

# Serenity School Maidstone

**Address:** Springfield House, Sandling Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 2LP

**Unique reference number (URN):** 149907

## Inspection report: 3 February 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ● ●
Expected standard	● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

### ✔ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

#### **How we evaluate safeguarding**

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

## Strong standard ●

### Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders' work to promote high attendance has had a positive impact. Attendance is high compared with other special schools, and persistent absence is reducing. Leaders monitor patterns closely and take appropriate action when attendance for individuals or groups falls. This is securing effective improvement over time. School systems are highly inclusive, welcoming and supportive for pupils, parents and carers to understand the value of high attendance. This helps families to feel valued and supported.

Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and nurturing, which contributes to pupils' sense of security and belonging. Behaviour is calm, positive and respectful. Leaders have established clear routines to create a positive environment. Staff apply behaviour policies consistently and understand how to adapt approaches for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Highly individualised approaches help pupils to settle, including pupils who have struggled to attend school elsewhere. Pupils show positive attitudes to activities, often with the valuable encouragement of caring staff. Staff know pupils well and provide effective support to help them regulate their emotions. Leaders do not tolerate bullying or discriminatory behaviour. If concerns arise, staff deal with them quickly, consistently and appropriately. Pupils are safe and well cared for.

### Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders demonstrate a determined commitment to inclusion. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and education, health and care plans. The school identifies pupils' individual needs with accuracy and urgency, ensuring that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those known or previously known to children's social care, receive precise support. This sharp understanding enables leaders to put the right support in place quickly.

Leaders remove barriers to learning and wellbeing through strategic, well-judged adaptations. Their inclusive practice is embedded and consistently evident across the school. Pupils benefit from reasonable adjustments that enable them to participate fully and make strong progress from their starting points. Leaders monitor pupils' progress with rigour. They evaluate the impact of interventions systematically and refine provision when strategies do not secure the intended outcomes. This ensures that support remains purposeful, targeted and effective.

The school gives teachers and support staff, known as 'Progress Partners', high-quality training on the approaches used to support pupils, which strengthens their expertise in assessing, planning, delivering and reviewing support. Leaders work proactively with families, external professionals and specialist agencies to shape provision and raise aspirations for vulnerable pupils.

Leaders use pupil premium funding strategically and with clear intent. They evaluate its impact closely, ensuring that funded actions lead to measurable improvements in pupils' progress.

The school's curriculum and personal development approach is highly inclusive, aspirational and character building. Pupils develop excellent life skills when cooking in the kitchen or working with money on enterprise projects, preparing them well for the world of employment. The 'nurture curriculum' provides a broad and appropriate programme that supports pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Pupils learn to reflect on their beliefs and experiences and to respect the values of others. Staff help pupils understand right and wrong and encourage them to think carefully about ethical issues through structured discussion and visual communication. Pupils develop social skills through cooperative tasks, conflict resolution strategies and participation in wider community experiences. These promote important British values such as tolerance, respect and democracy. Pupils also learn about cultural diversity and heritage and engage in creative and artistic opportunities that broaden their understanding of the world.

The personal development programme is well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit fully by removing barriers and adapting activities so that all pupils can participate. Relationships, sex and health education is appropriate and delivered sensitively. Pupils learn about risks and how to keep themselves safe.

Pupils learn resilience, independence and responsibility through routines, target setting and enrichment rewards. Leaders provide a suitable range of wider experiences that help pupils develop their talents and interests, including sporting opportunities with other schools. Pupils are proud to represent their school in competitions including boccia and football for boys and girls.

Leaders track the personal development programme carefully and adapt it to reflect pupils' needs and the school's context. Staff help pupils understand how to maintain physical and mental health through structured teaching, visual supports and regulation strategies. Pastoral support is strong. Staff know pupils well and provide consistent, nurturing guidance that helps pupils feel safe and supported.

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## **Expected standard** ●

### **Achievement**

### **Expected standard** ●

Pupils typically achieve well and make effective progress from their starting points. Success for many pupils involves personal development achievement as part of the nurture curriculum. The school can demonstrate some impressive progress and attainment across this route. Pupils acquire life skills, develop confidence and blossom with increasing independence. Older pupils learn to produce high-quality writing. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the school ensures success aligned to targets in pupils' education, health and care plans. Disadvantaged pupils progress well through the curriculum across the key stages. The school's highly inclusive ethos and practice helps pupils to prosper academically, socially and emotionally as they overcome challenges. Some have missed school for extended periods of time before joining here. The school helps pupils to feel a real sense of belonging.

Leaders show high ambition for pupils to achieve well academically. Currently, no pupils access the school's 'formal route' to achieve formal qualifications. However, the school ensures that most pupils achieve well using sensible target setting and in-school tracking. However, some inconsistencies in phonics teaching prevent pupils from achieving highly with their reading development. Teaching is not always highly effective across all classes, and this inconsistency means that some pupils may not learn as well as they could.

## **Curriculum and teaching**

**Expected standard** 

Leaders generally understand the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They identify where practice is less effective and take reasonable steps to bring about improvement. Leaders construct and adapt an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum across several pathways that aim to give pupils the skills they need for their next steps. This ambition is evident across the three pathways, although most pupils follow the nurture route and no pupils currently access the formal pathway.

Leaders ensure that teachers develop the subject knowledge needed to implement the curriculum. Training supports staff to deliver planned content with increasing confidence. The curriculum is designed and sequenced appropriately across subjects and phases so that pupils can build knowledge over time. Leaders and staff know pupils' needs well. They adapt teaching appropriately for disadvantaged pupils so that pupils can access the curriculum and make steady progress.

Primary-age and older pupils receive teaching designed to help them to learn essential knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Approaches such as 'Word of the Week' extend pupils' spoken and written vocabulary, while visual supports help pupils to understand routines and expectations. However, the school's approach to teaching phonics is not as precise as it could be. This prevents some pupils from developing their reading skills as well as they could.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Expected standard** 

Leaders and proprietors demonstrate high ambition for pupils. They are dedicated, caring and aspirational for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to truly shine. They understand many of the school's strengths and have identified priorities for improvement.

Leaders and proprietors meet statutory duties, including the independent school standards, with appropriate diligence. They take decisions that are in pupils' best interests, helping those who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or are known to social care to flourish with effective support. Safeguarding is prioritised, and the premises are safe, well maintained and compliant with equality requirements.

The proprietor body provides support and challenge to drive school improvement and maintain standards. Leaders' actions to manage staff workload and wellbeing are increasingly effective, and staff morale is positive. Staff feel well supported by their compassionate and inclusive leaders.

Leaders have begun to strengthen professional development. Staff, including early career teachers and trainees, access training that reflects leaders' priorities. However, this programme is not yet fully coherent or consistently evidence informed. There is work to do to ensure that teaching is consistently high quality across every class, particularly to strengthen the teaching of phonics and reading.

Parents and carers speak highly of the welcoming and supportive ethos of the school. They are keen to celebrate the positive impact of the headteacher to ensure that their children are happy, safe and thriving in this deeply caring environment.

## **What it's like to be a pupil at this school**

The school is an inclusive, caring and happy community where pupils feel safe, valued and proud to belong. From the moment they enter the building, pupils are welcomed into an environment that celebrates who they are and seeks the best in them. They greet visitors with a smile and enjoy explaining their interests and sharing their talents. They participate fully in day-to-day school life, forming positive relationships with staff and peers that are built on trust, respect and kindness. Pupils benefit from a rich range of wider experiences that extend learning beyond the academic, including visits and charitable work to contribute to the community. These opportunities broaden pupils' horizons and strengthen their sense of identity.

Pupils achieve well across the different learning pathways offered by the school. Classrooms are calm, purposeful and joyful places where teachers know pupils deeply and adapt teaching so that everyone can access the curriculum. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and education, health and care plans. Pupils make effective progress from their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils known to children's social care and those who face additional barriers such as trauma or school avoidance. Staff work with determination to remove obstacles to learning and wellbeing, ensuring pupils are well prepared for their next steps. Through the curriculum and wider opportunities, pupils develop their understanding of life in modern Britain and how to thrive with safety and happiness.

Pupils flourish because the school promotes positive behaviour, emotional safety and personal development very well. Behaviour is calm and respectful, and pupils show genuine care for staff and one another. They feel safe and know that adults respond quickly and effectively to any concerns, including bullying. Attendance is high, demonstrating pupils' enjoyment of school and families' confidence in the provision.

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## **Next steps**

- Leaders should ensure that the teaching of phonics and reading is consistently effective to help pupils to develop reading skills successfully.

- Leaders should ensure that teaching is consistently effective across all classes to help all pupils to achieve well across the curriculum.
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## About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

The inspectors met with the headteacher, school leaders and staff, the chief executive officer, the chair of the proprietor body and other members of the central team. The lead inspector reviewed documents provided by the school and those available on the school's website. He toured the school's premises and checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

Serenity School Maidstone can cater for up to 150 pupils between the ages of 5 and 18. All pupils have an EHC plan, with places funded by a local authority. The school specialises in providing education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most have a primary diagnosis of autism. Many pupils also have learning disabilities and associated communication difficulties. There are currently 83 pupils on roll.

The school does not currently use alternative provision.

The current headteacher recently took post in January 2026.

The school was registered on 15 October 2024. This was the first standard inspection of the school.

The name of the proprietor body is Serenity School Maidstone Ltd. The chief executive officer is Mr Gareth McCullough and the chair of the proprietary board is Ebere Emezie.

The fees currently charged are £41,000 to £76,000 per year.

The email address of the school is [maidstoneoffice@serenityschool.org.uk](mailto:maidstoneoffice@serenityschool.org.uk)

Headteacher: Hayley King

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## Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

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**1. Quality of education provided**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**6. Provision of information**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**7. Manner in which complaints are handled**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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**8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

Standards met

All standards have been met.

**Lead inspector:**

Scott Reece, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**

Tom Neave, Ofsted Inspector

Ed Mather, His Majesty's Inspector

## Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 3 February 2026

**Total pupils**

**83**

**School capacity**

**150**

**Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan**

**83**

**Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

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### Our grades explained

**Exceptional** ●

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

**Strong standard** ●

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

### **Expected standard** ●

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

### **Needs attention** ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

### **Urgent improvement** ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

### **Insufficient evidence**

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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