

Merrywood House Independent Special School

The Old Pheasantry Street, Merrywood Grove, Mogador, Tadworth KT20
7HF

Inspection dates

20 November 2019

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2 to 4

- The proprietor has a clear vision for the education that the proposed school intends to provide. It is captured in a written policy. Her plan is to combine academic learning and therapeutic services in a way that helps pupils to thrive. As such, it supports leaders' aspirations for pupils to achieve at least as well as pupils who attend a mainstream school.
- The consultant headteacher and proprietor have planned a suitably broad curriculum. Developing pupils' social, emotional and mental health is an integral part of this plan. Fundamental British values are promoted through the curriculum. Subject content is sufficiently demanding. This will help to give pupils the knowledge they need for their future.
- Leaders have used research and their own experience to plan sequences of learning. They have made sensible choices about the order of topics and content in English and mathematics. This looks likely to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills successfully. Leaders' work to develop other subjects is ongoing but shows appropriate thinking.
- Each pupil will have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) for an identified special educational need. Some pupils may have been absent from formal schooling for a time before they arrive. The curriculum is planned with pupils' likely needs in mind. Leaders understand the importance of promptly identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge. This is likely to help teachers to adapt their plans, so that they meet pupils' learning needs well. Planned opportunities for staff to reflect on pupils' progress are likely to contribute usefully to this.
- As yet, no teaching or support staff have been recruited. Suitable plans are in place for this to happen before the school opens, ensuring an appropriate staff-to-pupil ratio. Permanent staffing will be supplemented by therapists brought in as they are

needed. Thought has been given to an induction process that will help staff to promote the school's ethos successfully through their work.

- Formal assessments will complement teachers' ongoing reviews of pupils' learning. This information is likely to contribute to pupils' statutory annual EHCP reviews. Leaders have made initial links with other local schools. They plan to use these links to help them check the accuracy of teachers' assessments.
- All pupils will study personal, social and health education. Leaders are keen for pupils to learn about different cultures. This will provide chances to promote pupils' sense of respect and thoughtfulness.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is central to leaders' vision for the school's work. As such, leaders have a clear understanding of what this will look like, aligned to the relevant independent school standards, and how they will bring it about.
- Leaders understand the importance of learning about democracy in a non-biased way. They have well-formed plans to achieve this, drawing on their established links with a range of experts from beyond the school.
- The proprietor has experience of providing therapeutic services to young people. The other branch of her business fulfils this role. Consequently, the school has access to a range of experts who can support the wider curriculum in a flexible way, adapting to pupils' emerging needs.
- Texts selected to read in English lessons will encourage pupils to reflect on their own feelings. Leaders' promotion of equality and consideration of those with protected characteristics are threaded through the wider curriculum.
- The planned behaviour curriculum is designed to help pupils to understand their own feelings. By understanding the reasons behind their actions, pupils will be able to learn about how to manage their own emotions successfully.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 6 to 16

- Leaders understand the safeguarding considerations that are specific to this school. They have taken a robust approach to putting clear and appropriate procedures in place. This rigour is likely to promote a strong culture of safeguarding.
- The proprietor and consultant headteacher have completed a range of relevant training. This equips them well to lead safeguarding work in the school. They have put appropriate training in place for when staff join the school, regardless of their prior expertise. This will help them to ensure a consistent approach to this important part of the school's work.

- Leaders know about recent changes to safeguarding guidance. They have updated training and processes to reflect this. The policy was updated at the time of this visit and is fit for purpose. Planned processes demonstrate leaders' understanding of the rigour needed in this part of the school's work.
- Behaviour and anti-bullying policies are fit for purpose. They promote the school's intended approach of helping pupils to understand and manage their emotions in a developmental way. Arrangements to establish a 'no-touch' policy within the school, for example, are clear and appropriate.
- The proprietor understands the challenge of managing health and safety in the school. She intends recruiting a caretaker to help with this. Potential difficulties around sharing the site with another provider have been resolved, suitably managing any potential risks to pupils.
- Suitable arrangements are in place to supervise pupils when they are on the school site. Leaders have also considered how to provide safe and appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their independence. A suitable first aid policy captures how this aspect of the school's work will be managed successfully.
- Leaders have responded robustly to a fire safety review they commissioned. Consequently, facilities, fire equipment and procedures are fit for purpose. Plans are in place for ongoing staff training and testing of relevant fire equipment.
- The proprietor's plans for admission and attendance registers are appropriate. Leaders have given careful thought to how they will reduce the likelihood of children going missing from education as they move on and off the school roll. Arrangements to manage this are captured in the attendance policy.
- Leaders have considered risks linked to the premises, activities and pupils' likely needs. The proprietor has used relevant guidance to support this work. At the time of the inspection, this had not been brought together into a stand-alone written risk assessment policy. Samples of risk assessments indicated due care and attention. The impact of actions on the ensuing risk was not always captured clearly on written risk assessment documents.
- The standards contained in this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 17 to 21

- The proprietor has shown diligence in making recruitment checks on staff currently employed by the school. Safer recruitment training has supported her understanding of what is required. This includes extra checks that might be required, for instance when a member of staff may be returning from being overseas for a period of time. Checks on the headteacher, as the sole proprietor, have sensibly been verified by the advisory board.
- Leaders do not intend using supply teachers to cover for absent staff. Where possible, therapeutic staff who are known to pupils will fulfil this role. Nevertheless, leaders understand the checks and documentation required from anyone coming to work in the school on a temporary basis.

- A single central record of recruitment checks is in place. It provides leaders with a useful way of ensuring that required vetting activities are carried out and recorded in a clear and timely manner.
- The requirements of this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22 to 31

- Leaders have invested notably in ensuring that the school's premises are the best that they can be. In their work, they have considered both the academic and the social and emotional needs of pupils. As a result, the areas of the building that accommodate the school are warm, welcoming and conducive to pupils' learning and personal development.
- The school's section of the building is secure and separate from the part occupied by the building's other users. Leaders' care and thought are evident throughout the school's accommodation. This features sufficient small-group teaching spaces, a library and a larger indoor social space. A small kitchen is well equipped, being intended mainly for use by staff.
- Classrooms are well decorated and furnished. Calming colours and scents have been chosen deliberately to help pupils feel safe in this place of learning. Rooms are light, bright and suitably heated. Secondary double glazing is due to be fitted soon, to provide extra insulation to this old building.
- Suitable toilets and washing facilities are in place, with boys and girls accommodated separately. Currently, the girls' toilet lacks privacy, as there is a large window that overlooks the school grounds. Leaders anticipate adding a window covering in order to resolve this. At the time of this visit, the temperature of the hot water in the boys' toilet needed turning down, in order to avoid risk of scalding. Drinking water is available throughout the building and is labelled as such.
- Leaders have sensibly anticipated pupils' likely medical needs. A space has been set aside that allows for this to be managed sensitively and safely. Leaders have given some early thought to how an admission request from a pupil with complex medical needs might be managed. They do not expect this to be necessary when the school first opens.
- The school building sits in extensive grounds. Leaders have clearly designed these as an integral part of pupils' learning and recreation space. Throughout the grounds, there are areas for pupils to gather and learn together. A large pond is well maintained and securely fenced off, providing a useful and safe outside learning space. Sufficient external lighting is in place. A substantial field provides pupils with a space to play and get exercise. There are opportunities throughout for pupils to learn how to develop their independence and to take risks safely.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- The school's website is already in place. It clearly promotes the school's ethos in an accessible way, making clear its unique selling points. As such, it is a helpful resource to support prospective parents and carers who may, via the relevant local authority, be considering the school for their child.
- A number of policies and documents are uploaded to the website. These meet the requirements to publish safeguarding, behaviour, health and safety and first aid policies. Admissions arrangements are also made clear.
- Leaders are aware of their obligations to publish other information when it becomes relevant, such as the number of complaints received by the school each year once it is open. They recognise their duty to provide the local authority with relevant information about the difference that funding provided by them makes to the relevant pupils' quality of education.
- The school's contact details are readily accessible on the school website. Currently, the proprietor is not explicitly named as such, and her role as headteacher of the school is not clear.
- Leaders are likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- Leaders have produced a written complaints policy, which is published on the school website. The policy meets requirements and is accessible to parents. As such, it provides a useful reference for parents who may wish to raise a complaint formally against the school. Clear timelines are provided for the different stages of the procedure, making the school's obligations apparent to the reader.
- Pupils will be admitted to the school via a referral from their local authority. The proprietor therefore anticipates working openly with the relevant local authority in the event of a complaint being received.
- Leaders have considered how they will manage in the event of a complaint requiring higher levels of scrutiny. They have put some initial arrangements in place. They realise that the consultant headteacher is unlikely to be able to be involved, because of his close involvement in setting up aspects of the school.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the standards.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- The proprietor's commitment to this school is unquestionable. Her high aspirations are backed up with a body of useful knowledge and a strong desire to get things right for pupils. This drives her ongoing learning and development as a school leader. The consultant headteacher's experience as a school leader makes a useful contribution to this development.

- Leaders have sensibly reached out to other schools in the local area. They intend this to provide them with opportunities to learn from existing good practice and to explore options for future moderation of their own work. The proprietor is also keen to use other means to provide an external view about the school's work, in order to support ongoing improvement.
- The advisory board provides a useful layer of scrutiny, especially while the proprietor also fulfils the role of headteacher. It provides a helpful external perspective to the proprietor about the quality of her work. The advisory board has recently brought in additional relevant expertise to support its work. This has focused on the curriculum and safeguarding, and there is evidence of some early impact. Work to schedule routine checks on standards in the school is in the early stages of being put into practice.
- There are further plans to help the advisory body understand the school better as it evolves. Currently, minutes of the board's meeting do not capture the level of scrutiny that the proprietor might reasonably expect of them in order to support the school's work.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have produced and published an equality and inclusion policy on their website. It meets requirements, giving due regard to the Equality Act 2010, and emphasising the school's intended nurturing culture. It demonstrates leaders' understanding of their duties in this area of their work.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	147600
DfE registration number	936/6035
Inspection number	10128052

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Michelle Quayle
Headteacher	Michelle Quayle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,000
Telephone number	07427 630 539
Website	https://merrywood.org.uk/
Email address	contact@pisupport.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	7 to 11	7 to 11
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	16	16

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	16
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	16
Of which, number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	16
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	16

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	4
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0

Information about this proposed school

- Merrywood House is intended to provide full-time education for up to 16 pupils. Pupils are likely to be at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream education. Admission will be via referral from the local authority.
- All pupils will have an education, health and care plan for an identified special educational need. These are most likely to be: behavioural, emotional and social development needs or difficulties; communication and interaction needs; speech, language and communication needs; and/or autism spectrum disorder.
- The school will not have a particular religious character.
- The proposed school will be based in part of a large former residence in a secluded rural setting. Currently, the remainder of the building is used by a charity that runs residential activities for disadvantaged children, operating at weekends and during school holidays.
- The sole proprietor will initially be the named headteacher of the school. She is currently supported by a consultant headteacher who forms part of the school's advisory board. The proprietor anticipates appointing a substantive headteacher once the school is established with at least four pupils on roll.
- An advisory board provides additional external scrutiny to the proprietor in the absence of a governing body.

Information about this inspection

- This was the proposed school's first pre-registration visit under this application. A pre-inspection visit for a previous application took place in July 2019.
- Her Majesty's Inspector met with the proprietor and consultant headteacher to review their work around preparing the school to meet the independent school standards. Together, they toured the school premises and reviewed a range of relevant documents. Her Majesty's Inspector also spoke to a member of the advisory board on the telephone.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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