

Inspection of Clay Hill School

Clay Hill, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7DE

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 October 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are positive about their school. They are proud of what they are achieving. They feel safe here and have strong opinions about the world around them. Older pupils are keen to share their views with visitors, not afraid to hold back when sharing their thoughts about previous settings. One pupil's view that, 'Mostly everyone relates to you here, so you don't have to mask anything, because everyone just gets it, so you can be yourself, truly', met with blanket approval by other pupils. Loyalty to your peers, to staff and to the school itself, means something here.

Pupils' behaviour is largely excellent, though not perfect all the time. Periods of high anxiety are managed well by all because partnerships are trusting and staff are skilled at heading off problems. Because of this, classrooms are purposeful and productive places.

Most pupils settle quickly on joining Clay Hill because staff work hard on getting relationships right before anything else. As a result, pupils respond well to the increasingly high expectations of staff over time, developing trust and confidence in themselves as learners. The impact of this is a happy school where pupils achieve well, despite the complex barriers that some face.

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

This is a school where pupils, most of whom have often been out of education for long periods of time before joining, are now thriving. Staff offer a kind and nurturing environment. Nevertheless, the expectations of what each individual pupil can achieve, both in and out of the classroom, are high. Parents and carers acknowledge this. The very large majority who replied to Ofsted Parent View or communicated directly with inspectors have very positive views about the quality of care and education the school is providing.

Leaders at all levels benefit from a range of support from the proprietor company's central team of experts. This includes in such areas as human resources, finance and safeguarding. Oversight of the quality of education is also a top priority for the proprietor, with a successful system of quality assurance and compliance fully in place. As a result, the school continues to meet the requirements of the independent school standards and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school is particularly successful in building pupils' self-esteem and resilience. The pastoral care here is very strong because adults understand pupils' needs extremely well. Staff are open and reflective. They look for the positives rather than dwelling on the negatives when problems surface. This includes staff who are part of the therapeutic and inclusion teams, whose work sits comfortably alongside that of teachers and learning support assistants. The school's caring and understanding ethos is also evident in pupils themselves, who are increasingly willing to play their own part in making the school a great place to be.

The English curriculum is designed to interest and engage pupils. Pupils are happy to share their prior learning, equally keen to confirm their understanding of the language used by Shakespeare or the powers displayed by comic-book superheroes.

Pupils who join the school who are not yet confident readers are identified quickly. A range of appropriate interventions are available, often supplemented by activities that take into account pupils' sensory needs. Largely these work well, though further training is planned to ensure that staff are as effective as possible in delivering the new phonics programme.

The school's mathematics curriculum is planned appropriately but the way it is taught is sometimes inconsistent. Some staff are not as confident in teaching mathematics as they might be. This means that they are not as skilled as others at identifying the gaps in knowledge or misconceptions that some pupils have. This is also the case in other subjects such as English, where the subject knowledge of some staff is not as strong as it might be. Despite this, pupils' progress through the curriculum is broadly very positive, especially when their starting points on joining the school are considered.

Ensuring that pupils attend school has a high priority here. Absence of any kind is followed up rigorously. Leaders are proactive in their work to support pupils and families when there are concerns. Happily, the need for this work, though always a focus, is reducing for a number of reasons, not least because pupils enjoy coming to school.

The personal development of pupils is a clear strength. Staff fully understand the additional needs of vulnerable pupils with complex needs. The programme to ensure that pupils are prepared as well as possible for life in modern Britain is well established. Much is tailored for individuals. Everything is planned deliberately and not by chance. This means that pupils benefit from a rich set of experiences when developing their understanding of different cultures and values.

The school's programme of enrichment activities builds character and helps pupils overcome long-held anxieties. During the inspection, pupils from the Home Farm site visited a Titanic-themed escape room to help build teamwork and confidence. Bus and train travel, supermarket visits and trips to cafés, enhance pupils' experiences while developing vital life skills.

The school's careers programme is responsive to individuals' needs. Work experience opportunities are also used sensitively to help pupils see beyond the school gate. The result is clear to see, especially in older pupils, who are increasingly confident in their own futures as they focus on their next steps after leaving the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and the proprietor)

- On occasion, teaching does not meet the needs of pupils as well as it might. Sometimes staff lack confidence and miss opportunities to adapt their teaching in the moment. This includes when pupils need additional support, or reminding about what they already know and can do. When this is the case, pupils' progress through the curriculum is not as strong as it might be. The school needs to focus more sharply on ensuring that best practice is more widely shared, so that all pupils benefit from high-quality teaching across both sites of the school.

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	140046
DfE registration number	850/6090
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10322069
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Proprietor	Aspris Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Nancy O'Regan
Headteacher	Andrew Whyte
Annual fees (day pupils)	£77,000 to £123,000
Telephone number	02380 283 633
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk
Email address	clayhillschool@aspriscs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 June 2021

Information about this school

- This is a special school which provides for pupils with autism spectrum conditions and associated needs. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates from two sites. Most pupils are based at the Clay Hill site, SO43 7DE, in a listed building within a rural setting in the New Forest. A small number of pupils attend the Home Farm site, which is situated a short distance away at SO40 2RP.
- Though registered for pupils in the age range from five to 19, the school does not provide a traditional sixth-form curriculum.
- 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.

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued 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 leaders at all levels, as well as teaching and support staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietor company who was accompanied by the proprietor's regional director.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of a local authority which places pupils at the school. He also met with the school's link police community support officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English including reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector heard some pupils read. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects with leaders.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of parents, 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.

- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. The lead inspector also talked formally to two representative groups of pupils on day three of the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted Parent View. The views of staff were considered through Ofsted's staff survey. The lead inspector met with a parent and also received an email from another parent.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jason Philipsz

Ofsted Inspector

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