

# Essex Fresh Start

Church Street, Witham, Essex CM8 2JL

## Inspection dates

15–17 January 2019

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>Good</b>          |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | <b>Good</b>          |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | <b>Good</b>          |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | <b>Good</b>          |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | <b>Good</b>          |
| Sixth form provision                         | <b>Good</b>          |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The proprietor and senior leaders have ensured that all the independent standards are met.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders and governors have a strategic vision and know what is needed to move the school forward. This is shared by the committed staff, who work hard to achieve good pupil outcomes.
- Pupils joining the school often have large gaps in their learning because of poor attendance at their previous schools.
- Staff know their pupils' needs well. They plan personalised learning which helps all groups of pupils make good progress over time.
- The school provides a flexible curriculum to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and/or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) needs. It combines essential academic and vocational experiences for all pupils, including those in the sixth form.
- The pupils who completed Year 11 in summer 2018 all moved on to appropriate further education courses. Sixth-form provision meets the needs of pupils well.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and show respect for teachers and other adults in the school.
- The school provides a safe environment. Governors and leaders have established thorough procedures and oversight for safeguarding, personal development and the well-being of pupils.
- The vast majority of pupils quickly improve their behaviour, because they enjoy attending the school and want to be involved in all the activities that the school offers. As a result, behaviour is good.
- For most pupils, attendance improves rapidly once they start at the school. However, the attendance and commitment of a minority of pupils is not yet good enough.
- Not all pupils write at length, or frequently enough, in subjects other than English to enhance their literacy skills.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils in order for them to achieve their full potential.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Plan more opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills at length in subjects other than English, and in areas that engage and interest them in order to develop further their literacy skills.
- Continue to raise achievement by ensuring that teachers have higher expectations, to enable pupils to reach their full potential.
- Improve the attendance of pupils so that they are in line with the national average for secondary schools.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The proprietor and the headteacher have taken swift action to address the independent school standards that were not met at the previous inspection. The school now meets all the independent school standards. The proprietor and headteacher communicate high aspirations for the continuous development and improvement of the school.
- Leaders have successfully reviewed daily routines, systems, approaches and practice to ensure that they are appropriate and consistently promote the school's values. There has been a concerted effort by leaders to provide good opportunities for pupils to make choices and decisions for themselves.
- Leaders are steadfast in re-engaging pupils in learning. A 'we never give up on the pupils' philosophy is shared by all staff.
- Leaders draw upon knowledge from external providers and across the organisation to support school improvement. They share practice across other schools in the Transitional Care Educational Services (TCES) group. There is a strong capacity to continue to make further improvements.
- The proprietor is rigorous in seeking 'critical friends' to help review the quality of the provision in the school. External evaluations are studied carefully by the headteacher, and actions are taken to effectively improve provision wherever required.
- Leaders are diligent in checking that the premises meet the independent school standards. On the Clacton-on-Sea site and the Witham site, not enough ventilation was provided at the time of the previous inspection. Inspectors found that all windows now open. Door locking is no longer common practice. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Leaders check that systems in place for fire safety and evacuation are effective. They have acted upon advice from fire service experts. Staff carry out weekly, fortnightly and monthly checks, which are recorded diligently. Staff training in safeguarding, first aid and fire safety is up to date.
- Leaders collect a broad range of information and evidence about the effectiveness of leadership and management, safeguarding, teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, outcomes and sixth-form provision. They critically evaluate the information to arrive at an accurate judgement of effectiveness and use this information to plan improvements.
- The curriculum is closely matched to most pupils' needs, interests and aspirations and provides appropriate preparation for the next stage of their lives, whatever their starting points. The school provides a broad range of accredited vocational and academic qualifications.
- Pupils gain a good understanding of British values and are well prepared to take their place in modern Britain. The personal, social, health and relationships scheme of work promotes British values effectively, as well as independence and life skills.
- Leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching is good, is kept under review and has a positive impact on achievement. Staff at all levels are held to account for their

performance and supported appropriately to improve. There is a clear determination to drive up standards. Weaker aspects of teaching are tackled effectively.

- Staff morale is high. Results from the staff questionnaire corroborate this. Staff have confidence in leaders and appreciate the frequent training they receive to enhance their safeguarding knowledge and their teaching skills.
- Inspectors found that the school adheres to its complaints policy consistently and staff resolve complaints suitably. All the required information for parents and carers, including the school's complaints procedures, is available on request or through the school's website.
- All the placing authorities and alternative providers who expressed views about the school believe that leaders and teaching staff have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to school. Placing authorities and parents and carers receive regular updates to let them know how pupils are doing.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that all pupils have equal access to all that the school provides. This is evident in pupils' individualised timetables and the personal support provided.

## **Governance**

- The proprietor, who is the chair of governors, is knowledgeable and fully committed to the school and its pupils. He has had an important influence on the positive ethos established in the school. He continuously reflects on his decisions, to ensure that they are in the pupils' best interests.
- Governors play a central role in monitoring all aspects of health and safety, holding leaders to account and ensuring that all policies and procedures are implemented consistently and in a timely manner. The governing body has ensured that health and safety checks of the premises are rigorous to ensure that all the independent school standards are met.
- Governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the quality of the school's work. Governors carry out checks assiduously to ensure that all agreed actions have been followed up.
- The governing body includes members with a wide range of knowledge, skills and expertise, which results in governors being able to set the strategic vision for the school well. Governors both challenge and support leaders. They keep a close eye on priority areas of the school improvement plan to ensure that sufficient progress is being made.
- Leaders provide governors with sufficiently detailed information on how well pupils achieve across the school. This allows governors to ask challenging questions about whether leaders' actions are improving pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching.
- Governors have ensured that pupils have sufficient opportunities to self-regulate their behaviour. Pupils move sensibly around the buildings without the use of locked doors.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors give safeguarding a high priority at the school.
- The safeguarding policy is published on the school website. It is comprehensive and meets current government requirements. Staff are familiar with 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2018)', and fully understand their safeguarding duties and responsibilities.
- Leaders have ensured that the register of safeguarding checks is accurate, and that all pre-employment checks are completed and recorded. Checks on agency staff have been carried out in accordance with the school's policy.
- The designated lead professionals for safeguarding have the up-to-date knowledge they need. Leaders make referrals to other agencies promptly, when this is appropriate. This includes seeking advice from the local authority's designated officer for safeguarding to inform their planning and decision making.
- Staff receive regular high-quality training on safeguarding issues, including those that affect children and young people in the local area. For example, the school has recently undertaken more training with its staff on the risks associated with the criminal exploitation of children known as county lines. Leaders ensure that all new members of staff undertake suitable training prior to taking up their posts. Staff understand their role in protecting pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils who need support receive timely help and protection, because leaders and staff communicate well. Leaders work proactively with a wide range of external agencies. Systems are in place for staff to raise concerns, and leaders check that these systems are effective.
- Records are kept and stored appropriately. They show that appropriate measures have been taken to support vulnerable pupils. Records of behaviour and bullying incidents are complete and up to date. Leaders and staff have an accurate picture of pupils' needs and understand how best to promote their welfare.
- Records of the use of physical interventions by staff to support pupils' safety are suitably detailed. There is evidence that incidents are followed up by senior staff and that parents are informed.
- Leaders carry out health and safety checks regularly and act appropriately when any concerns are raised. The school carries out detailed risk assessments on all aspects of school life, including the risks associated with pupils absconding from school. Pupils' risk assessments are personalised according to their individual needs.
- Arrangements for promoting pupils' safety in the playground are effective. Staff supervision of pupils is effective. Consequently, potentially dangerous behaviour is rare.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and, as one said: 'I know I can get help from any member of staff if I need it.' Most parents believe that their children are safe and well looked after. Some concerns were raised about pupils' welfare, including the use of restraint. Inspectors found that procedures are followed appropriately by staff.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teachers plan activities that are interesting and enjoyable so that pupils are engaged and achieve well. Work is planned on an individual basis and tailored closely to most pupils' capabilities and next steps in learning.
- Staff assess pupils' starting points carefully and identify gaps in their learning, taking account of national expectations.
- The staff work tirelessly to respond to the learning styles and interests of individual pupils in a sensitive and patient manner. They respond flexibly and appropriately to pupils' changing needs, by making suitable adaptations to the curriculum.
- There are strong relationships between pupils and staff, so there is a very positive atmosphere for learning in the classroom. Staff maintain high expectations of behaviour and engagement, and pupils respond positively.
- Teachers know their pupils well and have a secure understanding of their needs. This, combined with strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect, is ensuring that pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for active participation in discussions and independent learning. Speaking and listening skills are developed effectively to promote pupils' confidence. Pupils are encouraged positively to join in and share their views.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and work successfully with pupils. They are careful not to do the work for the pupils and their interventions are astutely timed to enable pupils to learn better and build self-confidence.
- Provision at off-site vocational courses makes a strong contribution to the motivation and commitment of many pupils.
- Most teachers and classroom staff correct any inappropriate use of language by pupils. Teachers' high, consistently applied, expectations of pupils' conduct mean that a short reminder is normally all that is required to help pupils manage themselves well.
- Teachers have focused on ensuring that pupils develop their understanding of spelling, grammar and punctuation, and this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' writing. Opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills at length in subjects other than English are more limited. This reduces pupils' ability to explain and refine ideas in other subject areas.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations that pupils achieve the very best outcomes. Not all pupils strive to improve their work to the highest standards of which they are capable. As a result, some pupils are not consistently achieving their full academic potential.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Before lessons start, pupils make their own breakfast and talk maturely to staff and their peers about topics of interest and how they are feeling. This ensures a positive start to the day.
- Under the care and support of staff, pupils develop self-confidence and take pride in their work. Pupils learn to understand their own emotions and improve their personal and social skills through the programme of therapy and support sessions they attend.
- Pupils describe how staff listen to their views. There is an active school council which helps to develop pupils' independence and responsibility. As a result, pupils feel that they can have a voice and can see the changes in the school that they have instigated.
- Pupils' work is celebrated on walls in every teaching room. Pupils respect displays of work around the buildings and value their learning environment; there is no litter. They sometimes lack confidence when meeting visitors, but the majority try to be polite and welcoming.
- Pupils understand the points reward system and they can achieve points in all lessons and activities. Pupil voice is taken into consideration by leaders, when determining which rewards are given.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; this is promoted through the curriculum, during outdoor activities, visits and in social time.
- Each pupil has an individual education plan and an education, health and care (EHC) plan, which are reviewed regularly. These include targets for personal development as well as academic targets, which helps staff to focus on how to meet pupils' very individual needs.
- There is a good emphasis on healthy lifestyles in various areas of the curriculum and pupils are aware of potential risks to their health and well-being.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Staff have high expectations, quickly pointing out to pupils if their behaviour is not acceptable.
- Pupils are supervised well as they move around the school and in lessons. However, staff also place their trust in pupils. For example, not having internal locked doors and allowing pupils to leave the classroom, to have time to reflect, as part of their behaviour plans. This helps to raise pupils' self-esteem and morale.
- Staff and pupils enjoy breaktimes together. Staff are good role models, playing football with the pupils or taking opportunities to find out how pupils are feeling. Pupils relate well to each other as well as to adults.
- Pupils' behaviour is rigorously tracked, and improvements from their starting points are clear. Incidents of disruption and of physical restraint decline over time, because of the effective behaviour management systems in place.
- The anti-bullying policy, the anti-bullying week and anti-bullying contracts address any issues of bullying at the school and online. Pupils said that bullying is rare and that, if it does occur, staff take appropriate action.
- Fixed-term exclusions have reduced by 82% in comparison to the previous academic year. There have been no permanent exclusions since the school opened.

- Pupils' behaviour at the alternative providers is good and monitored with the same rigour as at the two school sites.
- Generally, pupils behave well in lessons. However, there are still some occasions when pupils' behaviour deteriorates, which are dealt with effectively. Pupils are highly self-reflective. They recognise that at times they display challenging behaviour, but the majority have learned to self-regulate. They confirm that they feel safe, secure and well cared for.
- The systems for monitoring attendance are robust. Attendance for the vast majority of pupils improves from their typically low starting points. However, overall attendance, although improving, remains below that of other schools nationally. This is because a few pupils do not attend as regularly as they should.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Many pupils join the school with negative experiences of education, low self-esteem and low aspirations. Often, there are significant gaps in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, because of previous poor attendance and negative attitudes to school. However, most pupils quickly want to do well and make use of this second chance.
- The transition work and packages of support pupils and their families receive are highly differentiated and support the reintegration of pupils back into education. Staff work tirelessly to raise pupils' aspirations as soon as pupils arrive at the school.
- Most pupils arrive in the school with prior attainment which is significantly below average. Many have had to manage barriers to learning relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics from a range of different starting points. School tracking information and the work in pupils' books confirm a similarly good level of progress across other subjects in the curriculum. Good progress is evident for all groups of pupils.
- The early stages of pupils' time in school focuses on quick-win qualifications through e-learning. There is a broad range of accreditation available to pupils, both at the school and through the close links the school maintains with other providers. These include GCSEs, Functional Skills, Entry Level Certificates, AQA Unit Awards, vocational courses, food hygiene and first aid certificates.
- All pupils who can achieve a GCSE sit GCSE examinations. Subjects include English, mathematics, science, and art and design. Pupils are typically successful at completing their chosen courses. Staff encourage pupils to attain the appropriate qualifications to achieve their ambitions.
- Pupils make good progress in managing their feelings and emotions so that they can get on well with staff and other pupils and learn successfully.
- Leaders provide pupils with external and impartial careers advice. This helps pupils to move into education, employment or training when they leave the school. Pupils who sat examinations in the summer of 2018 all went on to study at college.

- Placing authorities of children who are looked after and most of the parents contacted by inspectors are happy with the progress their children are making. Disadvantaged pupils make the same good progress as their peers; learning is personalised to their needs.
- Attainment on leaving is mostly still below the national average but demonstrates good progress.
- Pupils are not adequately supported to develop their writing skills at length in subjects other than English. This reduces the opportunity for pupils to develop their literacy skills.
- There is more work to be done in order that all pupils achieve their full academic potential. This is because teachers do not plan activities that are sufficiently challenging to enable all pupils to make the strongest progress.

### **Sixth form provision**

**Good**

- There are presently no students in the sixth form. Small proportions of pupils have attended the sixth form over the past few years.
- Leadership is effective. Leaders and staff work hard to deliver a curriculum that aspires to support and develop students' preferences and interests.
- All students are assessed on entry and their prior learning and aspirations established. Leaders establish clear learning plans for all students and review these regularly throughout the year.
- Leaders ensured that the good progress gained by pupils in the main school continued in the sixth form for past students.
- The sixth form is fully focused on providing a programme of therapy and support to enable students to develop as independent learners and responsible young adults.
- Previous students attended the sixth form on a regular basis, working closely with staff to achieve their qualifications.
- Pupils benefited from individual careers guidance and advice from an independent, impartial adviser. This helps pupils choose routes which interest them and where they can succeed.
- Students leaving the school go on to further education or apprenticeships. Retention rates at college are high.
- Careful attention is paid to safeguarding and statutory requirements are met.

## School details

|                         |          |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 135150   |
| DfE registration number | 881/6056 |
| Inspection number       | 10056566 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school                         | Other Independent Special School   |
| School category                        | Independent school   |
| Age range of pupils                    | 7 to 19  |
| Gender of pupils                       | Mixed  |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form     | Mixed  |
| Number of pupils on the school roll    | 66   |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 0  |
| Number of part-time pupils             | 1  |
| Proprietor                             | Thomas Keane   |
| Chair                                  | Thomas Keane   |
| Headteacher                            | Cheryl Rutter  |
| Annual fees (day pupils)               | £48,000–£88,000  |
| Telephone number                       | 01376 780088   |
| Website                                | <a href="http://www.tces.org.uk">www.tces.org.uk</a>                     |
| Email address                          | <a href="mailto:cheryl.rutter@tces.org.uk">cheryl.rutter@tces.org.uk</a> |
| Date of previous inspection            | 6–8 June 2017  |

## Information about this school

- Essex Fresh Start is a small independent day school in Essex that opened in 2007. It provides therapeutic education for up to 130 girls and boys aged 7 to 19 years who have not previously thrived in traditional schooling. It operates on two main sites in Witham and Clacton-on-Sea. Two smaller settings known as the Create Essex Therapeutic Hubs in

Wickford and Jaywick are no longer used to educate pupils. Some pupils access therapy provided by the school on site.

- The school was last inspected in June 2017, when the overall quality of provision was judged as requires improvement. Not all of the independent school standards were met.
- The school is one of a group of schools owned by the TCES Group. The TCES Group has a board of directors who act as a traditional board of governors. The proprietor, the director of clinical services, the director of operations for TCES and the external educational consultant provide the governance of the school. The proprietor intends to expand the governing body with other members that can offer a high standard of relevant expertise.
- The school aims to provide a personalised curriculum based on pupils' needs that re-engages them in learning and prepares them for their future adult lives in society. The school promotes a 'code' based on British and community values that instil an ethic of hard work and the mutual respect and tolerance of others.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. All pupils have identified SEMH and/or ASD needs. Most have additional learning needs. Most pupils have experienced long periods of absence from education before joining the school.
- Some pupils are looked after by their respective local authorities.
- The school uses additional provision at CTP Training Academy in Witham, Rallysport Automotive and Butterfly Lodge in Colchester and Circles Farm for vocational placements.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- The Department for Education asked inspectors to consider complaints received by the department as part of this inspection.
- The inspector toured the Witham site and the Clacton-on-Sea site with the headteacher and checked the school's documents relating to health and safety.
- Inspectors held meetings with the proprietor, the headteacher and leaders. They also spoke to staff during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning with leaders across the full age range at the Witham site and Clacton-on-Sea site.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and met with two groups of pupils to ask their views about the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised samples of pupils' work in lessons and conducted a work scrutiny.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with a sample of parents and carers, and with representatives of placing authorities and the alternative providers.
- Inspectors scrutinised several school policies, procedures and records to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- There were 43 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire, five responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View and five free-text responses.
- There were no Ofsted pupil questionnaire responses. The inspection team took into consideration an internal pupil questionnaire survey completed by 15 pupils on the third day of the inspection.

## Inspection team

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Sue Cox                                    | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Rachael Judd                               | Ofsted Inspector        |

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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