

Inspection of Cornerstone School

Halt Robin Road, Belvedere, Kent DA17 6DW

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 June 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is Debbie Donnelly. This school is part of the Trinitas Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Simon Godden, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Canon David Herbert.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils settle well and learn how to be enthusiastic and successful learners at Cornerstone. For some, this contrasts with their earlier experiences of education. The staff's ability to uplift spirits contributes significantly to pupils' overall enjoyment of school. The secure attachments that exist help pupils to feel relaxed, positive and ready to learn.

All pupils at the school have autism. There is a culture of being positive about what this means for the pupils. Pupils demonstrate an exceptional sense of belonging and self-worth. They make an overwhelmingly positive contribution to their community. For example, litter picking in the local park and organising charity events.

Typically, the school is a calm place for pupils to learn. There are times when pupils need help to manage their emotions and behaviour. When this happens, staff know what to do. This is because there is a detailed understanding of each pupils' individual needs. Pupils understand what bullying is and that it is not tolerated.

Communication with parents and carers is excellent. For example, senior leaders are always at the school gates before and after school, so any concerns can be dealt with promptly. Parents really appreciate the empathetic approach taken by leaders. It has built high levels of trust between home and school.

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

Leaders have established a broad and robust curriculum. In most subjects, leaders have identified what they expect pupils to learn. This is logically sequenced so that pupils return to, practise and embed important ideas before moving on to more challenging concepts. For example, in geography, pupils learn about familiar aspects in the local area. They use this knowledge when learning about physical and human features of unfamiliar places.

Staff are well trained and supported to implement the planned curriculum. For example, subject meetings allow teachers to share best practice. Leaders check the impact of the curriculum. This enables them to further refine the professional development opportunities provided for staff. Teachers choose engaging activities that help to bring the curriculum to life. This helps pupils remember and apply what they have learned.

Some aspects of the curriculum are at an earlier stage of design and implementation. In these instances, some pupils do not develop as deep a body of knowledge and understanding over time. Leaders are aware of this and have appropriate plans in place to further improve these aspects of the curriculum.

The school promotes the love of reading from the start. Staff reignite pupils' enjoyment of books and motivation to read regularly. Parents comment how impressed they are at how much their child's reading has developed.

Pupils' wider development is promoted well. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is designed to ensure pupils learn about important issues, such as respect and diversity and what constitutes a safe and healthy relationship. Pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain is fostered in many ways. These include through the specially designed Healthy Minds curriculum, assemblies on tolerance, Pride Month celebrations, school council activities and special awareness days.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Where required, well-trained staff provide expert support, helping pupils to regulate their emotions with dignity. Pupils have exceptional attitudes towards their learning and work hard in lessons to reach the very high expectations the school sets for them. The use of therapy dogs to help pupils manage stress is one example of the school's innovative approach to pupils' mental health. Similarly, pupil mental health champions value the chance to be role models to others. Every victory is celebrated, no matter how small, such as being a good friend or staying in school for the day. Parents told inspectors, 'This means the world'.

Pupils are proud of their talents and unique qualities. The school's carefully designed enrichment programme helps pupils to develop their independence and prepare for adulthood. Pupils particularly enjoy camping, gardening club, food technology and boxing. Pupils are given various opportunities to access careers advice. However, the current careers programme requires further adaptation to more precisely suit pupils' needs. Leaders acknowledge this and have started work to create more practical careers opportunities.

Attendance remains a focus for both leaders and governors. Systems such as 'The headteacher's breakfast' offer a unique incentive that motivates attendance. Those who need to access a remote learning programme that covers the full curriculum.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have very high expectations for all. They have created an ambitious environment in which pupils are supported to learn well. Governors and trustees maintain effective oversight of the school. They have an accurate and precise understanding of the school's many strengths and have accurately identified the areas they wish to improve further. Staff speak positively about the work and support of the trust. Leaders are considerate of the workload and welfare of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subjects are at earlier stage of design and implementation. This means that, on occasion, pupils' knowledge and skills do not develop as deeply over time. The school should implement their plans to ensure the curriculum is tailored to meet the specific needs of the pupils.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148582
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10293317
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lynne Wainwright
Headteacher	Debbie Donnelly
Website	www.cornerstone.bexley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 June 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 19 years. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school caters for pupils with autism.
- The school opened as part of The Trinitas Academy Trust on 1 September 2021.
- There are currently no students on roll in the sixth form.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider of education.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal and members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector met with the CEO and the director of learning for The Trinitas Academy Trust. Discussions were also held with a group of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into English, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and geography. To do this, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teaching staff and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents and carers, pupils and staff. An inspector met with a group of parents.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Joanna Tarrant	Ofsted Inspector

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