Inspection of Holme Court School

Cherry Hinton Hall, Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 8DW

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This school is a place of healing for the many pupils who join the school after challenging experiences in education. All pupils have dyslexia, and many have other special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many pupils told us that at this school they are valued for who they are and they, 'don't feel the odd one out anymore.' Pupils learn about themselves and use this self-awareness to overcome whatever challenges they face in learning. They approach learning confidently and with determined focus. They take pride in their many impressive achievements and take positive next steps in education or training.

Pupils are sensitive to their own emotional needs and are considerate of others. They develop strong relationships with staff and pupils. They thrive within the ethos of the school, summarised by one pupil as, 'friendship is magic.' In lessons and during social times, pupils enjoy their time together and bring the best out of each other.

Pupils are safe, emotionally and physically. They care for each other and say that bullying does not happen at the school. When friends fall out, pupils are well equipped to resolve issues. If they cannot, they know that any adult at school would willingly and capably help them.

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

Leaders have designed an impressive curriculum for reading and spelling. They precisely identify the needs of pupils and use this information to order an appropriate series of activities for each pupil. Leaders also ensure that pupils read texts that are matched to pupils' abilities exactly. Staff use impressive, evidence-based strategies that enable pupils to read well and enjoy reading. Leaders' refined assessment procedures ensure that staff check pupils' progress effectively and alter activities when necessary.

Many of the strengths in the provision for reading are evident in other areas of the curriculum. However, in some subjects, leaders have not clarified the knowledge pupils must know and the order in which some of the knowledge should be learned. In these subjects, pupils forget some of what has been taught.

Pupils join the school at different ages and times of the year. Nonetheless, pupils quickly learn leaders' high expectations of behaviour. Lessons are calm and free from disruption. Staff understand the needs of pupils with social, emotional and mental health challenges. They know the signs of when pupils' emotions become overwhelming, and they provide effective coaching and support.

Staff teach pupils about the many different lifestyles and beliefs found in society. They have thoughtful discussions about different types of relationships, contemporary issues and the wider world. Pupils learn to value people's differences.

They willingly take responsibility for themselves and others. They learn the importance of democratic values and take part in elections for school officers.

Staff prepare pupils well for adult life and for their next steps in education, employment or training. Pupils have regular time to investigate career options and they receive effective guidance.

Leaders have managed the school well through challenging times due to the pandemic and staff turbulence. Leaders have also increased the number of pupils on roll. Parents, pupils and staff are very confident in leaders' abilities to provide the high-quality provision pupils need. Staff are well supported by leaders with the training they need to teach pupils with SEND and, in particular, dyslexia. Staff appreciate leaders' work to ensure manageable workloads.

Many parents described for inspectors the positive transformation their children went through since joining the school. They appreciate how the school has helped pupils to learn effectively and feel good about themselves. However, some parents are concerned about leaders' communication with parents. Some would like more information about what pupils are studying at school beyond the development of reading and writing. Although leaders provide the required information on their website, they are currently updating the website to inform parents better.

The proprietor has effective systems in place to know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. She provides challenge for leaders and holds them to account for the quality of the school's provision. The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to be alert and deal with safeguarding concerns effectively. They know their pupils very well and act swiftly and appropriately when concerns arise. Pupils are confident that they can talk with staff when worried about school or issues at home. Leaders work well with external agencies and make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Staff make sure that pupils learn how to stay safe at school, home and online.

Leaders ensure that background checks are carried out to determine the suitability of adults working at the school.

The proprietor and local authority representatives scrutinise leaders' safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that they are carried out effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some areas of the curriculum, leaders have not made clear enough and ordered what pupils must learn. These areas are not taught as well as others, and pupils do not always learn what they need. Leaders must clarify and sequence exactly what pupils need to know and understand across all areas of the curriculum.
- Parents have commented that communication between the school and home needs to be better. Leaders must complete the work on the school's website and ensure that parents have the information they need to understand the provision at school, including the whole school curriculum.

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	108886
DfE registration number	873/6051
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10230300
Type of school	Other Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Harriet Sturdy
Headteacher	Anita Laws
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,536 for key stage 2 through Year 8 £18,408 for Year 9 to Year 11
Telephone number	01223 778030
Website	www.holmecourt.com
Email address	admin@holmecourt.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–23 November 2017

Information about this school

- The school has increased in size from 32 to 51 pupils since the previous inspection in 2020. It is registered to admit 55 pupils.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in November 2017. Since then, the school also had additional inspections in November 2018 and February 2020.
- The school uses no 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.

- 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.
- Inspectors held discussions with the proprietor, the headteacher, members of the senior team, subject leaders, teachers, members of support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in art, mathematics, reading and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders, teachers and pupils about some other subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the safeguarding policy and safeguarding records, including the record of background checks of adults at the school. Inspectors spoke with the proprietor, leaders, staff and pupils about safeguarding issues and practices. Inspectors also considered the school site and observed the procedures in place when pupils use the public park next to the school.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tessa Holledge	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022