

Inspection of The Belsteads School

Back Lane, Little Waltham, Near Chelmsford, Essex CM3 3PP

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 June 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 Requires improvement

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are members of a community in which they feel valued and where their voice is heard. Pupils experience a rich curriculum. They enjoy learning through first-hand experiences, such as skinning a deer using stone age tools, or caring for the animals in school. Pupils join in physical activity and enjoy sports. They develop the confidence to share their views and talk about what interests them. Pupils take pride in their achievements. They are well prepared for their next stage of education or training.

Pupils behave well. They learn strategies that help them manage their emotions and their behaviour. When things go wrong, pupils reflect on what they need to do to put things right.

Pupils know that staff care for their well-being and want them to be successful. There is a positive culture of mutual respect and understanding. Pupils feel safe and incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils are confident that adults listen to them and help them to resolve any worries they may have.

Feedback from parents and carers is overwhelmingly positive. They appreciate the dedication of staff and the caring ethos that enables their children to believe in themselves and in what they can achieve.

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

Leaders have carefully designed an ambitious curriculum that enables pupils to achieve well across a broad range of subjects. Staff are well informed about pupils' strengths and what pupils need to help them learn best. Staff use this information to adapt the curriculum well to meet individual pupils' individual needs. Teachers plan lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. Staff use assessment to identify pupils' starting points and next steps. Pupils have opportunities to practise and apply what they are learning. This helps them to secure important knowledge and deepen their understanding. This helps all pupils make good progress.

Staff have received training in phonics. This is helping them to support pupils who find reading more challenging. Pupils also build on their phonics knowledge to help them spell words accurately when they are writing. Leaders have adopted a reading programme to help pupils develop confidence, accuracy and fluency. This is making a real difference for pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. More confident readers are pleased to talk about the books they enjoy. Teachers choose books in class to inspire pupils and extend their understanding of the subjects they are studying. For example, pupils enjoyed talking about the science fiction texts they read while learning about space in science.

Leaders have prioritised qualifications in English and mathematics so that pupils are equipped with core skills to prepare them for training and employment. Pupils also gain Duke of Edinburgh Awards and accreditations in personal, social and health

education and in first aid. Leaders recognise there is more work to do to provide pupils with the opportunity to access and achieve a broader range of qualifications and accreditations. This is so pupils are well prepared for post-16 pathways that more closely match their wider interests and possible future employment.

Leaders promote pupils' personal development well through the curriculum and positive school culture. Pupils learn to consider other people's views and ideas when they debate topics that are in the news. Pupils are informed about environmental issues and actively seek solutions to support sustainability. Pupils are equipped with the knowledge they need to help them make positive choices, develop healthy relationships and keep themselves safe, including online. Careers education is well planned. Pupils are well supported in choosing their next steps.

Governors and the proprietor are well informed about the work and positive impact leaders have made in developing the curriculum. They can see the difference this is making to pupils' learning and achievement. Some governors are relatively new to the role. There is more work to do to ensure that all members of the governing body make an equally strong contribution in challenging and holding leaders to account for continued improvements to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. There are clear and effective systems for reporting safeguarding concerns. Staff are well trained. They know how to identify potential signs of abuse and when pupils may be at risk. Leaders work closely with other agencies and provide additional support for vulnerable pupils and families. Through the curriculum and regular discussions, pupils learn how to keep themselves and others safe, including online.

Governors and the proprietor regularly check that the right processes and procedures are in place to ensure that pupils are safe and feel safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The range of qualifications that pupils can obtain while at school does not fully reflect the breadth and ambition of the school's curriculum. This means that pupils do not gain qualifications in a broad range of subjects, or in subjects that particularly interest them. Leaders should extend the range of qualifications and accreditations that are available so that even more pupils are well prepared for post-16 study and possible future employment.
- Develop the role of the governing body so that all governors make an equally strong contribution in holding leaders to account for their work.

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	144378
DfE registration number	881/6067
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10243309
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Peter Adams
Chair	Anna Hassan
Headteacher	Erica Barnett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,000
Telephone number	07415 585867
Website	www.belsteads.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@belsteads.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 January 2020

Information about this school

- The Belsteads School is a day special school. The school opened in April 2017 and provides education for pupils with severe or moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and the associated challenging behaviour.
- Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their education prior to joining the school.
- A new headteacher took up her post in September 2020. This is the fourth headteacher since the school opened. The deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2021. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) joined in September 2021.
- The headteacher reports to the proprietor and board of governors. The board was established in January 2019.
- The school is registered to provide education for up to 18 pupils aged 10 to 16 years. There are currently 19 pupils on the school roll. This temporary increase in pupil numbers has been agreed with the Department for Education (DfE).
- Admission to the school is through local authority referrals. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- At its first inspection in March 2018, the school was judged to be inadequate. The proprietor had not ensured that all the independent school standards were met.
- Following the inspection, the school was issued with a notice to improve by the DfE. The school's action plan was evaluated by Ofsted on 30 May 2018 and judged to be unacceptable.
- A progress monitoring inspection in September 2018, conducted without notice, judged that the school met all previously unmet standards.
- A standard inspection took place in January 2020. The school was judged to require improvement. The proprietor did not ensure that all the independent school standards were met.
- The school makes use of alternative provision that is brokered by the local authority.

Material change

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if DfE decides the material change can be implemented.

- This inspection included an application to make a material change to the school's registration. The material change request is to increase the number of pupils on the school roll from 18 to a maximum of 30 pupils in the age range of 10 to 16 years.
- There are new, suitable premises located on the expansive school site. The premises can accommodate the change in numbers requested in the application to the DfE. Leaders have planned a careful approach to increase pupil numbers slowly as appropriately qualified staff are recruited.

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. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, the chair of governors and safeguarding governor, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the SENCo.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and support staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the designated safeguarding leader and the human resources manager to evaluate the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils and staff. Inspectors reviewed records of safeguarding training and spoke with staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks and the school's safeguarding records.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at play times. Inspectors spoke with pupils to seek their views and experiences of the school. Inspectors reviewed the records of behaviour and bullying incidents, and records of exclusion.
- Inspectors made a tour of the school site, including the new accommodation that has been built on the school grounds. Inspectors reviewed the information available on the school website. Inspectors considered a range of documentation. These inspection activities were carried out to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered the feedback and free text comments from six parents and carers that was submitted to Parent View. Inspectors also reviewed feedback from 21 staff who contributed to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke with pupils to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kim Hall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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