

Inspection of Underley Garden School

Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth, Lancashire LA6 2DZ

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 April 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

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff share a strong determination that all pupils will achieve their very best. This ambition is realised. Pupils flourish at this welcoming, happy and successful school.

Underley Garden School is like a caring family. Pupils benefit from the warm and friendly relationships that they have with staff. New pupils settle very quickly, making friends. They love spending time with the teachers' dogs, Maggie, Dora, Molly and Ollie.

Pupils feel safe at school. They know that staff will deal with any concerns that they have. Pupils are confident that if bullying were to happen, leaders would deal with it effectively.

Pupils develop as confident individuals. This is because leaders plan frequent opportunities for pupils' personal development. Pupils are fully involved in many aspects of school life. For example, they take great pride in running the school shop, delivering the school post and caring for the beautiful gardens.

Classrooms are a hive of learning activity. Pupils are keen to share their ideas with others. They strive to earn merit points for behaving well. Around school, older pupils are excellent role models to younger pupils.

What does the school do well?

Leaders have designed a broad, enjoyable and carefully considered curriculum. Pupils' learning is broken down into small, logical steps by skilled staff. Staff ensure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to revisit and secure earlier learning. For example, in mathematics, staff make sure that pupils learn and revisit important number facts. From their varied starting points, pupils thrive and achieve very well.

Pupils at the school have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). When pupils join the school, a team of therapists work closely with staff, parents and carers to identify with precision pupils' individual social, emotional and learning needs. Leaders use this information to develop detailed support programmes for each pupil. Staff are highly skilled in ensuring that the curriculum is carefully tailored to each pupil's needs.

Leaders have ensured that reading is a high priority across the curriculum. Staff plan imaginative and fun reading activities which encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Pupils love to share books with their peers and staff. Leaders ensure that the strategies used to develop pupils' reading are precisely matched to pupils' needs. Pupils develop their phonics knowledge in carefully ordered steps. Reading books are closely matched to pupils' reading ability. When appropriate, pupils develop as confident and fluent readers.

During their time at the school, pupils thrive personally as well as academically. Staff provide just the right balance of nurture and challenge to ensure that pupils make rapid gains in their self-esteem and confidence. For example, pupils take part in exciting outdoor activities such as sailing and climbing. They take great pride in their achievements.

Leaders make every effort to prepare pupils for the adult world. For example, pupils apply and are interviewed for leadership roles in school. They develop a wide range of knowledge, including gardening, decorating and caring for animals. Pupils benefit from detailed careers advice which is appropriately matched to pupils' aspirations and aptitudes. Leaders provide a wide range of trips and visits to help pupils develop an understanding of the opportunities available to them. Leaders make full use of the local community to provide pupils with valuable experiences of work. Staff help pupils to learn important life skills, such as using a washing machine and preparing healthy meals. Pupils move on successfully to a range of college and training settings of their choice.

Pupils develop as active and thoughtful citizens. For example, the school council help leaders to take important decisions, such as about changes to the school uniform. Pupils are keen to help others, for example through litter picking in the local area and raising funds for charity. Pupils learn to appreciate differences, such as in ethnicity.

Staff are extremely well trained and supported by leaders to manage pupils' behaviour successfully. Staff ensure that pupils develop the important skills needed to be successful learners, for example to persevere when work is tricky. Staff ensure that pupils gain the knowledge to manage their own emotions successfully. For example, pupils make full use of the school's quiet areas when they need some time to be calm.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They appreciate the many training opportunities that the proprietor body provides for them. Staff report that leaders are very considerate of their workload and well-being when making decisions. This ensures that staff feel valued.

Leaders make excellent use of the school's spacious buildings and beautiful grounds in order to support pupils' learning and well-being. Classrooms and learning areas are bright, attractive and well resourced.

Parents are full of praise for the school. They described the transformational impact that the school has on their children. Comments from parents typically praised the school, focusing on the progress that their children were making and how happy they are to attend each day.

The proprietor body has a detailed understanding of the independent school standards (the standards). It fulfils its statutory duties. This includes ensuring that the school's accessibility plan complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The proprietor body ensures that the school is a safe place where all are treated equally and with respect.

As part of this inspection, inspectors considered leaders' request to increase the number of pupils on roll from 72 to 96. The proprietor body intends to use the school's current safeguarding, health and safety policies and procedures to ensure that the proposed new pupils and staff will be safe, should the proposed increase to the pupil numbers be granted.

The proprietor body has taken effective steps to ensure that the school buildings for the proposed new number of pupils complies with government legislations for fire safety. The parts of the school buildings that the proprietor body intends to use for teaching the proposed new pupils are well decorated. Suitable provision for pupils has been made, for example through the provision of an appropriate number of toilet facilities which are separate for boys and girls.

The proprietor body has suitable plans in place to increase the number of teaching and support staff in school. This is to ensure that the proposed new pupils will be properly supervised. The proprietor body intends to use their existing policies and procedures when recruiting and checking new staff, should the proposed increase to the pupil numbers be granted. This is to ensure that any staff recruited to work in the school are suitable to work with pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular and detailed safeguarding training. This ensures that staff are very alert to possible signs of abuse. They are quick to report any concerns to leaders.

Leaders follow the latest government guidance when dealing with any safeguarding concerns. They have ensured that the safeguarding policy is up to date and published on the school's website. Leaders work closely with external agencies to protect pupils.

Through the carefully planned curriculum, pupils find out about how to keep themselves safe in range of situations which may lead to harm. For example, pupils learn about 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	112461
DfE registration number	909/6044
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10210325
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	April Boyd
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,000–£97,000
Telephone number	01524 271 569
Website	www.underleygarden.co.uk
Email address	info@underleygarden.org
Dates of previous inspection	9 to 11 January 2018

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school uses no 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.

- 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils about school life. They spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, members of staff and members of the proprietor body. They also met with the school's special educational needs coordinator and members of the school's therapy team.
- Inspectors considered responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. They spoke with some parents at the start of the school day and by telephone. They considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation including that in relation to safeguarding and information relating to the independent school standards. They looked at records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors checked the school premises.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils, from 72 to 96 pupils.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, inspectors 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 part of the inspection is: the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.

Information about the material change inspection

- Inspectors discussed proposed new staffing levels with leaders.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Stevens, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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