

Inspection of The Belsteads School

Back Lane, Little Waltham, Essex CM3 3PP

Inspection dates: 14–16 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Teachers plan interesting lessons but do not always plan work that is matched well to pupils' abilities and needs. Sometimes, pupils do not have the basic knowledge and skills they need to complete the tasks set. When this happens, pupils lose interest, give up too easily and sometimes disrupt the learning for others. A few pupils do not attend school as often as they should.

Pupils are confident that their school is a safe place to learn. They enjoy a range of activities, including local visits, horse riding, golf, outdoor learning, computing and cooking. Pupils feel that The Belsteads has made a positive difference to their lives. One said that the community is 'like a family'.

New pupils are supported to settle in quickly. Most pupils get on well together. Staff manage behaviour safely in lessons. Adults take care to give appropriate 'time out' for pupils to calm down when they are frustrated. Bullying is rare, and leaders deal with any issues well. Pupils value the strong working relationships they develop with staff during their time in school. Older pupils get the help they need to make choices about their next steps in education, employment and/or training when they leave.

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

Leaders enrolled a significant number of pupils last year in a short space of time. They did not manage this growth well enough. Until recently, resources and staffing have been overstretched. There have been improvements in some areas of the school's work to remove the inadequacies identified in the last standard inspection. However, the quality of the education available to pupils is underdeveloped. Some of the independent school standards remain unmet.

Revised curriculum plans in most subject areas are at an early stage of implementation. New curriculum leaders have not yet set out how they intend to build on pupils' previous learning to deepen understanding over time. Many of the changes, including the way staff check on pupils' knowledge and skills, have only recently been introduced.

In mathematics and English, staff do not routinely check what pupils know and can do to plan the next steps in learning. Pupils do not always understand the instructions given to complete tasks, so they lose interest. At times, support staff allow pupils to give up too easily and are too quick to write answers for them.

Reading is a high priority. Pupils are encouraged to read every day. Teaching assistants provide useful support, but the reading programme does not build well enough on pupils' starting points. Staff do not always plan effectively to help pupils to catch up on gaps in learning quickly.

The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme encourages pupils to consider important issues such as tolerance, respect and the rule of law.

The programme is supported by a series of themed assemblies and community visits. Pupils are usually tolerant of each other, but their understanding of different cultures and the wider world is limited.

A few pupils struggle to control their behaviour outside lessons. While most pupils improve their behaviour and attendance over time, incidents of persistent absence and temporary exclusion are too high. Leaders work closely with families and the local authority. This work, alongside changes to the school's rewards and sanctions system, is helping individual pupils to attend school more regularly and to improve their behaviour.

A new headteacher joined in September 2019. She has gained the confidence of staff, parents, carers and pupils quickly. Other new staff have also been appointed. The headteacher has an accurate understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do better. New classrooms are bright and pleasant spaces to learn. Pupils have access to some therapeutic learning on site and more is planned.

The proprietor and relatively new governing body do not hold school leaders to account effectively. A new chair of governors has recently been identified. A governance improvement and training plan is in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and school staff work effectively together to keep pupils safe. All the required checks are made when new staff are recruited. Staff are appropriately trained to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They know the procedures to follow if they need to raise a concern. Regular meetings, including reports to governors, ensure that safeguarding remains a high priority. Child protection records are clear and suitably maintained. Leaders have good working relationships with external agencies, including the local authority, social services and the police. A site manager has been appointed to ensure that the required health and safety standards continue to be met as the school develops.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum is not planned systematically to help pupils build on their prior knowledge in a logical order. Staff do not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do when planning lessons. Planning is not routinely adapted to meet the complex needs of individual pupils. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the training and skills they need to implement the intended curriculum successfully.
- Leaders do not analyse behaviour and attendance information well enough to identify the detail in patterns and underlying triggers. The proprietor and

governors should ensure that information is evaluated thoroughly, to inform ongoing improvement strategies, so that incidents of persistent absence and temporary exclusion reduce quickly.

- Pupils have limited understanding of life beyond school and their own social circle. Leaders should ensure that the revised PSHE programme is implemented as planned so that pupils gain a broad understanding of different cultures and the wider world.
- The proprietor and governors are not rigorous in holding school leaders to account for the school's performance. The proprietor should ensure that the intended new governance arrangements are put in place quickly and effectively. This is so that they can check that all the independent school standards are met consistently as the school develops and that improvement planning is working.

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

School details

Unique reference number	144378
DfE registration number	881/6067
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10125229
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Peter Adams
Chair	Peter Adams
Headteacher	Anna Mears
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,376
Telephone number	07917 402000
Website	www.thebelsteadsschool.com
Email address	littlebelsteads@yahoo.com
Date of previous inspection	13–15 March 2018

Information about this school

- The school opened in April 2017, offering provision for pupils with severe or moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and the associated challenging behaviour.
- Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their education prior to joining the school.
- A new headteacher took up her post September 2019. This is the third headteacher since the school opened. The headteacher reports to the proprietor and board of governors. The board was established in January 2019.
- The school provides education for up to 18 pupils aged 10 to 16 years.
- Admission to the school is through local authority referrals. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- At its first inspection in March 2018, the school was judged to be inadequate. The proprietor did not ensure that all the independent school standards were met.
- Following the inspection, the school was issued with a notice to improve by the Department for Education. The school's action plan was evaluated by Ofsted on 30 May 2018 and judged to be unacceptable.
- A progress monitoring inspection in September 2018, conducted without notice, judged that the school met all previously unmet standards.
- 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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We held meetings with the proprietor, governors, the headteacher, her deputy, curriculum leaders and other school staff, including the site manager. We also spoke on the telephone with the local authority and some parents.
- We visited lessons with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. We looked closely at the quality of education in English, mathematics, PSHE and computing. We checked learning schemes and books, met with teachers and support staff and spoke with pupils about their work.
- We looked at safeguarding and child protection documents, including the single central record. We reviewed the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of governor meetings of the trustees and the sub-committee,

records of behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.

- We took account of two free-text responses from parents and two responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire. We also looked at four responses to the questionnaire for school staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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