

Inspection of The Serendipity School

399 Hinkler Road, Thornhill, Southampton, Hampshire SO19 6DS

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this superb school. Extremely skilled staff quickly build caring, professional relationships with pupils. This develops trust and increases pupils' involvement in education.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Care for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs is excellent. Staff help pupils to understand themselves. Pupils learn to self-regulate their behaviour and improve their communication skills. Consequently, pupils' self-esteem grows, and they are able to attend regularly, behave very well and work hard. Pupils rarely fall out with each other, because leaders are adept at spotting any signs of tension between pupils.

Pupils learn to enjoy learning. They especially relish learning about hair and beauty in 'the spa' and participating in a wide range of trips, visits and sporting activities such as cricket and rock-climbing. Such activities help to develop pupils' character and cultural awareness extremely well.

Adults keep pupils on track and help them to make informed decisions about their futures. Older pupils benefit from college and work placements. Pupils, parents and carers recognise the life-changing impact of attending this school. One pupil, who told us the biggest difference the school has made to her, said, 'I'm not predicted to fail all my GCSEs anymore.'

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

Leaders, the sole director and all staff are highly ambitious for pupils' achievement. Together they make sure that the standard of education and care in this school is continuously exceptionally high. Clear and consistent systems and routines are at the heart of the school's success. Leaders' attention to detail is impeccable. This ensures that pupils thrive.

Pupils who join the school have significant barriers to learning. Many have experienced trauma and display extreme behaviour. Most have had periods out of education. Leaders and staff quickly learn about every aspect of pupils' needs and how best to support them. They become pupils' biggest advocates. Everyone makes sure that pupils' experience of the school is deeply rooted in their education, health and care (EHC) plan. Consequently, the education, behaviour support and therapy pupils receive matches their needs precisely. Pupils recognise this and most soon start to attend school regularly. For many pupils it is the first time they have been successful at school.

Pupils follow a well-designed, ambitious curriculum which is broadly based on the national curriculum. Teachers follow a similar approach to teaching the curriculum across the school. This ensures that a purposeful environment provides consistency for pupils and helps to minimise their anxieties. Staff adapt their plans expertly so that what pupils learn is finely tuned to fill in gaps in their subject knowledge. There

is, rightly, a strong focus on reading throughout the school. Teachers understand the importance of unpicking gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge, especially when teaching pupils of primary age. Older pupils are supported to attend part-time off-site courses such as animal care and hair and beauty. They achieve qualifications such as ASDAN, functional skills and GCSE.

The curriculum focuses strongly on pupils' personal development, health and safety. For example, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) strongly emphasises the importance of making safe choices when using social media. The excellent 'discovery curriculum' is aimed at pupils whose needs and particular circumstances have limited their experiences of 'ordinary life', such as driving in a car, playing in a park or having a friend. Adults develop pupils' social and communication skills expertly as they visit places in the local community such as parks, shops and museums. Activities are closely mapped to pupils' EHC plans. For example, a trip to a city helped one pupil understand that we live in a multicultural society. For another pupil, a trip to a museum was a much-needed opportunity to feel a sense of awe and wonder in the world.

Leaders meet pupils' behaviour needs very well. Pupils enthusiastically collect 'STAR' points for working hard and behaving positively throughout the day. They convert these into rewarding experiences at the end of the week. Leaders use the programme to help pupils manage their behaviour, and to see how well pupils are coping with their education. They adapt the education and behaviour support pupils receive based on their analysis. Additional high-quality support and bespoke therapies help pupils to self-regulate their behaviour and manage their emotions. As a result, pupils are helped to stay calm and focus on learning.

Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and later life. Right from when pupils join the school, leaders' ultimate aim is for pupils to be able to return successfully to mainstream education or to attend college independently. It is a testament to the excellent work of the school that pupils are highly motivated to achieve this aim. Independent careers advice along with carefully organised college courses and work experience help ensure that they are on the right path. Any pupil who is not quite ready to leave school at the end of Year 11 can stay into the sixth form. Here they are helped further to develop their academic knowledge along with social and independent living skills. This allows pupils to leave very well prepared for further education, employment or apprenticeships.

Leaders and the director carry out their responsibilities very well. They ensure that all staff develop professionally and have a manageable workload. They are adept at utilising staff interests and talents as part of their desire to show pupils that there are many different ways to be happy and successful in life.

Leaders make sure that the independent school standards are fully met. For example, all the necessary health and safety checks are carried out regularly. The school site is extremely well maintained. Schedule 10 of The Equality Act 2010 is complied with.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are very well trained in safeguarding. Adults are tremendously knowledgeable about pupils' needs, circumstances and any potential risks to their well-being and safety. Safeguarding records and individual risk assessments are detailed and meticulously kept. This helps leaders to spot any worrying patterns and act on any concerns quickly. Leaders work closely with parents, carers, local authorities and other agencies to help keep pupils safe.

The safeguarding policy includes the most recent statutory guidance. It is available on the school's website. Recruitment processes are rigorous and fully meet requirements.

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	131556
DfE registration number	852/6009
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10193092
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	9 to 19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	The Serendipity Centre Ltd
Chair	Sean Maguinness
Headteacher	Catherine Walker
Annual fees (day pupils)	£69,000
Telephone number	023 8042 2255
Website	www.serendipity-education.com
Email address	info@serendipity-education.com
Dates of previous inspection	22 to 24 November 2016

Information about this school

- The Serendipity School was established 15 years ago to cater for girls with severe and complex emotional and mental health needs. Most girls at the school have experienced trauma and are considered likely to benefit from a girls-only environment.
- Pupils have typically been excluded from mainstream or other special schools and many have been out of education for some time. Nearly all pupils have an EHC plan, and many are looked after by their local authority. All pupils' fees are paid for by a local authority, whether they have an EHC plan or not.
- The previous full standard inspection on 22 to 24 November 2016 judged the school to be outstanding for the third consecutive time.
- Since the previous inspection, the sole director of The Serendipity Centre Ltd resigned. The new director has been in place since October 2019. He provides governance to the school. He is in close contact with the school's investors, who are not part of the proprietor body.
- Since the previous inspection, the school successfully applied for a material change to increase the school roll to 20 pupils.
- The previous headteacher left the school in March 2021. The current headteacher joined the school at this time. The school's staff team is made up of teaching staff, teaching assistants and well-being professionals, including clinical psychologists and the therapy team.
- The school makes use of the following three registered providers as alternative part-time provision for pupils on roll: St Vincent College, Gosport; Totton College, Southampton; and Havant and South Downs College, Waterlooville. The school also makes use of the following four unregistered alternative providers: Woodmill Outdoor Activity Centre (Active Nation), Southampton; Bitterne Leisure Centre (Active Nation); Fort Purbrook Activity Centre; and Tender Loving Care (TLC), Sarisbury Green.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils on roll of primary school age and none on roll in the 16 to 19 provision.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- During the inspection, inspectors met with leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, pupils and the director to discuss different aspects of the school.
- When considering the quality of education, inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and science. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in place to support pupils' additional needs, including through exploring PSHCE and the school's bespoke 'discovery' curriculum. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders and teachers, looked at pupils' work and visited lessons in these subjects. This included a lesson taking place off site.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the records leaders keep about pupils' behaviour, attendance and safety. Inspectors explored the school's recruitment procedures and checked the single central record. Inspectors spoke with pupils, staff, leaders and the director.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluations, action plans, policies and documentation associated with the independent school standards (the standards). Inspectors also toured the school site to check that it met the standards.
- Inspectors considered the six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the two associated free-text responses. Inspectors also spoke with two parents and carers on the telephone, and considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's confidential survey for staff.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Gordon

Ofsted Inspector

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