

# Inspection of The Serendipity School

399 Hinkler Road, Thornhill, Southampton, Hampshire SO19 6DS

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Inspection dates: 4 to 6 June 2024

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Outstanding**

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The quality of education

**Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Parents and carers cite the transformative experience this school has had on their children, one referring to The Serendipity School as having gone 'above and beyond for me and my child' and another calling it: 'our light at the end of a very dark tunnel.' As a result of the expert care and support pupils receive, they feel increasingly engaged in school and hopeful about their futures. This is especially important as, for many pupils, their prior experiences in school and education have not always been as positive.

Pupils are known exceptionally well by staff, who are expert in adapting their approaches to meet the needs of the pupils in their care. For example, by knowing the signs that mean they might be struggling, pupils are supported not just in the moment but also longer term in being able to identify and pre-empt these elements themselves. This personalised and adapted support develops their self-esteem, confidence and personal and social skills. Opportunities for 'gem time' and 'talk about' sessions are used expertly to develop pupils' increasing awareness of their impact on others, supporting their resilience and mental health. Over time, these support pupils in knowing how to regulate their own behaviour. As a result, relationships across the school are highly positive.

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

There are high aspirations for what pupils can achieve in this school, and these are shared by everyone. The school has a thoughtful and ambitious curriculum, which supports all pupils to do well. The knowledge and skills that pupils need to develop have been carefully sequenced across subjects so that pupils are able to apply this growing understanding in their work. An increasing focus on pupils attaining qualifications that support their futures continues to reap rewards. This means that pupils feel increasingly positive about what is possible for them. The school works well with local colleges to further supplement the range of opportunities on offer to support pupils' development.

In lessons, staff are adept at knowing how to present information in a way that engages pupils and supports their learning. Due to the nature of the provision, many pupils arrive at this school with significant learning gaps. Staff are expert at being able to identify what pupils know so that pupils can make effective progress from these differing starting points.

Reading is made a high priority in the school as leaders understand the power this has to unlock educational opportunity. Daily opportunities to 'Drop Everything and Read' mean that pupils read or hear stories that engage them. Staff share the books they are reading and enjoy in order to motivate pupils to read further themselves. The local library makes regular deliveries to engage pupils in reading. For example, one pupil expressed their determination to read the next book in the series of texts that had gripped them. For those that join the school struggling to read well, a

phonics programme is well implemented to support pupils in being able to develop their confidence and fluency.

The additional needs of the pupils in this setting mean that they sometimes struggle to regulate their own behaviour. Many have come from mainstream settings with a perceived sense of education already having failed them. At Serendipity, pupils' needs are swiftly identified and staff are trained to a high level to support them. Most importantly, there is continual reflection and updating of this picture for each pupil, so that any adaptations and adjustments to their provision can be made. This is one of the reasons pupils do so well.

Behaviour around the site is mostly calm and settled. Pupils want to engage in learning, and staff support them well to achieve and sustain this aim. There is a well understood set of rules, many of which the pupils have been involved in drawing up, to support the whole learning community. This includes family-style dining in 'the hub', where staff and pupils come together each day and work to the rules they collaboratively designed.

A rewards system further supports pupils in making the right choices. 'STAR points' are awarded for ongoing effort and conduct, and these build towards smaller weekly rewards, which are personalised to the pupils they are motivated to attain. Over longer periods larger rewards are earned, which involve opportunities such as trips out to museums, further ensuring the wider cultural development of pupils. On occasion when behaviour becomes heightened, staff are adept in supporting pupils to re-regulate. These consistent practices support the routines for pupils and, over time, build their confidence and independence in being able to apply these principles for themselves.

Lessons in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) are carefully considered to support pupils in developing an increasing awareness of themselves, their choices and their impact on others. Wider opportunities for pupil development are woven through the offer for pupils. Recent examples include visiting local street art installations to support pupils in designing their own, and trips to the beach and the local community centre. Pupils are supported well to think about careers, benefitting from one-to-one careers interviews, as well as personalised work experience opportunities to help them in deciding on their next steps.

One of the most significant strengths of the school is how well known the pupils are individually. All staff have a consistently strong, shared understanding of the individual needs of each pupil, regularly updated through daily briefings, which ensures that adults are adept at knowing how to support pupils to do their best. This leads to personalised and bespoke support, both in lessons and in their social interactions. As a result, pupils' needs are often anticipated, and staff are highly skilled in being able to read when things might need early intervention.

None of this happens by accident and this sense of deliberateness characterises the work of leaders. They have established highly effective systems to ensure that this level of expert knowledge is consistent across staff and evaluated regularly. The

proprietor and the members of the proprietor body have strong knowledge of the independent school standards and ensure they are met consistently over time.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131556
<b>DfE registration number</b>	852/6009
<b>Local authority</b>	Southampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	10322065
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent Special School
<b>School category</b>	Independent Special School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	23
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Serendipity Centre Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Sean Maguinness
<b>Headteacher</b>	Philippa Smith
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£75,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	02380 422255
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.serendipity-education.com">www.serendipity-education.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@serendipity-education.com">info@serendipity-education.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 to 15 July 2021

## Information about this school

- The Serendipity School is an independent special school which caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils on roll have an education, health and care plan.
- The school currently uses five alternative providers, of which three are registered and two unregistered provisions.
- The school is registered at the address 399 Hinkler Road, Thornhill, Southampton SO19 6DS
- The previous full standard inspection took place on 13 to 15 July 2021. This was followed by a material change inspection in December 2022 to increase the number of pupils on roll from 19 to 25.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils on roll of primary school age and none on roll in the 16 to 19 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.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The inspection team held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the chair of proprietor body.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspection team also visited a range of other lessons and looked at work from other subject areas.
- 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.
- The inspection team took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and external reports on the school.

They also considered evidence of how the proprietor body ensures that the independent school standards are met consistently.

- The team spoke with pupils about their experience of the school. They took account of parent and carer and staff views through conversations and responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Marian Feeley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mary Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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