

Inspection of a good school: Cornfield School, Littlehampton

Cornfield Close, Littlehampton, West Sussex, BN17 6HY

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 June 2021

Outcome

Cornfield School, Littlehampton continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Cornfield enjoy learning and are well prepared for the next stage in their lives. They study a wide range of subjects, join in with stimulating enrichment activities and develop strong bonds with staff and each other.

Leaders and teachers make sure they get to know as much as they can about pupils' needs and interests in order to plan ambitious programmes of study and support. Staff keep up regular, supportive communication with families. Pupils feel safe, settling quickly into the school's secure routines and high expectations.

Pupils deserve to be proud of their achievements in this nurturing and orderly school. Striking displays of their artwork create an inspiring atmosphere and impress visitors. Pupils' behaviour improves because staff look after them and understand their needs. Skilled staff patiently calm down pupils' intense anxieties or impulsive behaviour. Pupils are taught not to goad each other or make hurtful comments. Nearly all are confident that bullying will be dealt with well.

Parents value what their children learn and know the difference the school makes. As one parent commented, 'My son has exceeded and achieved so much. I could not be any more grateful for all the support they have given him.'

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

School leaders are dedicated to teaching pupils what they need to know for their future employment and independence. Teachers plan sequences of lessons with pupils' interests in mind, while making sure that the content of topics is ambitious and wide-ranging.

In spite of considerable staffing challenges, senior leaders and subject leaders are not complacent about improving their curriculum. They know that they do not have much time to get pupils ready for life beyond school and that some pupils missed essential

learning during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. In the lower school, pupils follow an integrated primary-style curriculum which rightly prioritises reading, writing and mathematics, while also providing coverage of foundation subjects. Leaders have rightly identified, however, that the link between what is taught in the lower school (Years 5 and 6 and some pupils in Year 7) and the upper school is not clear enough. For example, teachers sometimes do not take quite enough account of what pupils already know and remember when they start their upper school mathematics.

The teaching of reading continues to be a strength in the school. Pupils know how important reading is and try hard to improve. Tutors reinforce pupils' positive reading habits every day, sharing their own enjoyment and commitment. In English, pupils get to study a wide range of classic and modern literature. Pupils who are at an early stage of reading get the good-quality teaching they need through a well-planned phonics programme. Many pupils enjoy choosing books from the wide choice in the library. They appreciate the quiet reflective moments when they can get lost in a book.

Pupils gain much from the school's wider curriculum, including the termly exciting and challenging community, enterprise or healthy lifestyles focus weeks. At the time of the inspection, Year 11 leavers were about to attend a special celebration of their achievements. Pupils achieve impressive GCSE results in art, on a par with their peers in the mainstream. The school's carefully planned physical education programme is crucial to pupils' fitness and mental health. Leaders have been working on refining the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, including developing more therapeutic approaches to managing behaviour and pupils' mental health. They have rightly identified that they need to assess more precisely what pupils take in and remember about the PSHE topics they have been taught.

Most pupils treat staff and each other with respect. They try hard to keep focused on their work and deliberate disruption to learning is rare. Sometimes pupils forget themselves and swear or use inappropriate language. However, when bad language occurs, staff give pupils a firm reminder and help them get back on track.

Subject leaders, teachers and teaching assistants are typically eager to keep learning. Senior leaders ensure that staff have opportunities to develop their skills, at the same time as reducing unreasonable workloads and taking care of their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leaders in the school carry out their duties meticulously. They use their knowledge and experience to identify concerns about pupils and push for better help from other agencies. All staff are well trained to spot signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm and are confident that their concerns will be acted on. Safeguarding records are detailed and enable swift responses to serious and new concerns. Pupils quickly gain a sense of security when they join the school. Strong communication between staff and other agencies helps to keep pupils safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum planning in the lower school does not link coherently enough with what pupils study in the upper school. Leaders should ensure that assessments of what has been taught and learned in the lower school are used effectively to ensure pupils' progression through the upper school curriculum.
- Senior leaders and teachers are enhancing their approach to pupils' personal development across the school. In order to check what pupils know and remember from the different PSHE topics, leaders should develop a more precise assessment system.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 22 and 23 June 2016.

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 are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school [here](#).

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	126170
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10192873
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Geoffrey Palmer
Headteacher	Maria Davis
Website	http://www.cornfieldschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Cornfield School caters for boys who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional learning needs or have experienced past trauma. All pupils have education, health and care plans.
- The lower school provides an integrated primary curriculum for pupils in Years 5 and 6, with some Year 7 pupils. The upper school provides national curriculum foundation and core subjects for pupils in key stage 3 and 4. Pupils are able to study for a range of qualifications, including GCSE, functional skills and some vocational courses.
- The school does not outsource alternative provision. The school serves as an alternative provider, providing tutoring and arranging off-site education for some pupils placed by the local authority.
- The school has been part of a hard federation with Oak Grove College and Palatine School since 2012. In September 2017, Herons Dale School joined. The Thrive Federation became a soft federation in 2021.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have

taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leads, governors and a group of staff. The lead inspector had a telephone call with a local authority representative. Inspectors met a group of pupils and spoke to others informally.
- Inspectors considered the views of nine parents who contributed to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 13 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors reviewed 22 responses to the staff survey and spoke to a number of staff.
- Inspectors did deep dives in English, mathematics, art and PSHE. These consisted of reviewing curriculum plans, speaking to subject and senior leaders, visiting lessons, speaking to pupils and reviewing their work.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including checks on adults working in the school, record-keeping of serious concerns, and staff's understanding of how they identify, help and manage concerns about child protection. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding in the school.
- A range of other evidence relating to pupils' behaviour, bullying and the wider curriculum was also taken into account. Inspectors also considered staff well-being and the impact of their workload.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Shaun Jarvis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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