

Inspection of Serenity School

Rowan's Hill, Coulsdon Lane, Chipstead CR5 3QG

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to Serenity School. They described their experiences very positively, saying that they are happy and feel safe. Pupils get on well with each other and any bullying is tackled quickly. One pupil told the lead inspector how lucky pupils feel to attend this school. A parent, reflecting on her daughter's experience, said, 'It is the best school she has attended in her whole life.'

Staff have high expectations of pupils' attendance, behaviour and learning. They work hard to develop pupils' self-esteem, confidence and independence. When pupils first arrive, staff find out as much as possible about them. Staff use this information to create a highly bespoke curriculum. As a result, pupils make excellent progress academically, socially and emotionally, and are prepared well for the future.

Pupils benefit from well-embedded routines that help to keep things calm and predictable. Staff have an infectious positivity. They greet pupils each morning, making sure that pupils get off to a good start for the day. The daily mile not only provides an opportunity for exercise, but it also gives pupils much-needed time to talk to staff and peers, and to develop social and communication skills.

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

Pupils thrive here in so many different ways. Often, their previous experiences of school have been negative. Leaders know that time is precious. They have unrelenting aspirations for every pupil. The curriculum is highly personalised to suit pupils' individual and wide-ranging needs. This not only means ensuring that pupils achieve academically, albeit very important, but it also means ensuring that they make progress socially and emotionally. Staff support pupils to understand their emotions and communicate their feelings. Importantly, pupils are supported to become well-rounded citizens that are ready to take their place in the world.

Staff use the wide range of information they gather about pupils to make important decisions about which pathway will be most appropriate. Informal, semi-formal and formal pathways make sure that pupils get the specific help they need. For some pupils following the informal pathway, also known as nurture, staff focus on pupils' sensory and communication needs while developing their independence. Pupils' individual communication systems give pupils the tools to make choices, express how they are feeling and communicate their needs. A range of visual resources and techniques support pupils to make sense of what is going on around them.

The different pathways ensure that pupils access a broad curriculum. Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are prioritised, but so too are their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils following the semi-formal and formal pathways study different subjects such as mathematics, English, science, food technology, physical education and computing.

In lessons, teachers and teaching assistants, known as progress partners, work well together to support pupils. They make learning interesting and provide plenty of opportunities for pupil discussion. This helps to bring together pupils' ideas about what they are learning. Staff ask helpful questions that encourage pupils to think. Pupils hone their reading, writing and mathematical skills in lessons. Staff regularly check how pupils are progressing towards their individual targets. These checks help staff to know whether the curriculum is making a difference. They also help them to provide extra help in literacy and numeracy, as well as speech and language, occupational and animal therapies. The therapy dog, Pablo, is another helpful support for pupils.

Pupils leave Serenity School with qualifications that help them to secure suitable education, training and employment. As part of pupils' educational programmes, some pupils attend college to study mechanics and construction. Opportunities are also provided for pupils to do work experience. Students in the sixth form, like the rest of the school, have a personalised curriculum which focuses on preparing them well for the future. They benefit from studying a range of different subjects, such as English, mathematics, sport, business studies, and health and social care.

Pupils' personal development is exceptional. The school's approach to personal, social, health and economic education has been well thought out. Pupils learn a plethora of important topics in their personal and social development lessons. Assemblies support their understanding of these topics. What pupils learn helps to prepare them for adulthood. For example, they learn how to travel independently, about healthy relationships and personal hygiene, and how to stay healthy, both mentally and physically. During the inspection, staff and pupils marked mental health week by wearing something green. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are carefully woven into the life of the school. Pupils receive tailored, one-to-one careers advice and guidance that helps them find out about future careers. One student in the sixth form told inspectors that he is planning to go to university. He talked positively about a recent visit to a university which inspired him.

Proprietors and directors of the school have high expectations. They have developed sophisticated systems that help them to monitor leaders' work. They challenge and support leaders in equal measure to ensure that the school's statutory duties are carried out fully. This includes compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders prioritise professional development and a suitable work-life balance for staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a safe environment for pupils. Crucially, they understand pupils' vulnerabilities. Recruitment processes are robust and ensure that all staff undergo the required checks. Safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable and are trained well to carry out their duties. Staff receive regular training so that they know what to do if they are worried about a pupil's safety or well-being. Simple, effective

processes are well understood and utilised by staff. These processes help safeguarding leaders to take the right actions to ensure that pupils are safe. Pupils say they have trusted adults they can talk to about any worries they have.

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	146660
DfE registration number	936/6058
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10267691
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Serenity School Coulsdon Ltd
Chair	Ebere Emezie
Headteacher	Charmaine Ayisi
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,000 to £59,000
Telephone number	020 4517 0920
Website	www.serenityschool.org.uk
Email address	office@serenityschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 May 2019

Information about this school

- Serenity School is an independent special day school. Since the last inspection, the school has relocated from Croydon to Coulsdon. The school's pupil numbers have increased, and the school is now co-educational. The school also has sixth-form provision.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for boys and girls aged from 11 to 19 years with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school provides for pupils with profound, multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.

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.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietorial body, who is also the chief operating officer, as well as the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, nurture, and personal and social development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held discussions with some pupils to gather their views about the school.
- Inspectors visited the sixth-form provision and held discussions about each of the students in the sixth form. The lead inspector also looked at a sample of students' work.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments received during the inspection. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors held meetings with safeguarding leaders, staff and pupils. They scrutinised the single central record and sampled safeguarding records.
- Inspectors also took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and records relating to governance.

Inspection team

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Chris Ellison

His Majesty's Inspector

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