

Inspection of Benjamin College

4 Wren Path, Fairford Leys, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 7AR

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 December 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from attending Benjamin College. They flourish because of the positive relationships they rapidly build with staff. Pupils value that their views and choices are heard and acted on. Staff take the time to know what each pupil needs. This includes information from the specialist checks made on pupils when they arrive. Consequently, staff put in place the most precise and effective help for pupils.

Most pupils have had low school attendance before they join here. They have also experienced traumatic and challenging experiences. This means that pupils are often not ready to learn or receive therapeutic support. There are high expectations that pupils will leave here well prepared for what comes next. Therefore, the school has taken an approach to achieve 'therapeutic alliance' for pupils. This step-by-step and sequenced approach helps pupils to be ready to access the psychotherapy and learning they need for future success.

Pupils appreciate their 'diversion' activities, which include bowling, studio music recording, dance clubs, army cadets and horse riding. These activities capture the individual talents and interests of pupils. They also help pupils to positively engage with the school and develop their social and interpersonal skills.

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

The school has put in place an ambitious and broad curriculum. There has been careful curricular thinking about what pupils will learn and when. There is appropriate adaptation to curriculum breadth in order to enable pupils to take part in vital personal development activities. The curriculum for each pupil is highly personalised. Effective checks are made on what pupils know when they arrive. The school uses this information to create a bespoke curriculum map for every subject. Therefore, learning is closely matched to pupils' individual needs. Checks on how well pupils are learning happen each term. Sometimes, these checks are not precise enough to spot gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that, in these instances, teachers do not address pupils' gaps and misconceptions. Consequently, pupils do not routinely progress through the curriculum as well as they could.

Staff have secure knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They use this knowledge to plan effective and engaging lessons. Staff are well trained to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They understand the complex needs of pupils and how best to encourage them to take part in learning. They make accurate and precise changes to activities, which means pupils can access learning successfully. Subsequently, pupils achieve well through most of the curriculum.

When pupils join, they are often not enthusiastic readers. Reading is therefore prioritised in the school. The school has carefully selected high-quality texts for pupils to read in English lessons. This means pupils are exposed to a range of rich vocabulary. In classrooms, accessible text formats, such as picture books and

graphic novels, help pupils to re-engage with reading. There are a small number of pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading. The school is still in the process of identifying an effective phonics approach to support the weakest readers. These pupils do not have the knowledge and skills they need to become confident and fluent readers. This limits them from being able to access a broad curriculum as well as they could.

Many pupils attend school regularly and take part in lessons well. Classrooms are set up to be calm and purposeful learning environments. Pupils feel comfortable to learn. Pupils do recognise that staff want the best for them. This helps pupils to feel safe and cared for. Staff are well trained to understand the social and emotional needs of pupils. This shows in the expert support staff provide when a pupil is finding it difficult to regulate their emotions.

The provision for pupils' personal development is exemplary. The school highly prioritises supporting pupils' mental health and well-being. Expert therapeutic support, informed by precise diagnostic tools, helps pupils to be ready for their next step. Monthly child-focused meetings (CFMs) between care, education, and therapy staff identify ambitious personal goals for each pupil. These goals are matched to pupils' wishes and aim to overcome their barriers to education and prepare them for adulthood. During tutor time and personal development sessions, pupils are taught about different cultures and religions. They begin to understand that their voice matters and that they have the power to use it positively.

From Year 7 onwards, pupils access effective careers lessons and activities. During careers weeks, pupils hear from external speakers and explore the further education options available to them. All pupils also receive specialist one-to-one careers guidance. In CFMs and annual reviews, precise discussions and plans are made which support pupils well to be prepared for their next steps and adulthood. The school makes sure that the pupils' voice is central to these decisions made.

Staff feel empowered and motivated to work here. They appreciate the level of expert training they receive and how this helps them to meet pupils' needs accurately. Staff value how much the school considers their workload and well-being. The proprietor has effective oversight of the independent school standards (ISS). Through regular audits and checks, they ensure the ISS are securely and consistently met. The proprietor and governing body are driven to give the highest quality support to pupils. Together, they have secure oversight of their statutory duties. They provide robust support and challenge to the school. Leaders at all levels have a clear strategic vision for the school. They collaborate well with staff, and those with parental responsibility, to achieve this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's approach to teaching early reading does not meet the needs of all pupils. This means that, currently, a small group of pupils do not yet have the secure phonics knowledge to access the broader curriculum. Leaders should continue their work to put in place a system which will help all pupils to be confident and fluent readers.
- The school's assessment process does not robustly check how well pupils are learning. Subsequently, pupils are not progressing as well as they could through the entire curriculum. The school should ensure that teachers know how to precisely identify pupils' knowledge gaps so they can provide accurate support in order to close them.

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	135805
DfE registration number	825/6042
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10342066
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	12 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Claudette Deysel
Headteacher	Anne Hanson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£46,540
Telephone number	073 7715 3639
Website	None
Email address	a.hanson@benjamincollege.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2022

Information about this school

- The school currently operates from nine sites.
- All pupils are pupils with SEND. The main area of need is social, emotional and mental health. Most pupils have an education, health and welfare plan.
- Pupils have been at the school for various lengths of time, ranging from several months to a few weeks. They stay at the school for different periods of time. The number of pupils on roll at the school fluctuates regularly as some leave and others join.
- Currently, there are no post-16 pupils on roll.
- The school currently makes use of one unregistered 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. She also met with the chair of governors and one other member of the governing body. She also met with the proprietor.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the 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.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents, including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan, and minutes from governors' meetings.
- The inspectors considered the responses of parents and carers to Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 lead inspector toured the school sites to gather evidence about compliance with the standards. Inspectors also reviewed a range of other documents and policies.

Inspection team

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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