

Inspection of Mountfield Heath School

John's Cross Road, John's Cross, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5FA

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Attending Mountfield Heath School is a life-changing experience for its pupils. This remarkable place provides an inspirational, safe and nurturing environment in which pupils thrive. This is heartening, because many of them have struggled in their previous school settings. Staff strive relentlessly to enrich pupils' lives, including through the delivery of the highly aspirational curriculum. They have a clear ambition and determination that every pupil will benefit from a rich, broad learning experience – and they do.

Expert staff know pupils remarkably well. Each individual pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are very well understood. Expectations are extremely high. Pupils are helped and supported to manage and regulate their behaviour exceptionally well. As a result, learning is uninterrupted in lessons and pupils treat each other with respect and kindness.

Pupils' personal development is woven into every aspect of school life. They develop independence and important life skills so that they are extremely well prepared for all that the future brings. Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging here. When they first join the school, pupils and their families become part of the 'Mountfield Heath family'. As one parent said, 'For the first time, my child has a sense of achievement and self-worth.'

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

Pupils achieve extremely well. Their lives are transformed because of the school's unrelenting and uncompromising aspirations for every pupil. The curriculum is exceptional. It sets out precisely what pupils should learn and remember, from their individual starting points, based on their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets. Consequently, pupils benefit from a highly personalised and tailored curriculum, which meets their specific needs successfully. Parents and carers hold the school's high expectations in great regard. Staff go out of their way to help parents understand what their children are learning, through forming strong partnerships and sharing information about the support that the school provides for their child.

Many pupils have previously struggled in other school settings or may not have attended for a variety of reasons. When pupils first join, staff take time to get to know each pupil well. They put in highly effective and supportive strategies to help pupils make a positive new start. For example, often pupils will start attending school on a part-time basis to help them transition successfully into Mountfield Heath School. Before they know it, pupils attend on a full-time basis and never look back.

Rightly, learning to read is given the highest priority. Staff promote pupils' love of reading by sharing stories, poems and rhymes at every opportunity. Pupils revel in visiting the well-stocked book areas. They have often struggled to read before

joining the school. Pupils find reading difficult because they lack early reading skills. However, expert staff address this highly proficiently. Phonics is taught expertly to those pupils at the earliest stages of learning to read, with books closely matched to the sounds they know. Consequently, they make rapid progress and quickly grow in confidence.

Staff and the school's therapy team work really well together to ensure that each pupil's strengths, needs and next steps are identified, fully understood and planned for. Pupils' highly specialist learning needs are refined into termly 'individual therapeutic education plans', which set out the 'small steps of learning'. Evidence of progress towards these individual targets is captured across the breadth of the curriculum and used to inform next steps. Staff use questioning skilfully during lessons to check pupils' confidence and understanding. Important ideas and key vocabulary are revisited frequently. Staff are mindful to ensure that pupils do not become overwhelmed or overstimulated. They know pupils very well. Staff are adept at swiftly adapting learning activities, or supporting behaviour, in response to pupils' engagement and progress.

Pupils display exceptionally positive attitudes to school. A purposeful buzz of learning permeates each classroom. Playtimes are highly sociable occasions and times where pupils relax and catch up with their friends. They enjoy eating healthy snacks, relaxing on beanbags, looking at picture books and playing board games. There are numerous outdoor areas for pupils to enjoy. They are encouraged to be active, with exciting equipment that stimulates their imaginative and creative play.

Character development is at the heart of the school's ethos. Staff take every opportunity to increase pupils' resilience, confidence and well-being. Pupils on the school council are mature ambassadors for the school. They are incredibly proud of the positive contributions they make to the school and wider community. All pupils benefit from extensive and well-considered wider learning experiences. For instance, pupils delight in the diverse range of clubs available. There is something for everyone, including yoga, dance, Lego, gardening, virtual reality, film and cooking. An equally exciting range of trips support pupils' wider personal development exceptionally well.

The proprietor body and governors are highly effective and know the school extremely well. They carry out their work diligently and hold leaders to account, providing a sensible balance of support and challenge. Consequently, they are effective in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met securely and consistently. Statutory duties, including around safeguarding and equalities, are complied with successfully.

There is a remarkable sense of teamwork among staff, reflected in the nurturing atmosphere within the school. They know that the leaders, including the proprietor body and governors, consider the impact of any changes before they are introduced. Consequently, staff morale is sky high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	145980
DfE registration number	845/6065
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10299243
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Number of part-time pupils	14
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Lyndsey Jeffries (executive headteacher) Natalie Stevens (head of school)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,150 to £84,865
Telephone number	01323 914 600
Website	www.mountfieldheathschool.co.uk
Email address	Office@Mountfieldheathschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 December 2019

Information about this school

- Mountfield Heath School is an independent special school. All pupils attending the school have SEND. Most have a primary diagnosis of autism. Many pupils also have social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school caters for pupils aged between five and 11 years of age. It is registered for 32 pupils. There are currently 38 pupils on roll. This means that the school is exceeding the maximum number of pupils on roll that it is currently registered to admit. The school's request to increase the number of pupils it is permitted to admit was considered as part of this inspection.
- All pupils attending the school have an EHC plan. They have often experienced a disrupted education prior to joining the school. Most pupils have been out of formal education for an extended period.
- The school's first standard inspection took place in December 2019.
- The school does not currently 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.

- 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, head of school, other leaders and staff in the school. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the proprietor body and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language including early reading, mathematics and personal, social and emotional development. 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.
- 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.
- The inspection team looked at the school's website, toured the school premises, examined policies and associated documentation and spoke to staff to consider if the school meets the independent school standards.

- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted’s parent survey. Ofsted’s surveys for staff were also considered.
- The lead inspector met with a group of pupils to gain their views of the school. Pupils were also spoken with during lesson visits and as inspectors moved around the school.

The school’s proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a ‘material change’ to its registration. At the DfE’s request, we checked whether the school meets the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change. The material change has already been implemented.**
- The school has applied to make a material change to its registration. The school’s request is to increase the number of pupils on roll from up to 32 to up to 40 pupils. It is anticipated that the additional pupils would have an EHC plan and the majority are likely to have a diagnosis of autism.
- At the time of the inspection, there were more pupils on site than are currently registered to attend the school. This is because six additional pupils have been placed at the school by the LA under section 41.
- The proprietor body has ensured that there is plenty of space for the proposed increase in the number of pupils. A new building has been constructed since the previous inspection. This is bright, airy and well-equipped. The accommodation includes two spacious classrooms, a well-equipped kitchen, as well as additional learning spaces and toilet facilities. All facilities have sufficient water supplies for hand washing, and the temperature of hot water is regulated appropriately. Fire routes are clearly indicated throughout, and new fire extinguishers have been installed.
- The school’s attractive and well-maintained outdoor areas provide ample space for pupils to relax and play. Ratios of staff to pupils are high to reflect the complexity of pupils’ needs. Well-established routines and policies to ensure that pupils are adequately supervised are in place.

Information about this material change inspection

- Inspectors considered all relevant aspects on the independent school standards relating to the material change as part of the linked standard inspection. These included considerations associated with pupils with SEND.

Inspection team

Louise Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Liz McIntosh

Ofsted Inspector

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