

Inspection of Merrywood House Independent Special School

The Old Pheasantry, Merrywood Grove, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 7HF

Inspection dates: 2–4 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils describe Merrywood as a 'loving, safe and happy place where we achieve more than just an education'. They go about their daily routines cheerfully, confidently and calmly. Pupils exemplify the school values of 'safety, security and equality' in their conduct and attitudes. Incidents of discrimination and harassment are few and far between. Staff have high expectations. Classrooms are happy places and playtimes are especially harmonious. Poor behaviour rarely disrupts learning.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They told the inspector that there is always a 'trusted adult' on hand to help them with any worries they may have. Pupils have a profound respect for others and know about equalities. One pupil said, 'Everyone feels included here and that is what matters most.' Pupils talk maturely and responsibly about the importance of looking after their mental and physical health.

Leaders provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. For example, pupils enjoy learning new hobbies, such as gardening, playing musical instruments, cooking, rock climbing, caving and horse-riding. They learn to take risks, manage conflict and communicate their views confidently.

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

Leaders and staff have high aspirations for all pupils. Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum across a wide range of subjects. It sets out clearly the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and know well. Pupils' learning is full of rich experiences that live long in their memories. This enables all pupils to understand how to use their learning in real-life situations. For example, trips and visitors help pupils learn about different career pathways.

Teachers identify the needs of pupils with special educational and/or disabilities accurately. They use their strong subject knowledge to help these pupils learn well. In most subjects, teachers make sure that pupils' learning carefully builds on what they already know and can do. However, in subjects such as history and geography, this is not fully the case. In these subjects, teachers move pupils' learning on too quickly. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Leaders prioritise reading. Often, pupils have fallen behind in their reading before joining the school. The phonics programme is well sequenced and there is a consistent approach to teaching phonics. Books are carefully matched to the sounds pupils learn in lessons. However, some staff do not teach phonics effectively enough. Leaders are taking the right actions to address this.

The mathematics curriculum is well organised. There is a clear approach for the teaching of mathematics across the school. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to check pupils' understanding before introducing new concepts. This helps pupils make links in their learning. When pupils need extra support, teachers

break down learning into manageable parts, providing extra resources where necessary. Pupils enjoy mathematics and their engagement is high. One pupil said, 'We work hard in mathematics because our teachers teach us the small bits one at a time. We build on these before doing the big parts.'

The personal development of pupils is embedded into the everyday life of the school. Pupils learn why it is important to show respect and empathy to others. Their work on 'projects' through the personal, social and health curriculum helps them deepen their understanding of the significance of a fair and inclusive society. Pupils are very knowledgeable about their rights and those of others.

Members of the advisory board are highly skilled and experienced in their specialist areas. They are very ambitious for pupils' academic and social success. They visit the school regularly and provide the proprietor with challenge and support in equal measure. Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel greatly supported by leaders in managing their workload. There is a strong team spirit and morale is sky high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture where the well-being and safety of pupils is of paramount importance. Well-trained staff know what to do if they have a concern. Leaders use their expertise and knowledge about pupils very well when assessing levels of risk and deciding on appropriate next steps. They work effectively with other professional agencies to help pupils and their families get the support they need. The culture of vigilance is second to none.

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

- In some subjects, such as history and geography, teachers do not always check how well pupils understand the important knowledge before introducing new content. When this happens, pupils struggle to make links in their learning. Leaders need to make sure that teachers check that pupils use their previous knowledge to help them know more and do more in all subjects. This will ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they could in the curriculum.
- Leaders have identified that some teachers do not teach phonics effectively. This means that some pupils do not learn the right sounds and phonics strategies. Leaders should continue providing staff with phonics training to address the issue. This will help ensure that all staff are clear about how to teach the school's phonics programme.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	147600
DfE registration number	936/6035
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10202293
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Merrywood Education
Headteacher	Michelle Quayle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£56,400
Telephone number	01737 336352
Website	www.merrywood.org.uk
Email address	admissions@merrywood.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in December 2019. The executive headteacher is the sole director of the proprietor body, Merrywood Education Ltd. There is an advisory board providing external challenge and support to the proprietor.
- Merrywood House Independent Special School provides full-time education for pupils aged five to 13 years. Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority. All pupils have complex social, emotional and mental health needs. These are often linked to adverse childhood experiences and trauma. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Since 1 September 2021, the school operates from two sites: Sandmartin Campus and Tadworth Campus. The campuses are approximately 10 miles apart. Key stage 3 pupils are based at the Sandmartin Campus. However, pupils access facilities at either site depending on their needs. For example, the Tadworth Campus has extensive grounds that pupils at Sandmartin Campus might travel to use.
- The school does not currently use an alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders and staff.
- The inspector evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of early reading, mathematics and history. The inspector discussed the school's curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers from the lessons visited.
- The inspector evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The inspector reviewed the school's single central record. The inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and spoke to pupils, staff and parents.
- The inspector met with two members of the advisory board.
- The inspector considered the views of staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- The inspector took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and the free-text comments.
- The inspector met with pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to them informally about the school.

Inspection team

Shazia Akram, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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