

Inspection of Cherry Tree

29 All Saints Avenue, Margate, Kent CT9 5QN

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 September 2022

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
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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?

This is a small school with high ambitions. The caring culture created by leaders since the school opened is now firmly established. Staff expect much from pupils. Poor behaviour is not accepted by staff and frowned on by pupils. Pupils are not concerned about bullying here, saying staff would be 'on it' if there were problems. When challenged to change 'one small thing' to improve the school, pupils genuinely found it difficult to put their finger on anything.

Pupils are openly proud of Cherry Tree. They see it as 'their' school, although they prefer to describe it as the 'Cherry Tree family'. They delight in showing visitors how much the school has changed their lives and their prospects. They talk passionately about how staff 'challenge and care' in equal measure. One pupil who arrived recently reflected, 'I don't feel judged for who I am, by pupils or staff.' Another who left the school very recently to take up a college place wanted inspectors to know how much difference the school had made to his life. The 'documentary' he left was viewed at the end of the inspection. Uncannily, it correlated closely with the outcomes reflected in this report.

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

All staff are leaders at this school. Although the headteacher and the operations manager are ultimately responsible, teachers and support staff are fully empowered and expected to play their part. Because of this and a strong culture of 'doing the right thing for pupils', the school has improved significantly since its last inspection.

The curriculum is ever evolving. Staff take great care in designing learning that meets the needs of each individual pupil. With only nine pupils, all with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, this is sometimes more difficult than it might seem. Most pupils were out of education for extended periods of time before joining the school. Many lack confidence in their ability to be successful learners. However, pupils quickly settle on arrival and enjoy the uniqueness of what is on offer, including their artistic endeavours in the upcycling workshop, or in helping train the school's new therapy dog, Hugo.

Leaders constantly monitor the breadth of opportunity the curriculum provides. Staff have high expectations but are also personable in their approach. They know that there is a delicate balancing act to play, especially in the initial stages when pupils transition into the school. A new system to assess pupils' academic and social and emotional development has been designed by the deputy headteacher. Introduced just over a year ago, this is now paying dividends in supporting staff to understand what pupils know and can do. It helps pupils to be aware of their successes. Importantly, it also helps them understand what they need to do next to achieve the qualifications they need for their next steps in education.

Pupils make rapid progress in the core subjects of mathematics and English. This is partly to do with staff expertise in these subjects. It is also closely linked to the unique learning culture evident in classrooms. Staff make learning interesting. They know that self-motivation plays a massive part in pupils' ability to learn new things. This was evident during all classroom visits, where pupils were highly engaged and active in their learning. This included sessions of blended learning, during the inspection, in which a pupil successfully accessed the classroom from home, playing a full part in her interactions with teachers and her peers alike.

Pupils' personal development is served well here. The school's caring ethos underpins this, although the wider curriculum also provides a solid platform to build on. The school's personal, social and health education programme includes appropriate relationships and sex education, as well as careers and the school's 'Britishness' programme. Much of the learning is based on real life, preparing pupils well for the difficult choices they make, both in and out of school. They know about the concepts of equality and diversity in society. They understand difference. Discussions with inspectors showed pupils to have a high degree of respect for themselves and their peers. They support each other well when their unique differences have the potential to create an inequality of opportunity in simple things such as being heard in a discussion.

Parents and carers had a lot to say to inspectors about this school, and none of it negative. Staff are also very positive about their work and the rewards it brings. Communication is strong. Staff feel listened to. They appreciate that leaders are 'present' and supportive of their work. External professionals from local authorities or other agencies are also positive about all aspects of the school and the way it supports its pupils.

Leaders are supported by a small management committee whose members provide a degree of independent oversight of the school. Terms of reference make the extent of their work and responsibilities clear. These include supporting the school's joint directors to meet all aspects of the independent school standards, particularly regarding the quality of education the school provides and all aspects of the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding pupils is strong because safeguarding is a daily constant for leaders and staff alike. Regular briefings ensure that information flows seamlessly and to the right people. This includes updates to and from parents, carers and other professionals outside of the school.

Although staff turnover is very low, processes to recruit and check staff or other adults are sound. The school's site is secure. Key policies are up to date, known and understood by staff. Record-keeping is detailed. Staff have confidence in leaders to act if they need to in order to keep pupils safe.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	145064
DfE registration number	886/6145
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10243556
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	11 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cherry Tree Learning Services Limited
Chair	Soo Finn
Headteacher	Soo Finn
Annual fees (day pupils)	£43,999
Telephone number	01843 290 131
Website	www.cherrytreeeducation.co.uk
Email address	soo.finn@cherrytreeeducation.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 to 21 June 2018

Information about this school

- Cherry Tree is an independent special school for pupils who have complex social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Many have been out of education for extended periods of time prior to joining the school.
- The school's proprietary company has two directors who also serve as the school's headteacher and the operations manager.
- The school has a small management committee whose members advise, challenge and support the headteacher and operations manager as independent, critical friends of the school.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in June 2018 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The school does not use 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.

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- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, the operations manager, curriculum leaders and teaching and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and two other members of the management committee. He also talked on the telephone to representatives of two virtual schools and an independent fostering agency.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and PSHE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- Inspectors toured the school's premises and accommodation. They checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They

also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff linked to the independent school standards.

- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.
- The lead inspector talked formally to two different groups of pupils to gain their views on the school. He also viewed a short digital presentation recorded by a pupil who has very recently left the school.
- The lead inspector considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's Parent View survey as well as a letter submitted by a parent. Ofsted's survey for staff at the school was also considered.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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