

Inspection of Clarity Independent School

Bridge Farm Barn, Woodhill Road, Sandon, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 7SG

Inspection dates: 11–13 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

While Clarity Independent School pupils take huge steps in improving their attendance, behaviour and personal development, they do not always do as well as they should in their academic studies. Sometimes staff set work that is too easy.

Pupils enjoy coming to the school. They like the small and close-knit community. They say that it is a friendly and safe place to learn. Staff are exceptionally caring and supportive. They understand pupils' social and emotional needs well. Working relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. These relationships contribute significantly to pupils' good behaviour and increasingly positive attitudes to learning. Parents and carers speak highly of the encouraging role that the school has played in changing their children's lives.

Pupils say that there is no bullying here. At break and lunchtimes, they are sociable and get on well with each other. The school guinea pigs are a popular feature of playtime. Pupils like helping to look after them. They understand their responsibility to make sure that there is a regular supply of clean water and fresh food.

Pupils join in a range of activities, including forest school, swimming, local visits and cooking. Most enjoy reading and can speak with confidence about their books.

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

The current school team is new and still developing. Staff have not had all the training they need to help them to plan effectively for pupils' learning over time. Some staff lack confidence to teach across a range of subjects. Expectations of what pupils can manage are not matched well enough to their ability, improving confidence and attitudes to learning. Systems for checking on what pupils already know and what they need to improve are at an early stage of implementation.

Staff plan interesting activities, but learning is not always ordered in the most logical way or revisited at the most appropriate time to help pupils know and remember more. Where learning is effectively planned, staff help pupils to revisit topic themes in different subjects. In one example, they linked a project on Charles Darwin to current work in English and found opportunities to discuss issues such as selective breeding and aspects of history.

Pupils are encouraged to read a range of different texts in lessons. In English, older pupils were excited by the book 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'. They enjoyed discussing the meaning of different sections as they took turns to read aloud. They also showed good recall as they made links to the storylines they had read previously. Most pupils enjoy reading. Some of the books they choose to read independently, and with school staff, are not challenging enough to improve their reading skills over time.

Staff have a clear understanding of pupils' social and emotional needs. They take great care to ensure that these needs are met. Pupils' personal development is promoted well. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, such as acting as 'ambassadors' for new entrants to the school. They are currently planning their ideas for more pupil responsibility roles and setting up a new school council.

Improving pupils' physical and mental health is a high priority. Regular exercise and sports, including swimming, are popular events. Working relationships between peers and with school staff make a positive difference to pupils' attitudes to learning and their regular attendance. The school team acts as a strong role model in helping pupils learn to be respectful of individual differences. Behaviour in lessons and around the building is mostly good. The occasional outburst is managed safely and well.

The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. This is because there are weaknesses in implementing the planned curriculum. The intended key stage 3 curriculum is not fully in place. Staff have not had the training they need to help them to plan effectively for pupils' academic learning. School improvement planning, including plans for introducing the key stage 4 curriculum and arrangements for ongoing staff development, is at an early stage.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders ensure that all the required pre-employment checks are made before new staff join the school. Staff training is up to date. The team is vigilant and knows what to do if a concern needs to be raised. Staff understand the signs to look out for that may indicate a pupil could be at risk of harm. Pupils say that they feel safe when they are in the school.

Leaders make sure that the school building is well maintained. All the necessary health and safety checks, including risk assessments, are completed.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Staff do not routinely adapt their planning to take account of the things that pupils already know and what they need to do better. Pupils in mixed-age groups are often set the same work, regardless of their ability or different starting points. Consequently, they do not learn as well as should. The school's assessment system is still evolving. Leaders should check that all staff are clear about what needs to be taught at each key stage and that the intended programme of assessment is implemented effectively.

- Some staff do not have the knowledge they need to teach with confidence across subjects. Learning is not always planned in the most logical order or revisited to help pupils know and remember more. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the training and skills they need to implement the intended curriculum successfully. They should evaluate the quality of pupils' academic learning regularly to inform further improvements and share good practice.
- Systems for monitoring and reviewing the quality of education that the school provides are underdeveloped. This means that the proprietor and school leaders do not have an accurate picture of the school's effectiveness. Leaders should set out their medium- and long-term vision in a well-defined school development plan, with clear milestones and regular review points involving the whole team.

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	146804
DfE registration number	881/6073
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10130237
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Clarity SEN Consultancy Ltd.
Headteacher	Debbie Hanson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,000
Telephone number	01245 408606
Website	Under construction
Email address	admin@clarity.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school's registration with the Department for Education (DfE) was approved in June 2019. It opened as an independent special school, catering for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, in September 2019.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils' support needs include autism spectrum disorder, cognitive and learning needs, specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social development needs, communication and interaction needs, and physical disability.
- Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their full-time education in previous schools.
- The headteacher is the sole proprietor and director of the limited company.
- The school does not have a governing body.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.
- The school's website was under construction at the time of the inspection. Parents can access all the required information, including policies and complaints procedures, on request from the school's office manager.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We held meetings with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, her deputy and other school staff, including the school caretaker. We also spoke on the telephone with the local authority and met with a parent after the school day.
- We visited lessons with the deputy headteacher. We looked closely at the quality of education in English, including reading, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education and history. We checked learning schemes and books, met with school staff and spoke with pupils about their work.
- We looked at safeguarding and child protection documents, including the single central record, records of behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.
- We took account of five free-text responses from parents and five responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire. We also looked at eight responses to the questionnaire for school staff and five responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.

The school's proposed change of age range

The school has applied to the DfE to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

The outcome of this aspect of the inspection is: The school is unlikely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to extending the age range of the provision is implemented.

- During the standard inspection, we considered the school's material change request to extend the current age range, for pupils aged six years to 14 years, to cover pupils between the ages of six years and 16 years.
- A temporary arrangement to extend the school's age range, to the end of the summer term 2020, was agreed between the proprietor and the DfE in September 2019.
- In considering the school's material change request, we reviewed the school's evidence against parts 1, 2 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- Further information about the independent school standards that are not likely to be met is available in the annex of the report.

The school's application to make a material change

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(f), 2(2)(g), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i)

- The proprietor has a curriculum plan in place that sets out a range of age-appropriate activities, including GCSE qualifications, to take pupils to the end of key stage 4.
- There is no clear strategy or planning in place to support staff and curriculum development over time.
- Current planning for learning does not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do. The school's assessment system is not sufficiently developed.
- The school has an appropriately planned programme to develop pupils' personal, social and health education.
- The curriculum plan to the end of key stage 4 covers a range of subjects and learning experiences, including careers information, advice and guidance.
- This standard is not likely to be met if the DfE approves the material change the proprietor has requested.

Paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i)

- As stated in the sections above, some staff are very new and have not had enough training to support effective implementation of the planned curriculum. Not all staff are confident to teach across a range of subjects. Assessment systems are still developing.
- Currently, pupils in mixed-age groups are often set the same work to complete. This is because planning does not give enough consideration to day-to-day reviews of learning and individual starting points.
- Over their time in the school, current pupils improve their confidence and regain an interest in learning.
- Classrooms are bright and welcoming. Staff and pupils have access to an interesting range of age-appropriate physical and online resources.
- Current pupils behave well. Staff promote good behaviour, tolerance and respect in lessons and around the school.
- The standard for Part 1 is not likely to be met if the DfE approves the material change the proprietor has requested.

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

Paragraph 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(v), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5(d)(ii), 5(d)(iii)

- As reported in the sections above, the school's provision for pupils' personal development is secure. Staff provide strong support for pupils' social and emotional needs.
- Pupils behave well. They understand the basic principles of democracy and fundamental British values. Staff manage occasional incidents of inappropriate behaviour effectively.
- Curriculum plans set out leaders' intention to continue to develop pupils' understanding of individual differences and respect for other people. Appropriate attention is given to the protected characteristics, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, in plans to the end of key stage 4.
- The standard for Part 2 is likely to be met if the DfE approves the material change the proprietor has requested.

Part 8. Leadership and management

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

- Leaders' strategy for the implementation of the planned curriculum to the end of key stage 4 is unclear.
- There is no linked programme of staff training or school improvement. The school's system for checking how well pupils are learning across subjects and key stages is underdeveloped.
- The proprietor and other senior leaders have ensured that safeguarding is a high priority across the school.
- All the required pre-employment checks are completed. The premises are well maintained. Suitable risk assessments are in place.
- The standard for Part 8 is not likely to be met if the DfE approves the material change the proprietor has requested.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Herlock

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards for the standard inspection of the school

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school Standards for the material change

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
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- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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