

Inspection of Benjamin College

4 Wren Path, Fairford Leys, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 7AR

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils experience a personalised curriculum which meets their needs. Many arrive at the school with low aspirations about the future. Pupils grow in confidence because of leaders' ambitious expectations combined with the effective care that staff provide. Pupils get good support for their mental and physical health. Relationships between pupils and teachers in lessons are trusting and respectful. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, including online. They also learn about how to form and maintain positive relationships.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Teachers' skilful approaches quickly remedy any problems, including when bullying occurs. Leaders' strategies for behaviour management are carefully thought through. Pupils clearly understand the well-established routines.

Pupils benefit from a range of enrichment activities which help to stretch and nurture their interests. For example, pupils can go swimming, learn boxing or study dance. They also have opportunities to learn about first aid or to join local groups such as Scouts or the Combined Cadet Force.

Leaders make sure that their ambitions for pupils translate into practice. This is true for pupils' education, behaviour and wider development. However, some important aspects of governance and the leadership of safeguarding are not strong enough.

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

Pupils study and gain qualifications in a wide range of subjects. Leaders rightly prioritise making sure that pupils gain recognition and accreditation for their achievements. The curriculum is specifically designed to adapt to pupils' individual circumstances, including the education they might have missed in the past and the length of time that they stay in the school. Pupils' needs are identified and met well. Teachers help pupils to recall their prior knowledge so that they build on it in their current learning effectively. Leaders' investment in training means that teachers have strong subject knowledge, including about how to improve pupils' reading and writing. Teachers' checks on pupils' work to see how well they are achieving are stronger in some subjects than in others.

Pupils gain a good understanding of key issues in modern life. The personal development curriculum, including for relationships and sex education, is broad, effective and tailored. Pupils learn about what is right and wrong, aspects of politics and its importance to our society, and the dangers of discrimination and inequality in all its forms. They also learn about people from different faiths and cultures. Leaders make sure there is a strong emphasis on pupils' character development. Pupils engage in fundraising for local and national charities, and volunteering. They also learn about such things as energy conservation and climate change. They explore historic and contemporary positive role models. They develop their own resilience

and their empathy for other people, including through focusing on a different virtue each term.

Pupils get the right advice and guidance to support them to move forward in their lives beyond school, including about college courses and apprenticeships. Like the curriculum, this support is highly personalised and raises pupils' ambitions and aspirations. Some pupils also attend careers fairs or access work experience placements. Pupils are clear about their hopes for the future and how they are going to achieve them.

Leaders have an appropriate policy of not excluding any pupils. Some pupils' attendance to lessons is not high because of their previous problems engaging with education. This affects their learning. However, leaders take effective action to improve pupils' attendance, some of which is very low indeed when pupils arrive at the school.

Governors have some knowledge of what the school does well and what could improve further. The headteacher and proprietor's knowledge is much sharper. However, governors have not made sure that leaders have identified clear, specific priorities for development in sufficient depth. Governors do not have a clear role in monitoring improvements or leaders' impact. Their oversight is not strong, therefore, and they do not hold leaders to account effectively enough. There is the capacity among leaders, governors and the proprietor to address these issues successfully. Staff feel valued and supported. Governors contribute to managing staff workload and well-being effectively. The proprietor makes sure that all of the independent school standards are met and that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to identify any concerns. Staff know how to report issues that arise during school hours effectively. Leaders provide the right support for pupils, involving other agencies regularly and appropriately. Leaders make the necessary recruitment checks.

While leaders and governors have an up-to-date understanding of safeguarding, they have not made sure that the school's systems are tight enough. The safeguarding policy does not incorporate the latest statutory guidance fully. Although comprehensive information is kept about each pupil, this is not reflected in the school's safeguarding records. Checks on the suitability of governors were not all in place at the start of the inspection. However, this was remedied by the end of it.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Aspects of safeguarding practice in the school are not as strong as they could be. While these do not put pupils at risk of harm, it means that the leadership of safeguarding is not as strong as it should be, including the work of governors. Leaders, governors and the proprietor must ensure that the school's safeguarding systems and processes are fully effective.
- Governors' oversight of important elements of the school's work is not sharp enough. They do not hold leaders fully to account or challenge them robustly. Governors' roles in monitoring and evaluating the school's ongoing performance and improvement need to be clearer and stronger.
- The quality of assessment is not as good in some subjects as it is in others. The knowledge pupils have learned, and, consequently, what they need to learn next is sometimes not identified clearly enough. Leaders should make sure that teachers' assessments have an effective impact on pupils' subsequent 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	135805
DfE registration number	825/6042
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10214658
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	12 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Claudette Deysel
Headteacher	Margaret Bond
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,000
Telephone number	07837 513 922
Website	None
Email address	m.bond@benjamincollege.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	30 January and 1 February 2018

Information about this school

- The school currently operates from the eight sites.
- All pupils are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The main area of need is social, emotional and mental health. Most pupils have an education, health and welfare plan.
- Pupils have been at the school for various lengths of time, ranging from several months to a few days. They stay at the school for different periods of time. The number of pupils on roll at the school fluctuates regularly as some leave and others join.
- The school had a material change inspection in July 2021. This raised the potential capacity to 36 pupils.
- Currently, there are no post-16 pupils on roll.
- The school does not currently use any 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 leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the school's safeguarding leader, representatives of the governing body including the chair, and the proprietor.
- Lessons were visited at all eight sites. Inspectors talked to teachers and pupils. They also looked at curriculum planning, pupils' work and teachers' assessments of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's plans for improvement, a range of policies, logs of behaviour incidents, and minutes of governing body meetings from the last year. This helped inspectors to evaluate the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors talked to leaders, pupils, governors, the proprietor and staff. Records of staff's and governors' training were reviewed, as was the school's recruitment checks on staff to make sure they are suitable to

work with pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's policies relating to safeguarding along with the school's records of safeguarding concerns.

Inspection team

Matthew Haynes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Claire Prince

Ofsted Inspector

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