

Inspection of Coombswood Special School

Laborem Place, Halesowen, West Midlands B62 8BH

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 September 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils who attend Coombswood Special School have encountered disjointed or adverse experiences in previous settings. The school understands these difficulties and is determined that all pupils should attend well and thrive. This vision is shared by everyone.

Pupils enjoy attending and speak highly of their school. They feel safe in school and know that the adults care for them. For example, pupils know that they can raise any concerns with staff. They learn about bullying, and how to report it if it were to happen. Pupils behave well around school. They are polite and relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful.

Pupils benefit from the increasing range of personal development opportunities on offer. They enjoy, for example, trips to science fairs and local places of worship. During social times of the day, pupils play board games or are active outside. They can be voted to become members of the school council. These opportunities help pupils to develop understanding of themselves and others.

Pupils do not yet benefit from a curriculum which is consistently well-matched to their needs. Support to always access the right learning at the right time is not yet consistently effective.

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

The values of 'determination, respect, empowerment, appreciation and motivation' are shared by leaders, staff and proprietors. There is a common ambition to improve opportunities for all pupils. In many ways, pupils thrive at the school. For example, they build respectful relationships, behave well and enjoy opportunities to learn about life in modern Britain. However, the school has not ensured that the quality of education is always suitable for all pupils. It has not made sure that the independent school standards ('the standards') are consistently met.

The school is continuing to develop a curriculum which matches the ambition of the national curriculum. It provides pupils with opportunities to work towards recognised qualifications in key stage 4. Schemes of work set out clearly what is to be learned. The school is keen for pupils to access learning appropriate to their key stage. For example, in English, all pupils in key stage 3 study dystopian literature and pre-20th century fiction.

Lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils listen carefully and are keen to contribute. However, the work for pupils to complete does not always match their stage of learning. Teachers do not routinely check what pupils have previously learned and can do. They do not always use the information they have to inform what pupils need to learn next. This means that, sometimes, pupils do not have the building blocks of learning in place to access new curriculum content.

Where teachers have the subject knowledge they need, they can, for example, confidently explain misconceptions in mathematics. That said, subject knowledge is not consistently secure to enable staff to deliver the curriculum effectively. On occasion, teachers select activities or methods which do not help pupils to secure the knowledge that they need.

Some pupils are at the early stages of learning to read. Staff are trained to use the chosen phonics scheme. Other work to ensure that pupils become fluent readers is in its infancy. Pupils do not receive phonics lessons regularly enough. They do not always read books which are matched to the sounds they know. In some lessons, they are asked to read and write words which contain sounds they do not know.

The school uses information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform how it will support pupils. Individual, up-to-date plans identify the resources and strategies to use. However, these are not consistently used in classrooms. This means that some pupils are not as well supported as they could be.

Pastoral care for pupils is effective. Staff use attendance information effectively to identify where action is needed. The school draws on the work of external agencies to support families who need extra help. As a result, most pupils attend regularly. The school knows pupils and their families and carers well. It works effectively to ensure that they get the help they may need.

The life skills and personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculums provide a framework for teaching pupils about how to keep themselves safe, including how to care for their mental health. The careers and personal development programmes are developing as pupil numbers at the school increase. The school has made links with local colleges, for example, to ensure that pupils learn about life beyond school. Some internal work experience opportunities are on offer, and the school is now looking further afield to further enrich pupils' experiences of the world of work. This helps pupils to make informed decisions about their futures.

Pupils learn about difference. For example, they enjoy visits to places of worship. They learn about religious festivals, such as Diwali. Weekly assemblies and celebrations are linked to the school's values. Enterprise events give pupils the chance to raise money for local charities.

Staff appreciate that the school is mindful of their well-being. The proprietor has ensured that there is oversight of the school's work. The school has ensured that it complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. A range of mechanisms are in place to offer support and challenge. However, the school and proprietor have not yet identified where improvements need to be made. For example, while a range of staff professional development is planned for the academic year, not all of this is focused sharply enough on what will impact most effectively on standards of education. The school and proprietor have capacity to make the necessary improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some areas, the school has not identified where actions are not having the necessary impact. This includes identifying staff training needs and ensuring that all pupils' SEND needs are met. As a result, pupils are not yet receiving a high enough quality of education. The school should ensure that actions and systems are thoroughly reviewed and sharp enough so that it has an accurate view of the impact of its work.
- The school does not use all the information it has to identify pupils' understanding or gaps in their knowledge. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, sometimes complete work which is not appropriate to their stage of learning, or which does not help them to build on what they already know. The school should ensure that all staff understand when and how they should check what pupils know and can do, and use this to inform subsequent teaching which matches the precise needs of all pupils.
- Staff's understanding of effective teaching methods and subject knowledge is variable. This means that, sometimes, pupils are not taught the right thing at the right time. The school should ensure that teachers' knowledge and understanding of pedagogy develops so that all pupils can make the progress they are capable of.
- Pupils at the early stages of reading do not consistently receive the support they need to become fluent readers. As a result, they are not catching up as quickly as they might. The school should ensure that appropriate provision and practice are in place so that all pupils can become fluent, confident readers.

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	150053
DfE registration number	332/6014
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10342214
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Proprietor	Coombswood Education Limited
Chair	Tracey Storey
Headteacher	Snita Verma
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,625 to £64,800
Telephone number	0121 573 0544
Website	www.coombswoodschool.com
Email address	snitaverma@coombswoodschool.com

Information about this school

- Coombswood Special School is an independent school which caters for pupils with a range of needs. All pupils have an EHC plan. The main areas of need include social, emotional and mental health needs, communication needs and autistic spectrum disorder.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- This was the school's first standard inspection. The school was registered by the DfE on 11 October 2023. It is registered to admit 50 pupils.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the executive principal (headteacher), the special educational needs coordinator and other leaders. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the proprietor body, including the chair. Inspectors also met with school staff and one parent at the school gate.
- The lead inspector made checks relating to the independent school standards, including checks on the school's premises.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and PSHE. 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 talked to leaders about some other subjects and looked at pupils' work in these subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at different times of the day. They spoke to pupils and staff about pupils' behaviour, and the lead inspector looked at records relating to behaviour.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of documents, including school policies.
- 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 lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Rachel Henrick, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Field

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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