

Inspection of Cornfields School

207 Hythe Road, Ashford TN24 8PL

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff at Cornfields put the school's motto, 'Improving life chances', into practice superbly. Pupils work hard in a calm and friendly environment. They achieve this because staff understand and address their needs exceptionally well. Adults make sure that each pupil gains the knowledge they need to succeed academically. Alongside this, adults teach pupils the personal, social and communication skills that will help them to succeed in the wider world.

Pupils who join the school typically have severe anxiety and often have troubled backgrounds. Many have previously been excluded or missed long periods of their education. Cornfields gives everyone a fresh start. Staff identify pupils' specific needs. Their calm and patient approach helps pupils to minimise their anxieties and manage their behaviours. Consequently, pupils' attendance improves significantly.

Pupils see school as a safe, secure place. They enjoy school and attend very regularly. Pupils develop positive, respectful relationships with adults and form friendships with each other. These are huge achievements. Bullying behaviour is not tolerated.

One parent reflected the views of many when they said, 'My child is now focused on education and has made amazing progress. Seeing my child happy whilst attending school is a wonderful sight.'

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

The school has a highly nurturing ethos which focuses on listening to pupils to identify their needs. Staff identify pupils' starting points expertly. They create learning programmes that are precisely matched to meet pupils' academic, social and emotional needs. Each pupil's curriculum is constantly checked and adapted to ensure that they are benefiting fully from their time in school. This personalised approach gives pupils the confidence that this is the right school for them. Those who have previously struggled to attend school for more than a few minutes at a time soon attend for full days and weeks. Pupils who used to lose control now do so rarely. Several parents told inspectors that this is life changing for their children. One said, 'My son is so much happier since starting here.' Another said, 'My daughter feels understood.'

All pupils who attend Cornfields are taught a range of subjects. Subject plans set out clearly what pupils need to know. Teachers check regularly what pupils have learned and any information pupils are not quite sure of or have forgotten. 'Progress and engagement guides', known as 'PEGs', spend extra time with pupils who need extra help. They break down the learning into manageable parts, making it memorable for pupils. This constant focus on ensuring that pupils understand and learn what they are taught is an exceptionally positive feature of the school. Pupils appreciate the extra time they have to embed their knowledge.

Teachers prioritise teaching pupils to read well. Sometimes pupils cannot read when they join the school. These pupils have regular intensive phonics sessions using an age-appropriate scheme designed to support the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Reading sessions boost pupils' knowledge of different phonics sounds. Teachers are well trained in teaching reading. All pupils practise reading aloud regularly so that they gain confidence and become fluent readers. Adults ask skilful questions to make sure that pupils' understanding of what they read improves. Consequently, pupils' reading develops very well.

Leaders focus strongly on developing pupils' social and communication skills. Lessons include opportunities for pupils to listen to others and to learn to express their opinions. For example, class councils decide on charity events and discuss issues in the news. Trips and visits to local attractions and shops build pupils' confidence in the local community.

Leaders make sure that pupils learn how to look after themselves as they get older. For example, all pupils learn first aid. Those that need it also follow courses in personal hygiene and how to tidy their bedrooms. Where possible, leaders find accreditation for such learning. Pupils are proud of the certificates they get because it helps them to see the progress they are making, and they know it will help future employers know what they are capable of.

Pupils at Cornfields are well prepared for their future lives. In addition to typical academic subjects like science and humanities, pupils undertake practical projects based on their interests. One pupil proudly told an inspector about the mathematical formula he used when deciding how to mix up concrete for laying foundations to an outdoor classroom he helped to build. Older pupils find work-experience placements in the local community where they practise independent skills such as getting to work on time and talking to customers.

The chair of the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, ensures that there is effective strategic oversight of the school. The local governing body and strategic governing body support and challenge leaders very effectively. Staff feel very well supported by leaders. They appreciate the daily debriefs where they can share any concerns. Leaders monitor staff's work regularly to make sure that the curriculum is being taught as intended for each pupil. Leaders' attention to detail helps to ensure that pupils who attend Cornfields are successful when they leave.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff are well trained in safeguarding. Adults spot signs of concern and report them promptly. Leaders are experts in understanding pupils' vulnerabilities and often-traumatic past experiences. They are tenacious at getting extra help from external partners. Safeguarding records are kept meticulously.

Staff help pupils to feel safe at school and in the community. Pupils receive bespoke and sensitively delivered education around their own personal safety. For example, some are taught how to move out of the way of others when walking along a pathway. All are taught how to stay safe online.

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	146521
DfE registration number	886/6152
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10219993
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Keefields Ltd
Chair	Mary McKeeman
Headteacher	Mary McKeeman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,500
Telephone number	01233 877046
Website	www.cornfields.kent.sch.uk
Email address	info@cornfields.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 November 2019

Information about this school

- Cornfields is an independent day special school for pupils aged between seven and 16 years of age.
- Pupils have a range of SEND, including communication and learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health difficulties and autism spectrum disorder. They have often experienced a disrupted education for an extended period of time prior to joining the school.
- Pupils are placed in the school by several local authorities. Most pupils currently in the school have been placed by the local authorities of either Kent or Medway. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school currently uses no alternative provision.
- This was the second standard inspection since the school opened in February 2019. The last standard inspection was in November 2019.

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.

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

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the operations manager, the chair of the strategic board of governors and a member of the local governing body. Inspectors also met with a range of subject leaders, including the assistant headteacher and curriculum leader.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about some other subjects and saw pupils learning in these subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors discussed pupils' behaviour and safety with leaders and governors. They observed the everyday work of the school.

Inspectors checked a range of safeguarding and behaviour records. They checked the single central record of employment checks.

- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, staff and parents by checking responses to the Ofsted surveys. Inspectors also met with some pupils and staff, and held discussions with some parents in person and on the telephone. Inspectors also communicated with members of the Kent and Medway local authorities.
- To inspect the independent school standards, inspectors checked the school site and scrutinised school policies, procedure and practice.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Shaun Jarvis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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