

Inspection of Underley Garden School

Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth, Lancashire LA6 2DZ

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 May 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Underley Garden School is a special place for its pupils. Many pupils join the school with negative views of education. Impassioned and kind staff help pupils to turn these views around quickly. Pupils' attitudes towards their education improve significantly. The school is an extremely welcoming place, where staff form highly positive relationships with pupils and their families. Pupils swiftly learn to trust the adults in school. They know that staff will do all they can to support them. Staff are highly skilled to help pupils manage their behaviour well. Pupils learn in a calm environment.

The school is determined to enable pupils to thrive. It has soaring aspirations for pupils' achievement, including for students in the sixth form. Pupils learn the ambitious curriculum well. They gain the important skills they need. The sixth-form curriculum is particularly focused on ensuring that pupils are thoroughly prepared for their future lives. As a result, pupils make impressive progress through the curriculum and achieve well.

The work to develop pupils for life beyond their time at the school is exemplary. From the time pupils join the school, they learn about how to be independent. Younger pupils learn about different aspects of safety such as road safety. Older pupils learn about managing money and how to apply for a job. Students in the sixth form enjoy the chance to practise their interview skills.

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

Pupils attending the school have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school ensures that it understands their needs, alongside using the information contained in pupils' education, health and care plans. The school's ambitious curriculum has many strands and layers. The carefully crafted curriculum runs through three different pathways. In each pathway, the school identifies the knowledge and skills that each pupil needs to know. Learning is carefully personalised for the pupils, reflecting their wide range of starting points. Sixth-form students study a relevant curriculum, depending on which pathway they are studying. This allows pupils to study qualifications which are most appropriate for them.

Skilled staff implement the curriculum effectively. They are very much experts in their field. They have strong knowledge of the subjects they teach. Staff carefully break down learning into clear and logical steps. They know the specific strategies that work for individual pupils. They use this knowledge to make appropriate adaptations to the delivery of the curriculum. This ensures that pupils access an individual curriculum. Pupils get many chances to revisit key learning. This culminates in pupils achieving exceptionally well from their starting points.

Teaching pupils to read, developing their love of reading and widening their vocabulary are shared responsibilities in this school. There are many opportunities

for staff to listen and teach pupils to read throughout the school day. Pupils enjoy sharing stories with each other through their 'paired reading time'. The school implements a highly well-thought-out and effective approach to teaching phonics. Effective, extensive professional development enables staff to support pupils in developing their reading skills. Those pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read get highly effective support. This means that, over time, they become more confident, fluent readers. Pupils who are developing their communication skills improve their ability to interact with others well.

The school has a laser focus on ensuring that pupils are well prepared for adulthood. It places pupils' personal development at the centre of what it does. The attention to detail in this area is impressive. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, have opportunities for work experience. For some pupils, this is highly structured in the school environment. For other pupils, this involves working with employers in the local area. Students in the sixth form visit local colleges if this is their appropriate education pathway. Pupils are taught very well about relationships, well-being and fundamental British values. They learn different social skills in a safe environment before visiting places to put these into practice. Other enriching opportunities enhance pupils' wider development. Pupils thoroughly enjoy these opportunities, including participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Pupils' attitudes in lessons are impressive. Staff support them effectively to ensure that they concentrate well on their learning. Pupils maintain focus on the tasks that their teachers ask them to complete. Skilled staff ensure that pupils' learning is not disturbed.

The proprietor has a clear vision for the school. It has clear oversight of the school's work. Various quality assurance visits are used to hold the school to account for pupils' achievement. The proprietor seeks external expertise to identify where this quality could be further enhanced. This level of rigour extends to other areas of the school. For example, the meticulous scrutiny of records for behaviour and safeguarding offers further support and challenge to the school. The extensive school site is well maintained. Classroom environments are conducive to learning.

The school supports staff's well-being and workload. It has created many ways of doing this. The staff appreciate this and are overwhelmingly positive about working at this school. They share the vision the proprietor has for pupils. Staff are calm and resilient when faced with any challenging behaviours because they are well supported.

The school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	112461
DfE registration number	943/6044
Local authority	Westmorland and Furness
Inspection number	10375127
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	April Boyd
Annual fees (day pupils)	£67,890 to £92,980
Telephone number	01524 271 569
Website	www.underleygarden.co.uk
Email address	info@underleygarden.org
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 April 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides full-time education for pupils with various SEND. This includes pupils with autism, severe learning difficulties and/or social, emotional and mental health needs. The school is registered to admit up to 104 pupils.
- The school operates from premises located at Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth, Lancashire, LA6 2DZ
- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 26 to 28 April 2022.
- The school does not make any use of alternative provision.

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 judgment about the quality of a school's 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the proprietor body and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, physical education and personal, social, health and economic education. 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 looked at pupils' work from other curriculum subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of the school, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and honest culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- School policies and other documents were examined to check compliance with the independent school standards and to provide other inspection evidence. These included the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

- As part of their checks on the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors made a tour of the school premises accompanied by the headteacher and facilities manager.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michele Costello

Ofsted Inspector

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