

Inspection of Courtlands Independent Special School

37 Parklands Avenue, Goring, Worthing, West Sussex BN12 4NG

Inspection dates:

4 to 6 March 2025

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's consistently calm, quiet and purposeful atmosphere makes a strong contribution to pupils' learning and well-being. Pupils move around the school sensibly, chatting to each other quietly as they do so. Pupils appreciate their school and treat this historical building, its attractive grounds and everyone in the school with respect.

Pupils have often had a difficult time in education prior to joining the school, including extended periods of time outside formal education. Staff establish strong and trusting relationships with pupils. Pupils grow in confidence because they feel secure and valued in school. They work hard and achieve well. Pupils learn a range of valuable skills to support independence, such as how to follow a recipe and how to use kitchen utensils safely. Visits and trips into the local community help to enrich learning and build important social skills.

Pupils respond positively to high expectations of their learning and behaviour. Good behaviour is a key feature of the school's strong community ethos. Pupils listen to their teachers and to each other with interest, often offering to help if a classmate gets stuck during lessons. They enjoy opportunities to play games or to catch up with interests during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Visitors are welcomed politely.

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

The school checks pupils' needs and starting points carefully when they join the school. These checks take account of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan targets, specialist therapeutic guidance and parents and carer views. The school uses targeted individual support to guide teaching and to check pupils' progress.

Pupils often have significant gaps in knowledge due to a disrupted education and missed learning prior to joining the school. The school focuses successfully on addressing these gaps, so that pupils have the key knowledge needed to achieve well. The school aims to ensure that pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to acquire nationally accredited qualifications, such as GCSEs and functional skills. The school's broad, ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum provides a clear structure for teaching. The curriculum is supplemented with therapeutic input where required, such as speech and language therapy. However, in a small number of subjects the planned curriculum is not delivered as consistently as intended. Teaching does not build on pupils' prior learning as strongly as it could where this is the case.

The school is well resourced with a wide range of good quality books. There are plenty of welcoming areas for pupils to read, including the school's well-maintained library. Staff choose texts for classroom use which are likely to appeal to pupils' interests. Pupils are encouraged to read and often choose to do so. Careful thought has been given to supporting weaker readers, although support for these pupils is at an early stage of development. A suitable phonics programme has been introduced.

This is already having a positive impact on pupils' willingness and confidence to read. However, it is too soon for the phonics programme to have made a noticeable difference to pupils' reading ability. Pupils read to an adult regularly.

The school premises are safe and maintained to a high standard. Safety procedures are clear and securely established, including fire safety arrangements, water safety checks and risk assessment procedures. Classrooms have a relaxed but purposeful working atmosphere. Staff understand pupils' needs and provide skilful support. They respond sensitively if pupils become anxious or stressed. Pupils learn how to recognise their own emotions and the impact that their behaviour can have on others.

Most pupils attend well. The school works constructively with pupils and their parents where attendance is a concern. There have been significant improvements in individual pupils' attendance since they joined the school.

The school supplements academic learning with a wide range of interesting activities, making full use of its extensive grounds and its proximity to the beach to support pupils' personal development. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, they learn how to keep safe in different settings, discuss important themes, such as consent, in relationships and sex education and play an increasingly active role in school life. The school has adopted a careers programme which provides impartial advice about career routes and employment opportunities. The school has plans to develop careers guidance further to support the older pupils, including establishing links with further education colleges. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards (the standards) are met continuously. The proprietor, headteacher and chair of the governing body work well together to oversee developments. However, checks and balances to monitor implementation of the planned curriculum are not as robust as they could be. The school intends to strengthen the governing body's role in checking the school's work and in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. It is currently in the process of recruiting additional governors to the governing body.

The school engages well with parents. Parents are highly appreciative of the school's work to support their children. High staff morale reflects the school's success in establishing a positive and cohesive community. Staff feel valued and supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Support for weaker readers is at an early stage of development. This means that pupils who have fallen behind prior to joining the school do not catch up as quickly as they could. The school should implement actions to ensure that the recently introduced phonics programme is fully established so that pupils become fluent, confident readers.
- The planned curriculum is not implemented as intended in all subjects. This means that learning does not build consistently on what pupils have learned previously where this is the case. The school should ensure that the planned curriculum is followed and delivered consistently in all subjects and that effective oversight is in place to ensure that this is the case.

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	149890
DfE registration number	938/6018
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10342205
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Courtlands By The Sea Ltd
Headteacher	Mark Birkbeck
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000
Telephone number	01903 255 900
Website	www.courtlands-school.co.uk
Email address	admin@courtlands-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Courtlands Independent Special School opened on 13th November 2023. It is registered to admit 21 pupils between the ages of 11 and 14. The school specialises in providing education for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. Pupils may also have cognition and learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan and are funded by a local authority.
- The school is based in a Grade II listed building which is located in a residential area in Goring, West Sussex. The building is set within extensive grounds which include a large pond.
- The headteacher has been in post since 1st February 2024.
- The school has a governing body which currently comprises the chair of the governing body.
- 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.

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.
- 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.
- An application for a material change was considered at the same time as this inspection. Initially, the proprietor wished to increase the maximum number of pupils on roll from 21 to 80 and the age range from 11 to 14, to 11 to 16. The proprietor amended the proposed change to capacity from 80 to 65 during the inspection and notified the DfE of the change in application.
- This was the school's first material change inspection.
- The school is currently operating beyond its registration agreement with the DfE. It is exceeding the maximum number of pupils on roll that they are registered to admit by two. At the time of this inspection, the school had not notified the DfE that it is operating beyond its registration agreement.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher and other school leaders. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.

- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's surveys. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times of the school day.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English including early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Compliance with the independent school standards was checked throughout the inspection, including a tour of the site, discussions with leaders and a review of relevant documentation.

The school's proposed change to a maximum of 80 pupils with an age range of 11 to 16

The school has applied to the 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 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.**
- The proprietor's rationale for its material change application is sound. The primary reasons are to provide ongoing education for the school's current pupils as they move up through the school and to respond to strong local demand.
- The proprietor proposes to increase the number of pupils on roll gradually over time during 2025 should the DfE approve the application until the school is operating at full capacity as below:
 - 33 additional pupils by April
 - 40 by June
 - 42 by the end of July
 - 56 by September
 - 65 by October.
- The school premises is suitable to accommodate the proposed material change. The school currently occupies the ground floor of the building. Work to the upper floors of the building has now been completed to a high standard. Classrooms and other areas are well-maintained, well-lit and suitably resourced.
- Curriculum plans and schemes of work have been prepared in a range of subjects. The content is appropriate for the additional year groups proposed by the school.

- The school has appropriate plans to develop reading provision should the DfE approve its application to extend the age range.
- The proprietor has a clear plan for staffing arrangements should the DfE approve the proposed material change.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lizzie Jeanes

Ofsted Inspector

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