

Inspection of King's Reach Education

St Hilary's House, Reculver Walk, Senacre, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8SW

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils see the school as a welcoming and safe environment. They like the fact that they have their own personal mentors and are equally positive about their academic 'tutors', who are all qualified teachers. Poor behaviour is rare and does not impact negatively on learning. Pupils who talked to inspectors were universally proud of their school. They were also quietly confident about the progress they are making with their studies, often after long periods out of education.

Although the school has only been open for a short time, its ethos has been firmly established. A truly inclusive culture sits as the bedrock of everything that happens here. Expectations are high, and pupils know this. Leaders expect staff to be consistent yet understanding and compassionate role models. This makes for a calm and respectful working environment, where pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), quickly build trust in themselves and the adults they work with.

Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging. They describe the school as a family. One told an inspector he could not wait to get back to school after the recent half-term holiday. Staff express similar sentiments at this unique setting.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that meets the needs of current pupils well. Despite this, they know the curriculum offer now needs to evolve as pupils become more confident and successful with their learning. This includes the curriculum offer for those very few students who attend the school's post-16 sixth-form provision. These older members of the school community benefit from aspects such as bespoke careers guidance, but do not follow a traditional sixth-form pathway.

Much of the teaching here is delivered on a one-to-one basis. This approach has its obvious advantages, especially for pupils or older students who are new to the school. It makes for a very bespoke programme of learning, but sometimes lacks the elements of academic collaboration and positive social interaction with other learners which pupils would benefit from. As a result, leaders have recently devised a programme of learning based on five stages which lead sequentially towards students moving on to further education, apprenticeships, or work. This is in its infancy, though builds on current strengths, and is impacting positively on individual pupils. The first stage, 'nurture', enables pupils to become established in the stable and safe environment the school offers. Subsequent stages enable pupils to work more closely in small groups across the whole curriculum. This already happens successfully in subjects such as physical education, enrichment, and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

Leaders also plan to expand the curriculum offer as part of the staged pathways approach. New staff are in place or are being recruited to facilitate this. This will add

further breadth to the curriculum offer, while retaining the personalised approach that is inherent in such a small school.

Classroom visits showed that teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are appropriately high. Inspectors gained a clear sense of pupils' 'awakening' to the prospect of gaining meaningful qualifications after less than successful experiences in previous settings. Pupils are motivated and work hard. Some ask for additional lessons because they are experiencing success. Some delight in a new interest in books and reading. Others are less keen about reading, though readily share that they have enjoyed the work of different authors in the past. Leaders are aware that more could be done to raise pupils' interests in reading across a range of genres. This will also help support pupils in furthering their understanding of the wider curriculum and developing their own interests beyond school.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development stands out. The school's unique 'future me' programme also focuses pupils on building life skills and developing the characteristics they will need to be successful after leaving the school. Much of this work is personalised to individuals, taking pupils' vulnerabilities into account while building their self-esteem and confidence.

Some of the work to support pupils' social development is delivered in a cross-curricular way. During an English lesson, the lead inspector was happy to be quizzed by a pupil about his own knowledge of 'ableist' derogatory language and how this may or may not impact on his life as an inspector. Pupils also benefit from a wide-ranging menu of extra-curricular experiences, including a recent visit and tour of the Houses of Parliament. Pupils value visits to local landmarks such as Chatham Dockyard.

Those few parents or carers who completed Ofsted Parent View or talked to inspectors were very positive about the school. The confidential staff survey was also wholly positive. Two different local authority officers who spoke to the lead inspector expressed confidence in the school, particularly highlighting the quality of the personalised curriculum and the social and emotional support provided for pupils.

While leadership is strong and well established, governance is less secure. Because of the strength of the present leadership team, this is not currently impacting negatively on the quality of provision. Additionally, the school meets all the relevant independent school standards. However, directors, who currently act in positions of governance, are not as well versed in what is working well and what could be better. Their oversight of safeguarding is appropriate, but other aspects are less strong. Directors intend to introduce a layer of independent, external scrutiny between the board of directors and school leaders, but progress has been too slow in this regard. Leaders need to formalise the way governance is structured. This will mean that the directors, who are ultimately responsible, will have a clearer understanding of the school's work and be more able to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture to safeguard pupils is strong. Protecting the welfare, health and safety of pupils, staff and visitors is a high priority for leaders. Staff know what to do if they have concerns because they are trained well and their communication with leaders is open, honest and timely.

Staff are very aware of the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND. Their understanding of contextualised safeguarding linked to the young people they work with is strong. Pupils are served well by the school's wider work to teach them about the potential dangers they face, both in and out of school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's curriculum needs to grow in breadth and depth to optimise the new-found hunger for learning that pupils are now displaying. The delicate balance between bespoke one-to-one tutoring and allowing pupils to access a more comprehensive and richer curriculum needs to be considered and refined further. Although this next step is based on the school's admirable success in building pupils' intrinsic motivation to learn, leaders need to act quickly to take advantage of the potential for pupils to gain a wider range of meaningful qualifications. This will mean that pupils and students leaving the school will be better placed for successful transition to their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Those in positions of governance do not have a clear enough understanding of what is good and what needs to be better. They are not well equipped for holding leaders to account for improving the school. A more formalised system of accountability needs to be agreed and introduced. This will help the board of directors to fully understand all aspects of leaders' work and ensure that the quality of provision continues to improve over time. It will also enable them to support leaders and staff more fully in overcoming the barriers they face in improving the quality of education further.
- Not all pupils read as widely or as often as they could. Some do not benefit from reading across a range of subjects or genres. Despite being confident readers, some pupils have not developed their love of reading because this has not been given a high priority. Leaders should raise the profile of reading and the written word. This will broaden pupils' horizons. It will also help them in building wider understanding and knowledge in subjects other than English.

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	149070
DfE registration number	886/6170
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10267715
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 25
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	King's Reach Limited
Chair	Richard King
Headteacher	Stewart King
Annual fees (day pupils)	£92,500 to £122,000
Telephone number	01622 693 737
Website	None
Email address	info@kingsreach.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- King's Reach Education is a small special school for boys in the age range 11 to 25. The school is registered for up to 10 pupils or students in its post-16 provision. All are placed by local authorities. Many have been out of education for long periods of time prior to joining the school.
- At the time of the inspection, the school had very small number of students attending over the age of 16. Therefore, a judgement was not made for the quality of sixth-form provision.
- Pupils who attend the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. All have education, health and care plans.
- This was the first standard inspection of the school, which opened in the summer of 2022 after being registered by the Department for Education on 26 May 2022.
- The school has a Christian ethos. It does not have a governing body. Governance is provided by the three directors of the proprietor company, King's Reach Limited. The school is also registered as a charity.
- 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.

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 held a wide range of meetings with the head of school, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders and teaching and support staff. They also met with the chair and the two other directors of the proprietor company.
- Inspectors talked informally and formally to individual pupils and students to gain their views about the school.
- 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 had a tour of the school's premises and accommodation. They checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record.

They also reviewed 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.
- Inspectors took Ofsted's parent survey into account. They also received an email from a parent and talked to a carer on the telephone. Ofsted's staff survey was also considered.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

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