

Inspection of Merrywood House Independent Special School

The Old Pheasantry, Merrywood Grove, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 7HF

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Merrywood is a safe and caring place to learn. Pupils' lives are transformed by attending this school and they flourish. This is noticed by parents and carers, with one commenting, 'this school has been life changing for my child'. This is because of the school's unrelenting commitment to understanding individual pupil's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs extremely well. Education and therapy staff work exceptionally well together as a cohesive team of experts. They put in place highly personalised education, trauma-informed therapeutic approaches, and pastoral care to precisely meet the needs of the pupils.

Highly effective and orderly routines help pupils to settle happily into school. For example, the day begins with appropriate sensory or physical activities which prepare pupils for learning. Pupils are keen to learn and build trusting relationships with staff. In turn, staff get to know the pupils extremely well. Pupils learn to understand their own emotions and behaviour. Through developing this knowledge, they are empowered to develop strategies to regulate their own behaviour. This results in a calm and therapeutic school environment where pupils' behaviour is remarkably respectful and inclusive.

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

At the heart of this school is a carefully designed, aspirational curriculum that has been expertly constructed to meet the needs of its individual pupils. Alongside this, staff thoughtfully create a safe and nurturing educational environment in which pupils want to learn. The curriculum is sharply focused on developing the important skills and attributes needed to equip pupils for a successful and fulfilling future. Each pupil works towards highly personalised goals in line with their education, health and care (EHC) plans and pupils in Merrywood achieve exceptionally well. All staff are trained to expertly understand the impact of trauma on engagement with learning. This consistent approach underpins every aspect of school life.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects, including mathematics and English. Their learning aligns to their individual needs and can include studying either functional skills or GCSE qualifications. Other lessons include science, daily reading, and an innovatively designed human and social programme. This helps pupils develop knowledge and skills in art, geography and history. Pupils relish the variety of excellent off-site physical education activities, such as basketball, horse riding and trampolining. On the Tadworth site, under the watchful eye of staff, pupils particularly enjoy the extensive woodland outdoor area at breaktimes. As pupils progress through the school, they benefit from personalised study pathways which prepare them extremely well in all areas including employment and adulthood.

Every opportunity to learn is seized. As appropriate, lessons take place in small groups in well-equipped, organised classrooms. Staff expertly draw out pupils' thoughtful ideas about their learning. For more individualised work, or therapy

sessions, creative use is made of small sensory rooms, specialist rooms and cosy, homely areas around the school.

Pupils have often experienced a disrupted education before they join the school. This can mean they arrive with significant gaps in their knowledge. Some may have also experienced significant trauma. To help pupils make an excellent start to their education, staff expertly identify and celebrate each pupil's individual talents and qualities. As a result, pupils develop a love of education. On admission to school, thorough assessment processes are sensitively timed to identify the gaps in pupils' prior learning. Families provide vital insight into what their children need to make a successful transition into the school. This partnership with parents means that staff are well informed about each pupil's needs. Pupils play a proactive role in designing their individualised plans. This creates a strong sense of self agency and independence. Consequently, pupils thrive. They love coming to school, and attendance is high.

Becoming a confident reader is a priority at Merrywood. Where needed, pupils participate in highly thought out and coherent lessons to secure their phonics knowledge and comprehension skills. Through this, they become confident readers. Pupils always have a book at the ready, to join in with a 'snack and read' session or to read when on a break. They value reading for pleasure as well as to enrich their knowledge.

The way the school develops pupils' character is impressive. The bespoke safeguarding and SEMH curriculums are distinctively beneficial to pupils. This unique approach means pupils' personal development is exceptional and pupils are extremely well prepared to make valuable contributions to society. Staff are highly responsive to pupils' interests. They take every opportunity to inspire them to pursue their talents. This includes providing ukelele lessons and 'DJ-ing' experiences. Pupils' views are highly valued. Examples of how pupils' views have been considered can be seen in the recent improvements to the cookery room. This is focused on helping pupils work towards qualifications in the hospitality industry. An extensive range of visitors to the school enhance pupils' understanding of the diverse wider world. Pupils also told inspectors about how their recent visit to a university had inspired and motivated them to make ambitious plans for their futures.

School leaders, along with the advisory board, are highly effective. They share the same uncompromising commitment to enable pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes. Staff well-being is considered at all times, for example the school's well-being toolkit enhances teachers' development. Staff whole heartily endorse the exceptional quality of the training they receive. The proprietor and board have developed meticulous systems to bring challenge and support to the school and to ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met. This ensures that the school's statutory duties are carried out fully, including compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	147600
DfE registration number	936/6035
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10307378
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	63
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Merrywood Education
Headteacher	Lucy Lee
Headteacher	Michelle Quayle (Executive Headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,006
Telephone number	0208 6481906
Website	www.merrywood.org.uk
Email address	admissions@merrywood.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 November 2021

Information about this school

- Merrywood House Independent Special School provides full-time education for pupils aged five to 16 years. Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority. All pupils have complex SEMH needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school opened in December 2019. The executive headteacher is the sole director of the proprietor body, Merrywood Education Ltd. There is an advisory board providing external challenge and support to the proprietor.
- The school operates from two sites. In addition to the school's registered address shown at the top of this report, the school operates from a second site approximately 10 miles away known as the 'Sandmartin Campus'. The address of the Sandmartin Campus is Sandmartin Way, Wallington SM6 7DF. The inspection took place across both the Tadworth and the Sandmartin Campus.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school received its first full standard inspection on 2 to 4 November 2021 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all relevant independent school standards were found to be met.
- In May 2023 an inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to consider the proprietor's request for a material change to the school's registration. This was the school's first inspection since these proposed changes.

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 judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, senior leaders, and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of the advisory board of the proprietorial body and other members.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading; mathematics; and human and social, which covers art, geography, and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also looked at curriculum plans and examples of pupils' work, and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during visits to classrooms, during breaktimes and as pupils moved around the school.

- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed on Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents. Inspectors also considered the views of staff during meetings with them and through the staff survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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