

Inspection of Heath Farm School

Egerton Road, Charing Heath, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AX

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at Heath Farm School. The exceptional quality of care and education makes a positive and pivotal difference to their lives. The school's values of 'love, commitment and opportunity' are part of pupils' everyday lived experience here.

A culture of inclusion and support pervades this school. Relationships between pupils and staff are built on the highest levels of mutual respect and care. Effective and personalised transition programmes give pupils the greatest chance to experience success from the very first day that they attend.

Adults use their specialist knowledge well to ensure that learning environments are both calm and purposeful. Pupils enjoy outside play and exercise during their busy breaktimes. Lunchtimes in the school hall are social events where pupils and staff come together, and the sense of community is tangible.

Pupils' interests are catered for carefully, with opportunities to learn musical instruments or photography. There is a focus on outdoor learning in the dedicated forest school area. Pupils are proud to contribute to their community, through growing food that is used in the meals prepared by the school's kitchen.

Parents, carers and legal guardians are effusive in their praise of the school. Many shared their view that coming here had been 'transformative' for their child.

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

School leaders and staff have a shared moral purpose to ensure that pupils have the very best education. The highly effective and ambitious curriculum blends learning, therapy and additional support in a way that matches pupils' needs precisely. Well-trained, knowledgeable and skilled staff deliver this curriculum extremely well. Core skills such as English and mathematics are prioritised to ensure pupils achieve qualifications that support them in achieving their future goals and ambitions.

In the sixth form, known as the college, students benefit from appropriate vocational and academic pathways. As in the rest of the school, provision is planned carefully to meet students' individual and specific needs. Students accessing the newly opened college provision are provided with highly tailored personal development programmes that well prepare them for adulthood. As a result, a high number of students successfully transfer on to further education or employment.

When pupils join the school, adults quickly identify what pupils know and what they need to learn next. Across the curriculum, pupils' progress is tracked carefully, to identify gaps in their understanding. Staff then expertly adapt future learning, taking careful account of the priorities on pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. As a result, pupils' needs are met consistently well, and they engage with education much better than in the past.

Reading is absolutely prioritised. Staff are provided with high quality training and guidance to deliver early reading programmes. On entry, pupils not yet fluent in reading are identified for tailored phonics support. This precise support continues into the college where needed. Pupils read every day. They are immersed in the range of carefully chosen texts. Pupils told inspectors that they now read books by the same authors at home. The support provided ensures pupils become confident and fluent readers.

Staff, who are proud of their school, have high expectations for pupils' conduct and achievement. Routines are exceptionally well-established and known by all. This helps pupils feel happy and safe. On occasion, pupils struggle to manage their behaviours, feelings and emotions. Staff address pupils' anxieties and concerns with skill and patience. This helps pupils to make the right choices, recognise the impact of their actions on others and develop skills to communicate their needs appropriately.

Promotion of pupils' personal development programme is carefully interwoven into all aspects of school life. Staff are focused on promoting independence at every opportunity, and pupils' opinions and preferences are listened to and acted upon. Pupils understand the importance of mutual respect and individual liberty. Through opportunities such as entering a display at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival and working with the local wildlife trust, pupils learn to be responsible and thoughtful citizens. They delight in opportunities to develop their talents and interests, such as in swimming, bowling and tobogganing.

Pupils, including those in the college, benefit from comprehensive careers information, education, advice and guidance. Staff work individually with pupils to explore careers and training opportunities. Guidance is highly personalised to each pupil. Staff take into account both academic and personal development targets to devise pathways that ensure pupils have the necessary skills and qualifications required for their future aspirations. As a result, a high number of pupils successfully move into further education or employment following their time at the school.

The school governance arrangements are highly effective. Governors use their own extensive knowledge of the sector to provide school leaders with high quality challenge and support. The proprietor has developed meticulous systems to ensure the independent schools standards are securely met, including compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

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

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| Unique reference number | 119009 |
| DfE registration number | 886/6060 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10299165 |
| Type of school | Special school |
| School category | Independent day school |
| Age range of pupils | 5 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 110 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 13 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 18 |
| Proprietor | Acorn Care and Education Limited |
| Chair | Richard Power |
| Headteacher | Jason Pearn (executive headteacher) |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £53,670 to £84,865 |
| Telephone number | 01233 712 030 |
| Website | www.heathfarmschool.org |
| Email address | enquiries@heathfarmschool.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 3 to 5 March 2020 |

Information about this school

- Heath Farm school is an independent special school set in a rural location near Ashford, Kent. The school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have additional needs associated with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils have often experienced disruption to their education prior to joining the school. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school includes a post-16 provision which is located at Heath Farm College, Hill Place, Queens Avenue, Ferndown, Maidstone, ME16 0ER.
- Heath Farm School is owned and operated by Heath Farm Family Services Limited. This is a fully owned subsidiary of Acorn Care and Education Limited, which is part of the Outcomes First Group Ltd, a provider of children's services in the UK.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision, MXCP (Motocross Challenge Project), The Yard, Abbey Manor, Abbey Road, Dover, CT15 7DQ.

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.

- 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.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, and teaching and specialist therapist staff in the school. The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body, including the chair. She met separately with the named proprietor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, music and personal, social, health and citizenship education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, looked at samples of pupils' work and EHC plans.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection, including during breaks. They assessed the school's culture to keep pupils safe throughout the inspection. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies, staff training records and documentation associated with the school meeting all

aspects of the independent school standards. The single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children was also scrutinised.

- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors spoke to the safeguarding leader and scrutinised a wide range of information, including a selection of the school's records. They also spoke to staff about safeguarding and looked at how pupils learn to keep safe.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

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 is likely to meet 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 school has requested increasing its maximum number of pupils from 136 to 164. This is in order to increase the availability of provision in the sixth-form, known as the college.
- The outcome of this part of the inspection is the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.
- In order to consider the request, inspectors toured the premises. They reviewed the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Inspectors also considered the suitability of staff including the proprietor and the quality of leadership and management of the school.
- The newly developed college site that will accommodate new pupils has been carefully designed to provide the learning space required. The space is more than sufficient for the additional number of pupils requested. The proprietor has ensured the new provision has adequate staffing ensuring the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety which will remain fit for purpose if the number on roll increases.

Inspection team

Laura James, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Woodbridge

His Majesty's Inspector

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