

Inspection of Clarity Independent School

Bridge Farm Barn, Woodhill Road, Sandon, Essex CM2 7SG

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 September 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have mixed views about school. While they say they feel safe at school, leaders have not ensured that this is the case. Leaders are not fulfilling all their statutory safeguarding duties. They are not following their risk assessment policy and procedures.

Behaviour improved over the course of last academic year. However, some pupils still struggle to manage their emotions. When this happens, pupils can behave badly and become violent. Staff do not de-escalate these situations effectively.

Pupils typically have positive relationships with staff. They say that staff are there to talk to should they need to share a concern. Pupils appreciate the effort staff make to take them on trips to places like Maldon Splash Park and to swimming classes.

The curriculum helps pupils to develop their communication, literacy and numeracy skills. There are opportunities for social development, such as cooking together. Pupils have access to independent and impartial careers advice. Currently, they do not have the opportunity to undertake work experience.

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

The proprietor is failing to meet its statutory obligations. Some statutory requirements, including the independent school standards, are not met. Since the last progress monitoring visit, leaders have not sustained improvements in safeguarding procedures. They are not following their policies and government guidance.

Leaders have not reviewed key documentation. Several policies, such as the health and safety policy and the information report for special educational needs and/or disabilities, are out of date. The complaints policy is inaccurate and misinforms parents. Some parents report the mishandling of complaints. The school is not compliant with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act. This is because there is not an accessibility plan in place which considers how to make the curriculum, environment and information more accessible for the pupils on the school roll.

The sole director of the proprietor body is also the headteacher. There is not a sufficiently robust system to enable leaders to check how well the school is doing, or for holding themselves to account. The proprietor recognises the need for independent scrutiny. This is an action in the school's development plan. This is not currently in place. Therefore, leaders have been slow to identify and address key weaknesses.

Leaders have not established a clear and coherent vision for the curriculum. While pupils study a range of subjects, it is not clear what their end goals are. Parents and pupils express confusion over whether pupils will or will not study qualifications. They do not know which qualifications are on offer.

Leaders have brought in commercial plans for the teaching of mathematics and science so that there is coherence to pupils' learning. However, teachers do not consider adequately pupils' prior knowledge and ability. Curriculum plans in English and art are for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and do not extend to key stage 4. Hence, some pupils find the work too easy. Pupils enjoy reading and have in their schedule the opportunity for independent reading. Sometimes, this is inconsistently implemented, and pupils miss the opportunity to improve their reading and enjoy their books.

The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is comprehensive. It covers a range of topics that help pupils understand how to live in modern Britain. This includes how to have healthy, age-appropriate relationships. In addition to small-group teaching, pupils also benefit from one-to-one sessions which cover aspects they are less secure in. Leaders have started developing careers education through other areas of the curriculum.

Leaders are not supporting staff sufficiently well with the behaviour management of pupils with complex needs. When pupils use inappropriate language, staff are advised to ignore this as they may 'trigger' heightened behaviour. This leaves pupils confused as to what is acceptable in society and what is not. Staff are not trained to de-escalate situations effectively. There are too many incidents of violence towards staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders do not record safeguarding concerns, referrals to external agencies or their actions as they should do. They involve staff in the handling of these cases who are not trained to the appropriate level for safeguarding. Leaders have not referred concerns about pupils to statutory agencies in a timely fashion. This places pupils at risk.

Staff work with extremely vulnerable pupils who can present challenging and violent behaviour. However, they have not completed suitable physical intervention training. The recording of the use of reasonable force does not follow government guidelines.

The safeguarding policy on the website is out of date and details procedures that are no longer used by staff. The draft version of a new policy had not been shared with staff at the time of the inspection.

While staff received training on the latest version of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2022), they are not reporting offensive extremist language.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Systems to monitor and manage safeguarding concerns are not effective. Leaders are not following their policies and procedures or the latest government guidance. This is leaving pupils and staff at risk. Leaders must follow government guidelines, and the school's policies and procedures. Leaders need to ensure that all concerns are recorded, responded to and monitored by an appropriately trained member of staff.
- Leaders are not sufficiently supporting staff to manage complex and challenging behaviour. The advocated use of blocking and statement of no restraint in the behaviour policy is not helpful for staff. Leaders need to review the behaviour policy so that it reflects government guidelines on the use of reasonable force, as well as ensuring staff have suitable training so they can manage challenging situations.
- Leaders are not clear about the curriculum offer for key stage 4 pupils. Some pupils in some subjects are not studying at an appropriate level for their ability. This is hampering their progression. Leaders need to be clear with parents and pupils about the qualifications pupils can do. They need to review the current curriculum to check that it provides a pathway to such qualifications. Leaders should make sure staff plan appropriately from pupils' starting points.
- The proprietor body does not have strong systems for checking the quality of the school and its leadership. This means leaders, including of the proprietor body, remain unaware of weaknesses and cannot respond quickly enough to issues or failings. Leaders must ensure that there are rigorous checks and balances in place to assure themselves of the quality and effectiveness of their work in all areas of the independent school standards.

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	146804
DfE registration number	881/6073
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10243311
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent Special School
Age range of pupils	6 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Clarity SEN Consultancy Ltd
Headteacher	Debbie Hanson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,000 to £67,000
Telephone number	01245 408606
Website	www.clarity.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@clarity.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 to 13 February 2020

Information about this school

- The school's registration with the Department for Education (DfE) was approved in June 2019. It opened as an independent school, catering for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, in September 2019.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils' needs include autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- All school placements are funded by Essex local authority.
- The school does not use supply teachers or alternative provision.
- Although the school is registered to have pupils from the age of six years old, it currently has Years 8 to 11 in the provision.
- The school's inspection history:
 - In February 2020, Ofsted conducted the school's first standard inspection. The school was judged to require improvement. Three of the independent school standards were not met.
 - On 24 September 2020, the DfE issued the proprietor with a notice, requiring the proprietor to prepare an action plan to show how the un-met independent school standards would be addressed.
 - The school submitted an action plan within the required timeframe. The plan was evaluated in November 2020 and was found to be not acceptable.
 - In September 2021, Ofsted carried out a progress monitoring visit. Three of the independent school standards were not met.
 - The school submitted an action plan within the required timeframe. The plan was evaluated in January 2022 and was found to be acceptable.
 - In May 2022, Ofsted carried out a progress monitoring visit. The standards checked were met. The DfE agreed a material change, increasing the age range to 16.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the sole director of the proprietor body, who is also the headteacher, senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with a representative from Essex local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and teaching assistants, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans for PSHE education, and for relationships and sex education (RSE).
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leaders and spoke to the local authority designated officer. They spoke to pupils and staff. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records, including those related to risk assessments, health and safety checks and the safer recruitment of staff.
- Inspectors spoke to parents by telephone. There were two free-text responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors toured the school premises, checked the school's website, and scrutinised the admissions and attendance registers and a range of other documentation to check if the school complies with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Steve Mellors

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-

- 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
- 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate;
 - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request;
 - 32(1)(h) where a pupil wholly or partly funded by a local authority (except where funding is solely for free of charge early years provision in accordance with the duty contained in section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006[16]) is registered at the school, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil is provided to the local authority and, on request, to the Secretary of State.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is-
 - 32(3)(d) particulars of arrangements for meeting the standards contained in paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 13;
 - 32(3)(f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which-
 - 33(c) sets out clear time scales for the management of a complaint.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school is not compliant with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act. This is because there is not an accessibility plan in place which considers how to make the curriculum, environment and information more accessible for the pupils on the school roll.

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