that leaders and teachers know how well pupils are learning. Teachers use this information carefully to plan lessons and activities which are suitable for pupils' individual learning and development needs and build on prior learning.
- The school is likely to meet this independent school standard if the material change is approved.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- The curriculum ensures that pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as the value of democracy, tolerance and the rule of law. For example, special events, such as mock elections, are organised to mirror significant national events, such as a general election, and help to teach pupils about the British voting system.
- The curriculum encourages pupils to understand the positive contribution they can make to their community and to value the views of others. For example, pupils contribute to the formulation of class rules, and the school's aims are agreed by the whole school.
- The school's religious education curriculum introduces pupils to a number of world religions. Visits to places of worship are built into the curriculum to enhance pupils' understanding of religious beliefs. Leaders make sure that the school's resources and displays promote and celebrate diversity.
- The school usually provides a wide range of trips and visits to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, such as museum trips, theatre visits, and a residential trip. In the past year, the pandemic has restricted the school's ability to offer the same range of activities beyond the school. However, leaders have made sure that pupils have continued to benefit from similar activities on the school site wherever possible, such as arranging for a theatre group to visit the school, or giving pupils the opportunity to purchase snacks from a sandwich delivery van.
- The school is likely to meet this independent school standard if the material change is approved.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website, as required. However, at the time that the inspection was announced, the policy had not been updated in line with 2020 statutory government guidance. Leaders subsequently addressed a number of omissions in the policy so that it now includes all required aspects of safeguarding.

- Safeguarding practices in the school are sound, despite omissions in the safeguarding policy. Leaders have a secure understanding of safeguarding matters. They make sure that staff are suitably trained.

Paragraphs 11–12

- The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy in place. The site manager keeps a close eye on health and safety matters. He makes sure that everything is in order from day to day and over time.
- Leaders ensure that the school's fire safety arrangements are regularly audited by specialist agencies, in addition to the school's own checks. They act swiftly to address any recommendations. Fire extinguishers are checked annually, and staff complete regular training in their use. Fire safety signage features clearly and consistently throughout the school.

Paragraph 14

- Strong relationships between adults and pupils contribute positively to pupils' self-esteem and welfare. Adults are attentive to pupils' needs and pupils respond respectfully. Leaders ensure that pupils are supervised appropriately during lessons and breaktimes. Midday supervisors get to know the pupils well. During the inspection, adults chatted pleasantly with pupils during the lunch break, while pupils played happily and sensibly.

Paragraph 16(a)–16(b)

- The school's risk assessment is fit for purpose. Risk assessments are routinely completed as a well-established part of school life. Sensible measures are taken to mitigate identified risks.
- The school is likely to meet this independent school standard if the material change is approved.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)–32(1)(g), 32(1)(h)–32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii), 32(2)(d)–32(3)(a), 32(3)(c)–32(4)(c)

- The school's website complies with statutory requirements about what schools must include.
- The school provides parents with a written annual report of pupils' progress and attainment in the subjects taught. The reports provide a comprehensive range of information, including an overview of pupils' attendance. In addition, provision plans provide precise information about the support and interventions in place for individual pupils.
- The school is likely to meet this independent school standard if the material change is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- Leaders are highly knowledgeable about teaching pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They are strongly committed to ensuring that every pupil achieves well.
- Leaders ensure that staff are suitably trained to teach pupils with SEND. They ensure that a range of robust policies and procedures are implemented consistently, so that the school operates smoothly and safely. Leaders make sure that the school is suitably resourced to deliver the curriculum.
- The proprietor has established an advisory board since the previous inspection. The board provides helpful support and challenge for school leaders.
- The school is likely to meet this independent school standard if the material change is approved.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	136211
DfE registration number	886/6136
Inspection number	10198550

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Paul Mortimer-Lee
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Emma Sillitoe
Annual fees (day pupils)	£14,850 to £29,544
Telephone number	01474 853192
Website	www.birtleyhouseschool.co.uk
Email address	office@birtleyhouseschool.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	9–11 May 2018

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	5 to 11	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	50	Not applicable	Not applicable

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Not applicable

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	50	Not applicable
Number of part-time pupils	0	Not applicable
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	50	Not applicable
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	45	Not applicable
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	45	Not applicable

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	6	Not applicable
Number of part-time teaching staff	2	Not applicable
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this school

- Birtley House Independent School is a mixed, independent, day special school. The school provides for pupils who have moderate and sometimes complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' needs vary but can include specific or general learning difficulties, social and communication difficulties, language and communication needs and emotional, attachment and anxiety disorders. The majority of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils are referred to the school by four local authorities and by a number of independent schools. Pupils join the school at different times during the school year and at different ages. Their length of stay in the school varies according to their

individual needs. The number of pupils on roll has increased considerably since the previous inspection.

- Therapists provide specialist support each week. Approximately half of the therapy is provided by the National Health Service and half by private companies.
- The school was previously inspected in May 2018.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- Pupils are taught English and mathematics in the mornings in ability groups of mixed ages. They are taught in mixed-ability and mixed-age groups in the afternoons.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to evaluate the school's application for a material change. The proprietor wishes to change the school status from an independent school to an independent special school.
- This was the school's first material change inspection.
- I held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special needs coordinator and site manager. I also had a telephone call discussion with a member of the directors' advisory board.
- I toured the school building, visited a number of lessons and observed the lunchtime break. I also looked at a number of pupils' workbooks. I reviewed the school's website and considered a range of school policies.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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