

Inspection of Southlands School

Vicars Hill, Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5QB

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Coming to Southlands makes a positive difference to pupils and their learning. Pupils are kept safe by adults who know them well and want the best for them. Over time, pupils grow in confidence and re-engage with formal education. This opens the door for them to achieve their academic potential and move on to future success in education, employment or training. Leaders are uncompromising in exploring options that will help pupils to thrive, now and in the future.

There is a real sense of community at this school. Relationships between adults and pupils are noticeably positive. Adults adapt their approach successfully in response to pupils' different and changing needs and vulnerabilities. Pupils trust adults to help them. Consequently, this school is a happy place for pupils to be. Interactions between pupils are, on the whole, positive. When things go wrong, adults skilfully help pupils to resolve their difficulties and focus back on their work. This helps pupils to make the most of their education.

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

Leaders recognise that pupils have the potential to do well academically. They know this will only happen if they put the right support in place. Leaders plan their curriculum with this firmly in mind.

Pupils at Southlands experience a broad curriculum, just as they would at a mainstream school. They learn a wide range of subjects that help them learn about the world around them. Pupils work towards achieving relevant qualifications, including GCSEs and A levels where appropriate. Formal learning is balanced carefully with supporting pupils' social and emotional development. Therapy and care staff contribute usefully to this work. This balance of academic and personal learning supports pupils in moving towards suitably ambitious future goals.

Staff are knowledgeable, both about the subjects and pupils that they teach. They adapt their planning and teaching carefully as they go, addressing gaps in pupils' prior learning as they emerge. Staff provide pupils with an environment where they feel safe to learn. As a result, the atmosphere around the school is typically calm and nurturing.

Recently, leaders have begun changing how the information on pupils' education, health and care plans is shared with staff, making longer-term learning priorities easier to identify. This is beginning to increase the rigour with which pupils' progress towards achieving their targets is checked.

Some younger pupils are in the early stages of learning to read. Appropriate arrangements are in place to help these pupils learn their letters and sounds in a systematic way. Sometimes, teaching is not precise enough to move pupils on as quickly as they need to. Nevertheless, pupils are developing an enjoyment for

reading, through sharing stories with their teachers. This is helping them begin to persevere with practising reading on their own.

The curriculum prepares secondary-aged pupils well for the future. For pupils in key stages 4 and 5, courses at local colleges complement the subjects they learn at school. Leaders' excellent support enables pupils to engage successfully with their college placements, fuelling their interests and aspirations. Consequently, pupils develop confidence and social skills that equip them well for the future. Over time, they become increasingly independent about going to college.

Pupils' personal development is central to learning at Southlands. Staff gently prompt pupils towards considering the impact of their choices and actions, showing them how to engage respectfully with others. They help pupils to learn about social and moral issues, engaging with relevant news stories, such as around the conflict in Ukraine. The planned programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) covers a broad range of relevant and required learning, including around relationships and sex education. Careers education is structured carefully, helping pupils to identify their personal strengths and future opportunities in education, employment or training.

Pupils contribute to the life of the school and their local community. Where appropriate, they engage with deliberately planned work experience, either at school or with local businesses. Leaders widen pupils' social and cultural experiences, for example via a virtual visit to Bournemouth Crown Court and a theme day to celebrate Diwali. Through engaging with fundraising events, such as the Christmas shoebox appeal, pupils learn about the importance of helping those less fortunate than themselves.

Leaders know their school well. They understand what is working well and where there is potential for improvement. Since taking up their posts, they have begun improving systems and processes and have appropriate plans for future development. However, staff personnel changes and absence, partly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, have been challenging to manage. Staff reflect this in their mixed views about the school, particularly around workload. Leaders are relatively early in their work to develop leadership capacity beyond the senior team.

The proprietor body is suitably connected with the school and its work. It makes sure that the independent school standards are met consistently. It provides useful support for school senior leaders and access to wider expertise within the Cambian Group.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Knowing pupils well helps staff to be vigilant about potential risks to their safety and well-being. Recent rigorous training has equipped staff with relevant knowledge and

expertise about their safeguarding duties. This ensures a strong safeguarding culture in the school.

Staff report concerns promptly, keeping appropriate and timely records. They understand the need to report seemingly minor worries, in case they are part of a bigger picture of concern. Leaders keep careful oversight of emerging issues, seeking advice from relevant experts where helpful. This enables them to put support quickly into place for pupils and families who might need it.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- An appropriate phonics teaching programme is in place for those pupils who need it. However, teaching does not always link precisely enough to the letters and sounds that adults know pupils need to learn next. Consequently, pupils are not catching up as quickly as they could. Leaders should ensure that phonics teaching takes more careful account of the letters and sounds that pupils need to learn next, so that they can more quickly become accurate and fluent decoders.
- The school's wider leadership is in the early stages of development. As a result, capacity to consolidate and build on recent improvements to the school is emerging but relatively limited. Leaders should ensure that current work to develop the school's leadership structures and staff expertise is completed promptly, to have a positive impact on the school's effectiveness.

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	116564
DfE registration number	850/6030
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10214703
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Cambian Asperger Syndrome Services Limited
Chair	Farouq Sheikh
Headteacher	Alison Priddle (Principal) Mark Gilbert (Head of Education)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£83,319
Telephone number	01590 675 350
Website	https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/asperger-schools/southlands-school/
Email address	Southlands.Admin@cambiagroup.com
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 November 2019

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the leadership of the school. The principal took up her post in April 2021. The head of education joined the school in November 2020. A number of other teachers and support staff are new to the school.
- All pupils at the school have a primary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Many have been absent from school for a substantial period of time before coming to Southlands. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most have their place at the school funded by a local authority. Just under half of the pupils live in children's homes run by the Cambian Group, which owns the school.
- The school operates from a single site in a rural setting in the New Forest. As well as general and specialist classrooms, pupils have access to extensive grounds.
- Pupils range in age from seven to 19 years. There are currently four pupils in the school who are aged between 16 and 19.
- Some pupils attend alternative provision for part of their education. Three of these providers – Brockenhurst College, Totton College and SETA – are registered with and inspected by Ofsted. The other two – RDA and South Downs Equine Therapy – are not registered with Ofsted.
- The school is owned and run by Cambian Asperger Syndrome Services Limited, part of the Cambian group, which is a subsidiary of CareTech. CareTech provides specialist services for adults and children with complex needs. The Cambian Group provides specialist education and residential care for approximately 2000 children and young people across the country. It has responsibility for a large number of schools and care settings, including children's homes.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- This inspection was brought forward in the inspection cycle, at the request of the Department for Education (DfE). This was as a result of complaints received by the DfE about the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the head of education, and with a range of teachers and other adults employed by the school. The lead inspector also spoke

with two representatives of governance and with the parent of a pupil who attends the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics, computing and PSHE. This involved meeting with relevant leaders, visiting lessons where possible, looking at subject planning and talking to teachers. Inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work and, where appropriate, talked to them during visits to lessons.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements were scrutinised as part of this inspection. Inspectors reviewed the school's central record of recruitment checks on adults working at the school. They spoke with the designated safeguarding lead and with other adults who have oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors also looked at examples of records kept about reported safeguarding concerns and spoke to staff about the training they had received.
- The lead inspector toured the site with school leaders, to check compliance with the independent school standards for premises and accommodation.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of other evidence about the school's work. This included relevant policies and records, curriculum planning and information on the school's website.
- Inspectors took account of five responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire and 23 responses to the staff survey. Pupils were not asked to complete the pupil survey. Instead, inspectors spoke to pupils throughout the inspection, mostly when adults were present.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022