

Inspection of Charlton House Independent School

55 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire, SO18 4DJ

Inspection dates: 7–9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to follow the school's mission statement to 'love one another'. They typically behave very well. Pupils say that the small size of the school allows them to be friends with everyone. Pupils seldom fall out and say bullying does not happen. They are confident that if it did, adults would sort it out quickly. Older pupils enjoy being prefects and school councillors. They check that younger pupils are happy at playtimes and establish procedures so that lunchtimes run smoothly.

Pupils benefit from a range of well-attended, extra-curricular activities. Ballroom dancing, choir and British Sign Language are the most popular clubs. Pupils recently enjoyed trips to make sculptures at an art gallery and to see the opera. They regularly contribute to local, national and international charities, particularly those with a Christian ethos.

Substantial changes to staffing have meant that the curriculum is not as well developed as it needs to be. What the school intends pupils to learn in each subject is not currently well organised. Systems for checking what they know and can remember are not firmly established. This limits how much pupils learn over time.

Some of the school's safeguarding procedures are not thorough enough, which puts pupils potentially at risk of harm.

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

Substantial changes of staffing, leadership and membership of the proprietorial body, along with uncertainty about the school's future and financial concerns, have meant that the quality of education, leadership and management in the school have not improved.

Leaders' ambition for pupils to learn knowledge which aligns with the depth and breadth of the national curriculum is not fully realised. This is because new staff do not have the full details of what has been taught previously in the school. In several subjects there are no well-established curriculum plans that set out in detail what pupils should be taught, and in what order. Consequently, new subject leaders are still setting out the sequence of learning in each subject. Plans are slightly further ahead in some subjects, such as mathematics and English, where leaders have purchased plans and resources that staff can use readily. However, in many other subjects leaders are still establishing for themselves what they intend pupils to learn over time. This includes in the early years.

Current staff are working hard to construct a curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in an organised way throughout their time in school. They are sharing resources and expertise with each other. This means that, day to day, pupils are increasingly learning useful knowledge in different subjects. However, some inexperienced staff have not received the training that they need to plan and teach the curriculum well enough.

A few subjects, including French and music, are taught by subject specialists who follow well-established sequences of learning. As a result, pupils successfully build knowledge in these subjects over their time in school.

Staff know they need to check what pupils have learned previously so that they can fill any gaps as they teach new knowledge. Procedures for this are starting to become established in some subjects. For example, in mathematics teachers are identifying where pupils have gaps in the building blocks they need before learning more-complex mathematics. There is not currently a common approach to checking what pupils know and can remember in other subjects. Consequently, gaps in learning in some subjects are not being identified and filled. Furthermore, there is not an established approach to ensuring that pupils remember what they are taught, as a result some gaps in learning persist over time.

Staff are prioritising teaching pupils to read. All pupils are encouraged to read regularly. Most could talk about a book they have recently enjoyed. However, some pupils are behind in phonics. Current staff have worked hard to identify pupils' gaps in phonics and provide extra teaching to help pupils catch up. There are signs that this is working, especially for the weakest readers. However, sometimes the books pupils are given to practise reading are too hard for them, which limits their ability to read fluently. New staff all use different methods to teach reading and the new subject leader is still establishing what will become the school's common approach. A new phonics programme has been purchased, but staff have yet to be trained in it.

The new proprietorial body is in its early stages of establishing processes, policies and procedures for how the school should run. Members of the proprietorial body currently lack the detailed knowledge they need to ensure that these are fit for purpose and meet the requirements of the independent school standards. For example, they did not know that the complaints policy and attendance policy contained inaccuracies. There were serious omissions from some risk assessments intended to keep pupils safe. The interim headteacher and external advisers are supporting those responsible for governance in establishing new systems to enable them to hold the school to account. This includes a useful schedule for meetings and monitoring of the school's work.

The proprietorial body has acted to ensure that fire safety equipment, that previously had not been checked, is now safe and working. Similarly, work to replace some water systems has been carried out. However, the proprietorial body has not ensured that further necessary, but costly, repairs to these systems have been made in a timely manner. Some work is yet to be completed, although it was booked in during the inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Staff are trained in safeguarding. They know the signs that might indicate a pupil is vulnerable and report these to leaders. Leaders act on concerns, including using outside agencies when a pupil needs extra help.

However, records of concerns are kept in several different places, and are not well coordinated. Sometimes concerns are not recorded in a timely manner. There is no systematic review of previous concerns. This limits the school's ability to recognise when pupils are at risk of harm.

Leaders typically check the suitability of adults working at the school. However, governors are not as alert to potential concerns as they should be. For example, information received in references is not always checked and considered.

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

- Members of the proprietorial board and advisory board lack the thorough knowledge and understanding they need of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They do not effectively monitor and evaluate the school's work. This prevents them from holding leaders to account. Those responsible for governance need to develop their skills so that they are well informed about school systems and the school's work to improve. This will enable them to provide effective and robust challenge for school leaders.
- Leaders have not ensured that safeguarding is effective. Safeguarding records are not organised, monitored and analysed in a systematic way. Risk assessments do not consider all the relevant information they should to reduce risk. Health and safety reports on the site have been too slow to be fully actioned. Recruitment checks are not as thorough as they should be. The proprietorial body and other leaders should urgently ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are reviewed and that a secure approach is established to record and analyse incidents and concerns. This will help leaders to identify patterns and causes and increase pupils' safety.
- The curriculum is not fully established.
 - Subject leaders have not received training to help them to plan clear and logical sequences of learning in all subjects, including in the early years.
 - There is not a common approach to checking what pupils know and remember across the whole school.
 - There is not a systematic approach to teaching phonics and early reading in the school.

This means that pupils do not learn or remember subject knowledge as well as they should, including when learning to read. Leaders should ensure that staff are provided with professional development and sufficient resources to help them to plan and deliver the content of each subject curriculum so that pupils can learn more and remember more.

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If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	116567
DfE registration number	852/6003
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10202267
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Charlton House School Limited
Chair	Steven Hulbert
Headteacher	Matthew Robinson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,085
Telephone number	02380 671739
Website	www.charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
Email address	administrationofficer@charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–5 December 2019

Information about this school

- Charlton House School is a small independent Roman Catholic school with a Christian ethos. It currently has 31 pupils on roll. Reception and Year 1 are taught together in a mixed-age-group class. Similarly, Year 2 and Year 3, and Year 5 and Year 6 are taught together. Year 4 are taught in a single-age-group class in the morning and join the Year 5 and Year 6 class in the afternoons.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in December 2019 when the school was judged to be inadequate and unmet standards were found. At that time, the school was called St Mary's Independent School and also had a secondary phase, catering for pupils up to the age of 16.
- In May 2020, the school closed to pupils and the limited company running it went into administration, with all staff made redundant. The primary phase of the school reopened to pupils aged four to 11 in September 2020, under the name of Charlton House School. Several pupils on roll are former pupils of the St Mary's primary phase.
- The school is now owned and run by a proprietor body called Charlton House School Limited. This is a private company limited by guarantee. The Brothers of Christian Instruction, a Catholic educational organisation, owns the school's buildings and land and provides some funding to the school.
- Charlton House School was subject to a progress monitoring inspection in November 2020. Unmet standards were found at that time and the school was served with a notice by the Secretary of State for Education, which required an action plan to be drawn up. This action plan was assessed and found to be acceptable in July 2021.
- Since the previous standard inspection in December 2019, several staff, including the headteacher and their subsequent replacement, have left the school. An interim headteacher was appointed in September 2021 for two terms. A new headteacher has been appointed to take up the substantive post from April 2022.
- Nearly all teaching staff were new to the school in September 2021.
- Governance is provided by members of the proprietor body. All current members of this body have been appointed since June 2021. An advisory panel acts as associate members of the governing board. Some members of this panel were members of the previous proprietary body, which was called St Mary's Independent School Limited.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

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.

- Inspectors met with the interim headteacher and other staff. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese (Catholic) of Portsmouth. A meeting was held with members of the proprietorial body and advisory panel. Further discussions were held with the chair and vice chair of the proprietorial body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography, and modern foreign languages.
 - This involved discussion with the leaders of these subjects, checking curriculum plans, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with pupils and staff about learning in these subjects.
 - The lead inspector also heard several pupils read to a familiar adult.
 - Inspectors explored the curriculum in some other subjects, by speaking to leaders and visiting some lessons.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and the deputy designated safeguarding lead, the site manager and members of the proprietorial body. They spoke to a range of staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records, including those relating to risk assessments, health and safety checks and the safer recruitment of staff.
- Inspectors spoke to several parents in the morning as they dropped their children off at school. Inspectors considered the views of staff through conversations and scrutiny of the responses to the online staff survey. Inspectors spoke to pupils in class and around the school, held meetings with groups of pupils and considered responses to the online pupil survey.
- Inspectors toured the school premises, including the building known as 'the White House' where pupils sometimes attend church services, checked the school's website, explored the attendance and admissions registers and scrutinised a range of other documentation to check that the school complies with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which–
 - 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
 - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is–
 - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
 - 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and–

- 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
- 33(k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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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