Inspection of Owlswick School

Newhaven Road, Kingston, Lewes BN7 3NF

Inspection dates:	3 to 5 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This school strives to give pupils a sense that they have a place in the world. For some pupils, this is truly transformative.

The school's welcoming environment and beautiful setting provide a positive space for pupils to re-engage in education. Relationships between pupils and staff are notably positive. In lessons, alongside the periodic use of well-judged humour, these relationships are mainly focused on learning. The school is ambitious for its pupils and pupils want to do well. At breaktimes, the atmosphere is more relaxed. Pupils and staff eat a freshly prepared hot meal together or play football outside. At all times, though, these relationships are characterised by mutual respect. Pupils are taught to listen, consider and accept others' viewpoints.

The school is usually calm. Pupils say that behaviour can sometimes be a bit 'up and down'. However, they trust staff to sort it out. They say they would always talk to staff about any concerns. Pupils are allowed the time and space to regulate their emotions and behaviour when they need to. The gently swinging hammock is a helpful and popular spot to relax. Learning outdoors and going elsewhere for physical education or other fieldwork activities add richness to pupils' experiences.

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

Stable governance and leadership support from Compass has served the school well through a challenging period. The clarity of vision and purpose from the proprietor sets a clear direction. Trustees, governors and operational leads combine strategic expertise and experience with a firm grasp of what is happening on the ground. They ensure that the school continues to meet the independent school standards. They know well the school's recent successes and the ongoing potential vulnerabilities in this small, complex setting. This is a school that learns lessons from what works and what does not and takes proactive steps to improve as a result.

The united staff team is pulling in the same direction. Staff are clear about what the school is trying to achieve. There is a shared focus on securing 'better futures' for pupils and giving them 'more choices' in life.

The school strikes a fine balance between its academic aspiration and providing the emotional and mental health support that pupils need. Both aspects are crucial to the school's success. There is clear academic ambition for pupils. Despite pupils' often complex social, emotional and mental health needs, the school is quick to identify and not limit their academic potential. At the same time, the 'parallel core curriculum' has equal status. This part of the curriculum focuses on pupils' emotional, personal and learning skills.

Therapeutic and mental health support is strong, personalised and holistic. This makes a real difference to pupils' capacity and readiness to learn. Pupils are helped to recognise, understand and start to manage their anxiety. The school's

expectations of pupils' behaviour are high but carefully managed. Pupils engage well in lessons most of the time. Some sustain concentrated focus and display excellent attitudes to learning. Most hardly miss any school. Teachers' trusting relationships with pupils mean they can challenge them in their learning. It also creates a positive climate for teaching sensitive areas, for example about sex and relationships. There is a recently strengthened programme for teaching pupils about areas such as diversity.

The school uses each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan effectively to put together a personalised programme. Parents and carers feed into this process, which includes regular reviews of each pupil's progress. The school's accessibility plan, compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, backs up the clear focus on making sure that the right pupils can access what the school has to offer.

Teachers are well supported by curriculum leadership from across the Compass Community of schools. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They check carefully what pupils have learned before and know what they need to learn next. Pupils are often successful in responding to teachers' frequent prompts to recall their previous learning. Usually, teaching is crafted in a way that builds carefully on this prior knowledge. This inspection found skilful practice where teaching developed step by step from pupils' known strengths towards the areas they find more difficult. Teachers mostly put their knowledge of individuals to good use when deciding how to teach the curriculum content. However, these personalised approaches are not completely habitual and embedded across the school.

The culture of reading has improved. The central library and frequent reading opportunities help promote the value of reading as both a pastime and a means of learning. The school identifies pupils who struggle to read and offers additional support, resulting in some real success stories. However, this extra help is not always as precisely targeted as it could be.

Pupils are readied well for their next steps. Individual careers interviews are helping pupils identify and explore realistic potential future pathways. Work experience opportunities are meaningful, relevant and personalised. The school has promising ongoing plans to further strengthen this work to prepare pupils for adulthood.

Staff are emphatic about the improvements since the arrival of the new head of school. They value the training and support from Compass. The company attaches a great deal of importance to the ongoing professional development and training of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- The use of diagnostic assessment to understand more about why some older pupils struggle to read is not as secure as it could be. This means that interventions to improve pupils' reading could be more specific and targeted than they are currently. The school should strengthen the expertise of all involved in teaching or supporting older struggling readers. It should put this expertise into practice by sharpening the approach to the assessment of reading and target specific interventions more precisely.
- There is some variability in how successfully approaches to teaching the curriculum take account of pupils' needs. This leads some pupils to sometimes disengage and not retain the intended learning as well as they could. The school should increase staff confidence and competence so that the curriculum is consistently well adapted to the needs of all 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.

School details

Unique reference number	114660
DfE registration number	845/6007
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10267604
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Compass Community LTD
Chair	Bernie Gibson
Headteacher	Stephanie Salter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£71,500
Telephone number	01273 473078
Website	www.compass-schools.org/featured_schools/our-schools/os/
Email address	admin@compass-schools.org
Dates of previous inspection	29 June to 1 July 2021

Information about this school

- Owlswick School caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Pupils may have associated diagnoses, such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan and have been placed at the school by a local authority. Pupils who attend have often experienced trauma and may be in care. They typically have fractured histories of education.
- There have been several changes of headteacher and school-level leadership since the previous inspection. The current head of school, Emma Gunn, took up her post in April 2023. There is also a regional executive headteacher, Stephanie Salter, who started in August 2023.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.
- The previous standard inspection was carried out between 29 June and 1 July 2021.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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.
- The inspection team met with a range of school and Compass leaders, including the head of school, the regional executive headteacher, the therapeutic pastoral lead, the regional special educational needs coordinator, the assistant director, the head of teaching and learning, the therapeutics development manager for education and the director of education services. The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietor body, the chair of governors and the safeguarding governor.
- Inspectors spoke with other leaders, staff and pupils. They considered comments submitted by a parent via Ofsted Parent View.
- To help understand the quality of education provided, the inspection team carried out focused activities in relation to certain subjects (deep dives). Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, and personal, social and health education. This involved discussing the curriculum for these

subjects with leaders and teachers, visiting lessons, speaking with pupils and looking at their work.

- Inspectors also spoke with school and Compass leaders about some other subjects and reviewed pupils' mathematics work.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents and records relating to the independent school standards. They explored the school's work to keep pupils safe. This included discussions with pupils, staff and leaders as well as examining records, policies and processes relating to safeguarding. The lead inspector also spoke with the local authority designated officer.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel McDonald-Taylor	Ofsted Inspector

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