

Inspection of The Belsteads School

Back Lane, Little Waltham, Near Chelmsford, Essex CM3 3PP

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 January 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The Belsteads School changes pupils' lives for the better. While their journey through school is not without the odd bump, the road ahead is much smoother. They typically join having developed negative views of education from the past. Many have not been to school for a long time. Pupils grow to see school as a place of happiness, kindness, and warmth. A place where they can be themselves and thrive.

Staff want the best for pupils. These high expectations, which pupils generally rise to meet, mean that pupils learn well. Equally, they are guided to develop their social and emotional skills effectively. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is positive. If a pupil becomes frustrated or downhearted, staff step in quickly to provide useful support. Elmo and Sid, the much-loved school dogs, are always on hand to provide comfort to pupils if they are upset.

Wider opportunities are plentiful. Whether sporting, gardening or craft-based, pupils take part in activities that interest them. These activities help them on their journey to aspirational careers or next steps in education. Teachers are meticulous in ensuring these opportunities are suited specifically to each individual pupil. Pupils benefit from the opportunities provided.

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

Pupils learn a broad and rich curriculum. Teachers help pupils to fill the gaps in their knowledge that have formed over time. This is due to pupils' disjointed educational experiences in the past. For example, pupils learn the important mathematical knowledge they need, laying solid foundations for future learning. They build upon this well as they move through the school. Pupils use this knowledge to attain formal qualifications. The school make wise use of the information set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to ensure pupils get the support they need.

Staff have strong subject knowledge. They explain new ideas and concepts clearly to pupils to help them understand. Pupils, for example, have a secure knowledge of geographical features such as volcanoes and the impact of flooding on humans. In the main, pupils attempt activities in lessons that help them learn what the teacher intends. At times, though, some work is too easy or too hard. This means some activities do not help pupils learn the important knowledge they need.

Pupils needing additional support with their reading receive effective support to help them catch up. Staff teach phonics well. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know, helping them to become fluent and confident readers. While this is the case, as pupils move through the school, at times they receive a disjointed experience in reading. Some do not always develop the knowledge they are capable of. This is because, there is not a clear and deliberate choice of texts they read. This means some pupils are asked to read texts that are too easy for them.

Pupils build highly positive relationships with staff, which result in them feeling safe and secure in school. Pupils are expertly supported to improve their behaviour. This is because of the high expectations staff have of pupils, along with the tailored therapeutic offer provided. Pupils' behaviour improves quickly when they join the school. While some pupils still struggle to manage their own behaviour, staff are adept at helping pupils through this.

Pupils benefit from the very well-considered personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. They are enabled to see themselves as individuals and celebrate the difference between themselves and others. They develop a secure understanding of different beliefs and faiths. The curriculum is complemented by visits to places of worship.

Pupils are exposed to wide ranging enrichment. This is often bespoke to individual pupils, giving them experiences that they may not ordinarily have, such as skiing or theatre and museum trips. The whole school tomato growing competition provides pupils with the opportunity to tend to their own crop. Similarly, they experience different foods at lunchtime, such as cuisine from different countries and cultures. Pupils benefit from visiting speakers greatly, who cover key aspects that affect the lives of pupils, such as gang life and knife crime.

Staff are valued by senior leaders and the proprietor. They receive regular and relevant training to help keep their practice sharp. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing regularly. Staff are overwhelmingly proud to work in school.

The school has well-established systems and procedures to make sure the site is safe for pupils and staff. Staff make regular and rigorous health and safety checks. The school identifies relevant risks that pupils and staff face, such as when travelling or using tools in the forest area. Sensible mitigations are in place to reduce these risks. The buildings and school grounds are kept well and safe. They provide pupils with a rich environment in which to thrive. Pupils delight in tending to the vegetable patch, seeing their produce on their dinner plates.

The proprietor and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school. Their well-established checks and support processes ensure the right balance of challenge and support to school leaders. This enables the school to continually meet all the independent school standards. The proprietor ensures that the school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- At times, teachers do not closely match activities to meet the specific needs of

pupils. This means that, on occasions, pupils do not always learn as well as they could, because their work is too easy or too hard. The school should make sure teachers adapt the curriculum consistently and effectively for pupils' varying levels of understanding and need.

- The reading curriculum is not sequenced well enough. This means that at times, some pupils can experience a disjointed approach to reading and not learn as well as they could. The school should ensure it sequences the reading curriculum precisely so that pupils make more rapid progress in their reading.

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	144378
DfE registration number	881/6067
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10342124
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	10 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Peter Adams
Headteacher	Erica Barnett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£68,506.50
Telephone number	01245 201652
Website	www.belsteads.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@belsteads.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2024

Information about this school

- The Belsteads School is an independent day school for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Most pupils also have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have an EHCP, and all pupils are funded by their local authority.
- The school received a material change inspection in May 2024 following a request to the department for education to increase the number of pupils they are registered to admit. The school is registered to admit 55 pupils.
- Since the last standard inspection in 2022, the school provides education for over twice as many pupils.
- The proprietor delegates some of its functions to a governing body.
- The school currently makes use of three unregistered alternative provisions.

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, PSHE and humanities. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and a range of staff. They met with the proprietor and members of the governing body. They also held telephone calls with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors toured the premises to review the suitability of school buildings. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- 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.

- The inspection team considered the views of parents through responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys, as well as interviews and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Nathan Lowe, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Liz Smith

His Majesty's Inspector

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