

Inspection of Arun Court School

Arun Court, 14 High Street, Bramley, Guildford GU5 0HF

Inspection dates: 13–15 November 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

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

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a very special school. Staff are dedicated and knowledgeable. Leaders have a clarity of vision and expertise that have ensured that this new school is good and improving. They expect the best of pupils and staff alike. They also work incredibly hard and have high expectations of themselves. In particular, they lead from the front.

The vast majority of pupils thrive here, despite their very complex needs. For the most part, their behaviour is good. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff believe that bullying is either rare or non-existent. It was clear to inspectors that staff deal with problems very well when pupils' relationships are at risk of becoming strained.

The curriculum provides a good balance between pupils' academic and social and emotional development. Because of this, pupils' personal development is promoted exceptionally well and is a great strength of the school.

Most pupils join the school after being out of full-time education for long periods of time, often for a number of years. Staff understand this and work hard to provide pupils with the motivation and confidence to believe in themselves once more. As a result, pupils flourish, make new friends, and enjoy becoming successful learners once more.

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

Since the school became fully registered earlier this year, much has been done to consolidate the curriculum and create a positive culture for learning. Leaders understand their roles and individual responsibilities well. The staff team members work together very effectively. Their aspirations for pupils' future success are high. As a result, the quality of education the school provides is good and improving.

Leaders are open and reflective. Communication is effective. Adults talk and readily share information in this school. Parents agree. Key information required by parents is available should they need it. Staff appreciate the way that they are listened to by leaders. They feel empowered to share their views, particularly where it involves the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Consequently, the pastoral care of pupils is strong.

Pupils follow bespoke programmes of learning tailored to their own individual requirements. Initial assessments of their needs are given a high priority when they join the school. Staff understand that getting this aspect correct at the start will pay dividends later. They also understand that low levels of self-esteem and high levels of anxiety need to be addressed before pupils will engage successfully in learning.

Once settled into day-to-day school life, pupils are introduced to an increasingly broad and demanding curriculum. This includes careers education and planning for next steps. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is also catered for

well. The school environment is suitable for the purpose it serves, although pupils and parents would prefer more readily available outdoor facilities for physical education.

Pupils appreciate being taught in small groups. This allows staff to be flexible with curriculum content, changing the direction of learning when the need arises. That said, the curriculum map is firmly established and gives a good overview of what pupils will study and when. This is true of both key stage 3, and of key stage 4, where pupils follow a GCSE syllabus in a broad range of subjects.

Pupils enjoy their visits into the local community. For most, this is a daily occurrence. Pupils also enjoy trips further afield, including to local theatres. A recent trip to see a production of 'Frankenstein' was used to bolster pupils' understanding of gothic art and literature, for instance. Other outings are designed to give pupils confidence when in their local community, including learning how to use public transport.

Pupils behave well most of the time, because staff have high expectations and are skilled at de-escalating situations before tensions run too high. Pupils disapprove of poor behaviour, especially if it affects their learning negatively. They told the lead inspector this does happen sometimes, but that staff deal with these situations well.

Pupils benefit from a range of therapeutic interventions to help them make sense of their feelings and to help them cope when their emotions run high. Although most pupils attend school well, a minority do not come as often as they should. Despite leaders' work to improve this, particularly in relation to reducing anxiety and boosting pupils' emotional resilience, more needs to be done to improve attendance overall.

The school is in transition as far as governance is concerned. The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, is keen to develop the role of the external monitoring and advisory team (EMAT) into a more formal governing body. Good progress has already been made in this area. Members of the EMAT have started to attend relevant training. As a result, the leadership and management of the school are effective. This includes in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.

Less well developed is the process for the EMAT to monitor leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and how this informs improvement planning. As a result, self-evaluation is not sharp enough and the school development plan does not focus keenly enough on the key aspects that need to be better.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are vigilant and give promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils the highest priority. They know what to do if they have concerns because routines and systems to safeguard pupils are strong.

Staff have completed appropriate training. Much of this is face to face and delivered by experts in particular fields. Staff understand fully the risks pupils face in their lives. This includes the increased hazards that vulnerable pupils with complex needs face in their day-to-day lives outside school.

All parents, pupils and staff who completed surveys or spoke to inspectors were positive about safeguarding at this school.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is overly descriptive. It is not focused sharply enough on why some aspects of the school are strong, while other aspects are less so. As a result, improvement planning is not as effective as it might be. Furthermore, leaders at all levels, including those in positions of governance, do not have a clear enough understanding of the key things that need to improve. Nor do staff have a strong enough understanding of the things that they could do better. Leaders understand that they need to sharpen this aspect of their work. They now need to make this a reality.
- Some pupils' rates of absence are too high. This is particularly the case with persistent absence. Leaders should redouble their efforts to reduce pupils' absence, so that more pupils benefit every day from the good quality of education the school provides.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	146338
DfE registration number	936/6015
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10100143
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beverley-Sarah White
Headteacher	Beverley-Sarah White
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,000
Telephone number	01483 894 858
Website	www.big-bear-bespoke-education.co.uk
Email address	enquiriesbigbeareducation@outlook.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This was the first standard inspection since the school was first registered to admit pupils in January 2019.
- The school is registered for up to 20 pupils in the age range 11 to 17.
- The school provides primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. It aims to combine education and therapy for pupils whose mental health needs, particularly anxiety, have not been successfully met in previous schools.
- Most pupils have an education, health and care plan. All are placed by local authorities.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

We 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.

- We held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with the proprietor, leaders, teaching and support staff, pupils, and a parent. The lead inspector met with the chair of the EMAT.
- When considering the quality of education, we focused particularly on English, mathematics, and personal, social, health and citizenship education. This included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- We took into account both pupil and staff surveys. We also reviewed parents' responses to Ofsted's online parent survey and accompanying free-text messages.
- We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection, including during breaks and at the start and finish of the school day.
- We assessed the school's culture to keep pupils safe throughout the inspection. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies and 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.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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