

Inspection of Clay Hill School

Clay Hill, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7DE

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 June 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from attending Clay Hill School. They flourish because they feel safe and well cared for. They appreciate how adults support them to learn at a pace that suits them. This helps pupils gain confidence and engage in learning in a way that they have struggled to do in the past. Some parents describe how this has transformed their child's life after long periods of time away from education.

Adults understand pupils' learning, social and emotional needs very well. Leaders are highly ambitious for what pupils can achieve academically, as well as personally. The school's work is planned carefully, taking all of these needs and ambitions into account. Great use is made of the school and local environments to stimulate pupils and engage them in learning. As a result, pupils participate fully in their education and are prepared well for the future.

Clay Hill is a happy place to be. Pupils and adults interact respectfully, showing genuine care for each other. Classrooms are calm and purposeful, with pupils sensitive to each other's needs. At breaktimes, warm relationships are evident. Instances of bullying are rare. They are handled sensitively, minimising the chance of a recurrence.

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

All pupils at Clay Hill School have special educational needs linked to a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Leaders are clear that this does not prevent pupils from achieving strong academic outcomes. They have reviewed and developed the curriculum to ensure that it supports pupils in working towards this aim. As a result, pupils learn an appropriately broad range of subjects throughout their time at the school. Adults teach carefully sequenced learning skilfully. This enables pupils to achieve increasing numbers of good-quality qualifications by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 11.

Leaders place suitable emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills. Staff use phonics techniques well to help pupils in the earlier stages of reading to become more fluent. Leaders have raised the profile of reading in the school, encouraging pupils to read for pleasure more frequently. Leaders have identified the need to develop some pupils' fluency and comprehension further. Their actions to address this priority were introduced very recently and so the impact is currently difficult to see.

A small number of pupils have slightly different needs to most pupils at Clay Hill. Leaders have recently reinstated the school's second site at Home Farm, intending to provide an adapted curriculum and approach that better suits the needs of these pupils. Their plans are well considered but are yet to be fully implemented. As such, the curriculum at Home Farm is currently less well developed and effective than on

the main school site. Initial signs are that provision at Home Farm is already impacting positively on the attendance and behaviour of some pupils. Many pupils join the school having had a negative experience of education in the past. Often, they have been absent from school for long periods of time before joining Clay Hill. Most pupils currently attend well. Where this is not the case, leaders work sensitively with pupils and families to identify and break down the barriers that prevent pupils from coming to school. This leads to improvements in pupils' attendance.

Personal development is at the heart of the school's work. Education and therapy staff work seamlessly together to incorporate personal development into pupils' taught curriculum and daily experiences in school. Opportunities to participate in trips and visits that enhance this aspect of the school's work have been impeded during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Personal, social and health education teaching meets the requirements of the independent school standards and statutory requirements for relationships and sex education. Pupils experience meaningful opportunities to learn about different cultures, faiths and relationships. Careers information, advice and guidance supports pupils well in moving on to meaningful post-16 learning opportunities within and beyond the Priory Group of schools.

Leadership arrangements have changed notably since the last inspection, with most leaders new in their posts. Some leaders took up their post the day before the inspection started. Leaders have a clear and shared sense of direction about the school's work and aspirations for pupils. Currently, it is too soon to see the impact of some leaders' work.

The proprietor body provides appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. It ensures that the independent school standards are met consistently and that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Local governance arrangements help to keep the proprietor body informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses. This also enables the headteacher and other leaders to be challenged and supported suitably about the impact of their work. Staff are highly positive about how leaders empower them, while being mindful of their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. Their vigilant care of pupils is highly evident in their daily work. Their actions to promptly identify and act on any potential concerns contribute to a strong safeguarding culture in the school.

Leaders promote safeguarding through all aspects of their work. Supported by the proprietor body, they ensure that relevant policies are fit for purpose and enacted consistently. Leaders carry out their safeguarding work dutifully and diligently. They

ensure that all safeguarding matters are pursued rigorously, involving experts from beyond the school where necessary. This work helps to keep pupils safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum for pupils at the newly reopened Home Farm site is less well developed than for pupils attending the main site. Consequently, pupils at Home Farm do not learn as well as those based at Clay Hill. Leaders should ensure that their coherent plans for the Home Farm curriculum are implemented fully, so that all pupils are prepared equally well for their future lives.
- Leaders have recently adapted the curriculum to help further develop pupils' comprehension and love of reading. While pupils can read accurately, they do not always do so fluently and with understanding. Leaders should ensure that pupils gain sufficient fluency and comprehension skills to access the wider curriculum efficiently.
- Many leaders are new in their roles. As such, it is too soon to see the impact of their work. Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that ongoing support, training and challenge enables all leaders to have a measurable impact on improving their area of responsibility.

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	140046
DfE registration number	850/6090
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10193118
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory Education and Children's Services
Chair	Chris Strong
Headteacher	Giovanna Marabese
Annual fees (day pupils)	£80,079
Telephone number	02380 283 633
Website	https://www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/find-a-location/clay-hill-school-hampshire/
Email address	clayhillschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 November 2017

Information about this school

- Clay Hill School is an independent special school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and other associated complex needs. It is registered to admit pupils aged five to 19 years. Currently, pupils are in Years 2 to 11. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates from two sites. Most pupils are based at the Clay Hill site, SO43 7DE, in a listed building within a rural setting in the New Forest. A small number of pupils attend the Home Farm site, which is situated a short distance away at SO40 2RP. This site has only been in use since January 2021 and incorporates purpose-built accommodation and some outside space. The Home Farm site was previously registered as a separate school, merging with Clay Hill in 2018.
- Clay Hill is owned and operated by Priory Education and Children's Services, which is part of the Priory Group. Another school within the group is situated adjacent to Clay Hill on the same site. A small number of Clay Hill's pupils live in children's homes run by the Priory Group.
- When the school was last inspected in 2017, it was also responsible for the education of pupils at a nearby 16-bed child and adolescent mental health services unit within the Priory Group. This facility is now registered separately as a school.
- Leadership arrangements at Clay Hill have changed since the last inspection. The headteacher joined the school in April 2020 and was made substantive in her post in April 2021. Many other staff and leaders have taken up their posts within the last 18 months, some very recently.
- The school does not use any 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 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned. This was in response to a

historic complaint received about the school since the last inspection. The complaint itself was not investigated as part of the inspection.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, art and history. This involved meeting with leaders of those subjects, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to pupils and staff about learning in these subjects.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders to discuss a range of relevant issues. They spoke to pupils and adults informally moving round the school and at breaktime. They took account of 11 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and two emails received from parents. Inspectors also considered survey responses from 34 members of staff and nine pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed recruitment and vetting checks on adults working in the school and looked at the single central register of these checks. They scrutinised safeguarding arrangements, including relevant policies and how these translate into practice.
- The lead inspector toured both sites and considered other evidence of the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Metcalf

Ofsted Inspector

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