

Inspection of The Cornelius Vermuyden School

Dinant Avenue, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 9QS

Inspection dates:

31 October and 1 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Ian Hockey. This school is a single academy trust. It has a governing body, which is accountable for the running of the school. There is no separate trust board, as the governors fulfil the role of trustees.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has many issues to deal with. Pupils are not learning as well as they should because the curriculum and its delivery does not meet their needs. Some pupils are not allowed to study certain subjects. For a small number of pupils, their attendance is limited by the school because of their behaviour.

Pupils are typically disengaged in lessons. They may ignore the teacher and chat among themselves. Some pupils can be defiant. They do not respond to adults' requests, and they leave lessons because they want to. Some pupils think they need to misbehave to fit in. Certain behaviour is dangerous, such as planned fights, and this has left pupils and staff feeling unsafe.

Pupils do not treat one another with respect. Name-calling, the use of homophobic language and bullying are features of everyday life for too many pupils. Pupils have stopped reporting bullying because, too often, 'nothing happens'. The negative experiences pupils have at school mean they do not want to attend.

On a positive note, pupils appreciate the greater opportunity they have to use social times as they wish, such as playing football.

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

Too many pupils are persistently absent. Pupils are choosing not to attend school. The school's curriculum is not fit for purpose. Some pupils have undertaken courses that are not in their interest to do so. A number of pupils are on a vocational pathway due to their past performance in primary school. They are not able to study a subject such as history. Where this is the case, they do not have access to the full suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate.

Many pupils are not getting standard pass grades at GCSE. This is particularly the case for boys. There are a number of contributing factors for this. Some subjects are not coherently planned or do not take into account what pupils already know. Where this is the case, pupils who have gaps in their knowledge do not catch up. Some pupils in key stage 3 are not given age-appropriate content to learn. Work can be far too easy. When this happens their learning stalls. Some pupils' behaviour and erratic attendance mean that they do not learn. Sometimes, pupils make copious notes, but they do not understand what they have written. They struggle to recall and apply what they have learned. This is because some teachers' delivery of the curriculum does not encourage pupils to think independently.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), like their peers, are not served well by the curriculum and how it is taught. Pupils' support plans, including those who have an education, health and care plan, have not been reviewed for some time. Some plans contain no guidance for teachers, and this limits the support they give.

Reading is a priority. The school day ensures that pupils have time to read. The investment in the library means that pupils now have access to a wide range of texts. They participate in a range of activities, such as author workshops. Pupils who struggle to read have access to support programmes, including phonics. Yet, a lack of specialist staffing means that pupils have to wait for their turn to have one-to-one phonics teaching.

The personal development programme appropriately teaches pupils about online risks and issues they may face in the community. The teaching of protected characteristics is not as well understood by certain pupils. This is shown in their intolerant behaviours. While there is a religious education (RE) curriculum and timetabled lessons in place, sometimes pupils are not taught RE due to staff absence or poor behaviour. The school has expanded its range of extracurricular activities. Pupils receive appropriate careers information, advice and guidance. A small number of pupils undertake work experience.

While staff report that the number of pupils truanting is reducing, it is still a problem. Some staff spend their time looking for pupils on site as they are not where they should be. Truanting pupils cause problems by disturbing other lessons. Most pupils following a reduced timetable do so to manage their behaviour and to avoid suspensions. In some cases, this is in place without parental agreement or because the parent felt under pressure to agree. Some are on the reduced timetable for the indefinite future. The school is not using part-time timetables for appropriate reasons, or the minimum time required. Pupils are therefore not accessing the education to which they are entitled. Pupils on reduced timetables spend most of their time off site. Although staff should complete checks on their whereabouts and their safety, these are not always completed. This places pupils at risk.

Governors do not have a clear understanding of the weaknesses in the school's provision. Over time, the school's actions to bring about improvements have been ineffective. There are now many issues to tackle as a result.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

There is a lack of safeguarding culture at the school. Too many pupils are not confident that staff will deal with behavioural issues or concerns about bullying. Thus, there is a reluctance to report issues as they occur. Many parents and staff agree that pupils are not safe on site.

Some of the most vulnerable pupils have suffered serious violence or harm by other pupils. While school leaders ensure they involve external agencies promptly, they inconsistently assess the level of risk that pupils face. In some instances, no risk assessment has been undertaken. Therefore, appropriate measures to keep pupils safe are not taken. This includes taking measures to combat risk for those pupils on reduced timetables and those who are subject to restrictive physical intervention.

Staff report that they have received injuries from pupils, but school leaders have no oversight of this. This limits their ability to provide a duty of care to both staff and pupils as well as liaise with the local authority designated officer if need be.

Too many pupils are absent, and staff cannot be confident of their whereabouts or whether they are safe. The school's systems for checking this are not working effectively. Staff are aware of the signs of potential abuse and neglect and make appropriate referrals to the designated safeguarding team. However, pupils not in attendance at school do not benefit from staff vigilance and are therefore vulnerable.

While relevant staff and governors are up to date with safer recruitment training, they did not complete all the checks they should when employing staff. The section 128 checks they need to undertake were not complete. This was undertaken during the inspection. School leaders do not ensure that new employees have a safeguarding briefing before starting work. This means that some staff are unclear about safeguarding procedures and to whom they should report.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are multiple failings with safeguarding practice and the school lacks a robust safeguarding culture. School leaders and staff are not consistently following statutory guidance to keep children safe. The school should address urgently the areas of weakness, making sure that staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities for the safeguarding of children, and follow clear and robust procedures.
- The behaviour policy and its delivery are not working. The school's core values of 'respect, responsibility and resilience' are often ignored. Too many pupils have a lack of respect for one another and for adults who work at the school. Some behaviour is unsafe. The school must strengthen the behaviour management systems that are in place, setting clear expectations for staff and pupils, so that behaviour improves rapidly.
- There are flaws with the curriculum and its delivery. In some subjects, pupils' starting points are not sufficiently taken into account. This limits learning, leads to boredom and, in some cases, misbehaviour, as pupils do not want to do the work. Some pupils are absent too frequently, which impacts on their achievement. The school must speed up its plans for improving the curriculum and its delivery so that pupils enjoy their learning and attend school.
- The support for pupils with SEND is weak in a range of lessons. Some support plans for pupils with SEND are unhelpful as they contain limited guidance or no guidance at all for staff. This means that pupils with SEND struggle to access the curriculum. The school must address the weaknesses in SEND provision so that this group of pupils learn effectively and are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

- The school has not addressed longstanding weaknesses in the quality of provision. Some decisions have not been made in the best interests of pupils. The curriculum has been narrowed for some pupils, reduced timetables are used inappropriately, and pupils undertake some courses that serve no useful purpose for them. The school must strengthen systems of accountability so that weaknesses are addressed effectively, and decisions are made in pupils' best interests.
- Having considered the evidence, we strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	140308
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10282625
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	777
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Fuller
Headteacher	Ian Hockey
Website	www.corneliusvermuyden.com
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school operates as a single academy trust with a governing body that is responsible for the school. There is no separate trust board. Academy members sit on the governing body. The chair recently took up the post, having previously served as a safeguarding governor.
- Since the last inspection, several senior leaders have left the school and new ones have joined. The headteacher has remained the same.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body and its representatives.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with a representative from the local authority. They also spoke with a sample of parents whose children are on reduced timetables.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, computer science and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including personal, social and health education and relationships and sex education.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. They considered pupils' views about behaviour in school. Inspectors also spoke to a sample of pupils who have received suspensions and to pupils who are on a reduced timetable. They spoke with staff about pupils' behaviour and their workload and well-being.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Likhon Muhammad	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Brock	Ofsted Inspector
Nathan Lowe	His Majesty's Inspector

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