

Inspection of Farney Close School

Bolney Court, Bolney, Crossways, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5RD

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 October 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

A sense of care for every child permeates every aspect of Farney Close School. Pupils often arrive having struggled in school previously. When they first arrive, staff work to get to know each individual and what has made school challenging for them in the past. Pupils say that because they are listened to and cared for, this is a good to school for them.

Pupils are proud of their school and keen to talk about how school staff help them with learning and provide them with a wide range of opportunities. Some of these are extra-curricular trips and visits, but many are threaded through the curriculum. For example, in food technology, each pupil learns to make a Christmas cake, which they take home to their families.

Leaders recognise that pupils have the capacity to achieve even more in their learning. They are currently in the process of re-developing the curriculum to achieve this.

Classrooms are mostly settled and focused. When pupils do struggle to manage, all staff know exactly what to do to support them and help them get ready to learn again. Pupils recognise that in the past bullying has happened, but now, leaders act quickly to nip any unkindness in the bud.

Parents say that the support their children receive is life changing, not just for their child, but also for their families.

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

Around the time of the last inspection, there had been turbulence in senior leadership, and governance of the school was not as strong as it needed to be. Since this time, the leadership team has stabilised, and grown in strength and capacity.

Senior leaders have carefully considered the education that pupils at Farney Close need. They know that many pupils arrive with gaps in their core knowledge. These gaps, and the underlying causes, are carefully assessed for each pupil upon entry, and the curriculum for each pupil is adapted in response.

Following the pandemic, senior leaders carried out a full review of the school's academic offer for pupils. This review identified that some aspects of the school's curriculum were not ambitious enough for all pupils. Leaders are in the process of redeveloping the curriculum to address this and remove any ceiling that has historically been placed on pupils' achievement.

Senior leaders want to ensure that pupils develop a love and rich understanding of literature. They know that to do this, they need to ensure that any pupil who is struggling to learn to read gets the right support. At present, the early reading

curriculum is not as well established as it should be in the primary phase of the school. Staff have not been trained to provide expert support to struggling readers, and pupils do not get sufficient opportunity to practise reading. There is a different picture in the secondary phase. Here, pupils get individualised support from the SEND team.

More widely, the English, mathematics and science curriculums have all been redesigned to ensure that the knowledge and skills pupils are taught over time build towards clear and ambitious end points. Beyond these core subjects, curriculum development is at varying stages. The curriculum for food technology has been fully redeveloped, and very carefully sequenced. Other subjects, such as art, provide pupils with the opportunity to explore a range of media, materials, artists and cultures. However, leaders know that there is more to do to ensure that, over time, pupils are taught the knowledge and skills to achieve as well as they might do. In almost all subjects, the curriculum for the newly formed primary phase of the school is less developed than the curriculum for the secondary phase.

Leaders carefully consider every moment of the day for pupils, and the ways in which smaller moments contribute to pupils' broader development. There are a range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including a range of clubs and trips within the local area and beyond. Pupils can undertake a Duke of Edinburgh award. A member of staff trained in outdoor adventure pursuits offers a range of activities, including bush craft, archery and forest school. Pupils talk of these very positively. They study an appropriate personal, social and health education programme, which includes relationships and sex education. Pupils are confident to discuss all the protected characteristics and are clear that their school community is a place where everyone is welcomed and valued.

Leaders and staff recognise their crucial role in preparing the school's pupils for their next steps. Careers advice begins in Year 8 and is bespoke to individual pupils. Older students benefit from a carefully planned and supported transition into college. Leaders know that some aspects of their strong vocational offer have been impacted by the pandemic, for example construction. However, leaders and staff are determined to mitigate this impact, for example by offering construction as an after-school club.

Behaviour rarely impacts how well the curriculum is taught, but leaders know that some teaching staff within the school are more experienced in managing the behaviour of pupils than others. Leaders are continuing to provide support with behaviour management to any staff that need it.

Most governors are also directors and trustees of Farney Close Ltd, the proprietor. They have taken significant steps since the last inspection to restructure the governing board to ensure that each governor has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The school now meets all of the independent school standards and is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are clear processes in place to identify known risks at the time pupils join the school. Risks are appropriately shared with the staff, who work with pupils regularly so that they understand these risks and how to mitigate them. All staff are trained to be vigilant in identifying any unknown or newly emerging concerns. Leaders responsible for safeguarding work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils get the right help.

Concerns and follow up actions are recorded on the school's online safeguarding record system. However, at present, leaders are also maintaining a paper record-keeping system for each pupil and it was not always clear which system was intended to be the complete record for pupils. Within the inspection, inspectors also identified some safeguarding information that was kept elsewhere, for example in email folders. In addition, some information had been incorrectly categorised, or did not make clear exactly who information had been shared with. Senior leaders know they need to continue to sharpen recording practice so that the risk of information being missed, or misunderstood, is further reduced.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The early reading curriculum for pupils in key stage 2 is not as effective as it needs to be. Staff are not expert enough in the teaching of early reading, and pupils at an early stage of reading do not get enough practise in reading and re-reading books that match the sounds they are learning. Leaders need to ensure that any member of staff working with pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read fluently has expert knowledge in the teaching of early reading, and that pupils get very regular opportunities to practise reading so that they catch up quickly.
- The curriculum for the recently introduced key stage 2 (primary phase) is less developed than the curriculum for the secondary phase of the school. Not all subject leaders have considered how the primary curriculum prepares pupils for key stage 3. This needs to be further developed in a range of subjects to ensure that pupils get the most out of their time in key stage 2, and are fully prepared for the next phase of their education.
- In a small number of subjects, the sequencing of component knowledge is still being refined. This means that pupils are not always taught the things they need to know in clear and logical order. The impact of this can be seen in lessons, where pupils are asked to complete a task, but have not learned the knowledge and skills they will need to complete it. In a small number of examples, this had a detrimental impact on behaviour and engagement. Leaders need to ensure that teachers are supported to think through the building blocks of knowledge and understanding that pupils will need to be successful in their learning.

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	126139
DfE registration number	938/6217
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10214651
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	9 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Farney Close Ltd
Chair	Carole Johns
Headteacher	Sara Hack
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,157
Annual fees (residential pupils)	£77,297
Telephone number	01444 881811
Website	www.farneyclose.co.uk
Email address	sara.hack@farneyclose.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 to 5 December 2018

Information about this school

- Farney Close Limited is an independent residential and day special school in West Sussex.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school primarily supports those with social, emotional and mental health needs. It also accepts pupils with social and communication difficulties and/or autistic spectrum disorder. Some pupils may also have moderate learning needs, dyslexia or speech and language needs.
- Pupils complete a 'trial term' at the school to ensure that Farney Close is the right provision for them.
- Around two thirds of the pupils in the school's secondary phase are accommodated in the school's residential accommodation from Monday to Friday.
- The school is not currently using any alternative provision.
- The school is approved by the Secretary of State under s.41 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of senior staff, including the principal, the vice principal, the head of education and the head of care. The lead inspector met with representatives of the proprietor group and the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art, and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects.
- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety).

Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. They also checked the relevant policies and the school website.

- Inspectors judged the effectiveness of safeguarding by meeting with leaders, discussing records of concerns and speaking with pupils and staff about this aspect of the school's work. Inspectors confirmed that the right checks are being made to ensure that all staff, supply staff and members of the proprietor body are suitable for the posts they occupy. Inspectors confirmed that any allegations about adults are managed and reported appropriately.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys as well as responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Clive Close

His Majesty's Inspector

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