

# Ferndearle

Heather Lodge, 2 Radnor Park West, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5HH

## Inspection dates

13–15 September 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Good</b>

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher has made many changes that have improved pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils aspire to do well in their studies.
- The headteacher, teachers and assistants consistently monitor the impact of the recent changes. They regularly make adjustments to ensure pupils' needs are fully met.
- The curriculum meets the often complex needs of pupils well. It enables pupils to gain the skills knowledge and confidence they need for their next steps.
- Effective teaching sparks pupils' enthusiasm for learning, and ensures that any gaps pupils have in literacy and numeracy are filled.
- Teachers carefully monitor pupils' progress and provide additional bespoke support if their progress slows.
- Highly detailed assessment information indicates that pupils make strong progress from their much lower-than-average starting points.
- Pupils behave well because staff consistently use well-tested and agreed approaches to manage pupils' behaviour. Attendance levels are high.
- Safeguarding is strong because staff work closely with pupils, carers, and external agencies to ensure that pupils stay safe. Pupils know how they can protect themselves from risks.
- Leaders and managers, including the proprietor, have ensured that the independent school standards have been fully met.
- The proprietors are highly focused on supporting each pupil in their learning journey. They ensure that the care of the pupils is at the core of the partnership between school, carers and external agencies.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders and proprietors have not ensured that planned actions and follow-up actions are recorded and communicated widely enough. This makes monitoring more challenging.
- The questions teachers and assistants pose to most-able pupils, which require them to reflect on their own learning, are not always probing or challenging enough.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Proprietors should clarify leaders' roles and responsibilities so it is easier to track and check what actions have been agreed, and how the follow-up actions are being monitored.
- Teachers and assistants should ensure that their questioning of most-able pupils is demanding enough, so most-able pupils are more perspicacious about how they learn best.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher, since joining the school, has instigated many improvements that have made a demonstrable difference to pupils' learning and behaviour. Ensuring pupils' diverse and complex needs are successfully met has rightfully underpinned these changes. As a consequence, she has gained the support and trust of staff, pupils and carers, who speak highly of the way the school is led. Morale is high.
- The vast majority of pupils have had turbulent experiences of education hitherto, and often have high levels of anxiety about school. They nevertheless do well at the school. This is because of the positive climate for learning established by the headteacher and proprietors, which is effectively reinforced by all staff.
- Leaders and teachers are not complacent. They frequently review and refine their practice because pupils' needs vary so much from day to day. For example, teachers and assistants meet at the end of each day to review what has worked best for the pupils.
- Leaders robustly check the impact of changes to ensure that they are effective. They have sensibly identified that approaches to monitoring pupils' academic progress, established when the headteacher first joined, now need refining and sharpening.
- Teachers' and assistants' skills have been successfully developed. They have received support and challenge from the headteacher, who regularly observes their work and accurately identifies areas for further development and training.
- The bespoke curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and includes a range of effective therapies, including play therapy. Pupils in the upper school undertake courses and qualifications that closely match their interest and skill levels. In the lower school, pupils are given intensive, well-planned support if they need to catch up with their reading and numeracy. Routines for learning are well established.
- Planned learning successfully provides the flexibility pupils need, coupled with an appropriate degree of structure. This helps pupils regulate their own behaviour. For example, if pupils become unsettled, there is enough elasticity for staff to use their professional judgement and vary activities.
- The headteacher has wisely broadened the curriculum so that it encompasses subjects such as French and art. This is so that pupils can stand shoulder to shoulder with those in mainstream schools. The variety has stimulated pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Effective teaching in creative and performance-based subjects promotes pupils' social and cultural understanding. The philosophy and ethics programme is well planned so it incorporates opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual understanding, sense of right and wrong, and ability to reflect honestly on the decisions they make.
- Leaders have effectively ensured that pupils are outward looking and fully understand that British society is a blend of different cultures, traditions and religions. To help pupils understand how democracy works and give pupils chance to play a more active role in the school community, the headteacher has recently set up a school council. Such are the improvements in pupils' self-esteem that the majority now relish the opportunity to make a greater contribution to school life.

- During the inspection, leaders provided evidence to demonstrate that the school meets all independent school standards. The evidence for some standards was more readily available than others.

### **Governance**

- Proprietors have a strong and clear vision for the school. In particular, they have insisted on a consistent approach to integrating different therapies into the curriculum. This joined-up approach has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and well-being.
- Proprietors work effectively with the school to ensure that links with parents and carers and school staff are well maintained. Consequently, teachers and assistants are very aware of pupils' emotional state and tailor learning activities accordingly.
- Due to how rapidly developments in the management of the school have been, leaders and proprietors are not always sufficiently clear about their responsibilities. Consequently, agreed actions and follow-up actions are not always easy to track and check. This sometimes makes it more difficult for leaders and proprietors to monitor the pace and quality of agreed changes.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff liaise with carers on a daily basis so any concerns can be exchanged and dealt with. This helps to keep the pupils safe because staff are then able to predict any issues that might arise during the course of the day and prepare how best to respond to these.
- Policies and guidance on the school's website are detailed and in line with the government's current requirements. Staff are well trained, including in the 'Prevent' duty, and make good use of effective, additional guidance that helpfully outlines the curriculum areas where it is most appropriate to broach sensitive issues. Consequently, pupils who have a high degree of vulnerability, resulting from their complex emotional needs, are kept safe.
- Staff listen carefully to pupils' concerns and to the impromptu issues they raise, such as how peers can exploit each other. Staff make the most of these unplanned opportunities to reinforce key messages that are in line with school and government guidance. Consequently, pupils confidently discuss different types of risk and how they can protect themselves.
- Leaders effectively ensure that all staff understand the additional risks that may be incurred if pupils' routines are changed as well as the best ways to minimise these risks. Staff therefore feel confident about taking pupils out of their familiar surroundings, for example on educational visits. This has helped pupils develop their self-confidence, respect for others and tolerance.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teaching has improved and is now strong. Pupils are captivated by the overt enthusiasm that teachers and assistants display for the subjects they teach.
- Well-planned learning routines support pupils in staying focused. Teaching staff, including assistants, are deployed effectively so that pupils can benefit from their subject knowledge. For example, pupils made good progress in learning the guitar because they were enthused by the animated guitar playing of the assistant teaching them.

- Pupils digest facts and information imparted to them by teachers well. This is because teachers use their strong subject knowledge to find the best ways for pupils to fully digest complex information, for instance by creating 3D models of parts of the body. This approach helps pupils make good progress from their low starting points.
- There is a well-planned programme of additional numeracy and literacy support. This helps pupils who have gaps in their learning to catch up and also assists pupils in gaining the confidence to participate fully in the lessons they have with their peers.
- Pupils have a good grounding in key subject vocabulary. Teachers make sure pupils learn about the roots of words and their origins, and therefore, when they are confronted with unfamiliar words, they can begin to decipher their meaning independently. This is a good example of the impact of the work done to improve pupils' literacy and the emphasis placed on spelling words accurately.
- Homework is used effectively and helps pupils to secure and deepen their learning. Teachers assess homework tasks carefully to check whether key concepts have been understood and where necessary return to them in lessons. For example, the teacher's feedback to pupils after they had completed their mathematics homework helped them to identify their misconceptions.
- Most-able pupils learn well and are given work that is flexible enough to require them to use their initiative and creativity in order to complete it. On occasion, the questions teachers pose as part of their feedback are not sufficiently nuanced to enable this group of pupils to hone their skills further.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Despite most pupils having had previously stormy experiences of school, the majority exhibit positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers and assistants successfully nurture pupils' confidence while cultivating their resilience. For instance, they help pupils learn the language they need to explore their often complex emotions.
- The respect with which pupils treat each other and staff is rapidly improving. This in turn has created a more affirming learning environment. Pupils are keen to come to school and attendance last year was almost 100%.
- Teachers and assistants promote notions of respect for oneself and others in an effective way. Pupils are explicitly taught fundamental British values. Teachers and assistants make good use of visual and digital resources to ensure that pupils can relate these guiding principles to their own lives.
- Staff successfully support pupils in ensuring that they are aware that they can cause offence through the way they speak and what they say. Pupils were observed modifying their own language so that it was more respectful. As a result, pupils make progress in developing strategies to manage their behaviour.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are clear about the expectations inherent in belonging to a community of learners. Staff constantly reinforce agreed boundaries. As a consequence, the number of recorded incidents has declined when compared with the previous year.
- Rewards and sanctions are used effectively to support pupils in modifying their behaviour. For the most part, they are successful. Pupils respond well to the trust points they earn from small acts of kindness and positivity.
- Staff are acutely aware of each pupil's needs, which are documented in detail in their individual support plans. These plans clearly identify triggers for pupils, as well as effective approaches to prevent situations that arise from escalating further. They help staff manage pupils' complex behavioural needs effectively.
- Last academic year, improvements in the way pupils' behavioural needs were managed led to a significant reduction in the number of restraints staff used. When restraint is used, it is employed for a short period of time, as a last resort, and the circumstances are recorded in detail. There have been no incidents requiring its use since the start of autumn term 2016.

## Outcomes for pupils

### Good

- Outcomes are good. Pupils with low starting points and often complex emotional needs have good attendance and learn well. When pupils leave the school, they do so with a range of attributes that equip them well for their next steps.
- All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, accessing an array of well-planned additional help. One-to-one academic coaching therapies, delivered by an accredited therapist, and the opportunity for most-able pupils to attend lessons in upper school, indicate the range and ingenuity of the support available. The precision with which teachers deploy such interventions enables each individual pupil to develop and move forward.
- Pupils in the care of their local authorities do well. School staff liaise with carers on a daily basis so that they gain a detailed understanding of each pupil's learning needs. Teachers and assistants use their understanding well to ensure that this group of pupils surmount any initial barriers when they first join, so they then go on to attend well and gain new skills. It is of note that some pupils in the care of the local authorities develop the confidence and ambition to attend courses at the local college.
- Planning for life beyond school is a strong and effective element of the curriculum. It begins in the lower school when pupils develop a solid foundation of workplace skills such as teamworking. In upper school, pupils are provided with the opportunity to discover more about different career options through a programme of visiting speakers, such as the police.
- Pupils develop a secure understanding of the etymological roots of key vocabulary because teachers closely question pupils on what they have assimilated from their detailed explanations of word origins. Pupils, especially the most able, made strides in their learning by being challenged to make links with other words that share the same root in a mathematics lesson on cardioids.

- Pupils successfully acquire the basic skills they often previously lacked because there have been gaps in their education to date, including phonics knowledge. Pupils are tested when they join the school and regularly throughout the year, helping teachers to identify gaps in learning as well as pupils' potential.
- Tests are also used effectively to check that pupils are pursuing the most challenging qualification of which they are capable. Consequently, pupils have successfully undertaken entry-level qualifications and vocational courses and, this academic year, some are embarking on GCSE courses.
- In-school tests and assessments, conducted at the end of the summer term in 2016, showed that all pupils made progress from their starting points and the majority made strong progress in spelling, reading and mathematics. Some pupils made notable gains in reading.
- In a number of subjects, due to recent improvements, most-able pupils are making steady progress from their starting points because teachers are well attuned to recognising their potential. However, the questions teachers and assistants ask to aid most-able pupils in identifying how they learn best do not have sufficient depth and subtlety.

## School details

Unique reference number	135510
DfE registration number	886/6126
Inspection number	10008937

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Proprietor	Robin Dearle
Headteacher	Zara Malyon
Annual fees	£35,620
Telephone number	01303 850182
Website	<a href="http://www.ferndearleschool.com">www.ferndearleschool.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:ferndearle@ferndearle.co.uk">ferndearle@ferndearle.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	26–27 June 2012

## Information about this school

- Ferndearle School is a small school, owned by three proprietors.
- Its previous standard inspection was on 26–27 June 2012.
- Ferndearle is a special school for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. It operates on two sites, one focusing on key stages 2 and 3 learning and the other on key stage 4.
- It currently has 10 pupils on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school is registered for pupils aged between five and 16 years of age.
- All the pupils are eligible for enhanced pupil premium funding because they are in the

care of a number of different local authorities.

- Since the previous school inspection in June 2012, a new headteacher has been appointed, taking up her post in September 2014.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors made short visits, on four different occasions, to observe teaching, learning and assessment. They also observed tutorial time.
- Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised.
- Informal meetings were held with pupils on two occasions.
- The inspector spoke to a group of teachers and assistants, which included a newly qualified teacher, and also held meetings with senior leaders. The inspector met separately with the proprietor and also held a meeting with a therapist who works regularly with pupils.
- Eight questionnaires submitted by members of staff were scrutinised.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation and development plans, were checked for compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors took account of four written comments and six survey responses made on Parent View and two emails from pupils' carers.
- The inspector made a telephone call to the local area designated safeguarding officer.

## Inspection team

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Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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