

School inspection report

10 to 12 December 2024

Connie Rothman School

Millhams Street

Christchurch

Dorset

BH23 1DN

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and staff provide a warm and secure environment for pupils experiencing serious mental health difficulties. It is a place where pupils learn successfully after long periods of absence from education.
2. The school's continual improvement owes much to the input that trustees provide and the quality of support its members offer. Leaders support their staff well with transparent communication and an open-door policy. Leaders and staff work effectively as a team to promote pupils' best interests and wellbeing.
3. Leaders evaluate and adapt the curriculum to ensure that it accommodates pupils' interests and abilities, for example through recent expansions relating to media, computing and photography. The school emphasises flexibility, offering functional skills and GCSE qualifications to suit pupils' varying needs and post-16 level 1 and 2 qualifications in the sixth form.
4. Teachers provide a highly specialised, supportive and adaptable learning environment. Their secure subject knowledge and high expectations help them to plan activities that interest, motivate and engage pupils. High staff-to-pupil ratios facilitate personalised attention and a focus on pupils' wellbeing. Teachers and teaching assistants provide individual pupils with effective targeted support. They ensure that pupils know how to improve through clear targets and ambitious expectations where appropriate. As a result, pupils, many of whom have experienced substantial disruptions to their learning, with some having missed two years or more of their secondary education, make good progress from their starting points.
5. All pupils have a pastoral plan to support their mental health and help build their self-esteem. Depending on their planned lessons and pathways, pupils will see a counsellor or mental health nurse each week to help them with concerns. Leaders work closely with external services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Activities such as those that form the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) further develop pupils' self-confidence.
6. Pupils' behaviour and willingness to learn improve dramatically throughout their time at the school because staff consistently teach them how to behave.
7. The school provides suitable personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE). However, the RSE provision does not develop pupils' knowledge and understanding in this area as effectively as possible.
8. The school's close relationships with pupils and parents and its focus on empathy and emotional regulation help pupils transition into college and employment and improve their personal development, supporting them as they navigate various societal challenges.
9. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are effective and fully meet the requirements of current statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- develop the provision of relationships and sex education to strengthen pupils' knowledge and understanding in this area.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders apply their skills and knowledge effectively. They successfully maintain high levels of commitment and consistent support from staff so that they work together very cohesively to promote pupils' wellbeing.
11. The leaders' procedures for accurately viewing the school's performance are detailed, thorough and effective. For example, leaders regularly conduct non-intrusive learning walks to avoid causing pupils anxiety, and review the work they produce in books and folders. As a result of their efficient self-evaluation, leaders generate well-judged school development plans that lead to effective school improvement.
12. Leaders manage staff performance well, setting appropriate targets for teachers and teaching assistants explicitly linked to the improvement of pupils' learning. Staff members have two specific targets: one related to their subject area and another related to school-wide priorities. Current school targets focus on improving pupils' understanding of their academic levels and addressing the needs of pupils with poor communication skills, some of whom are selectively mute. Weekly staff meetings focus on these targets, helping to enhance staff knowledge and skills, and so improving their ability to support pupils and foster their development. Leaders' self-evaluation includes scrutiny of actions taken and their impact on pupils' learning and development.
13. Leaders give considerable thought to the range of subjects and experiences provided and ensure the successful promotion of equality so that pupils have opportunities to succeed. Any gaps in progress or attainment between different groups are identified quickly and closed rapidly. The variety of experiences effectively develops pupils' interest in learning and raises their confidence. Leaders monitor the impact of the support provided to individual pupils to ensure it is effective.
14. School leaders ensure that risk assessment procedures are detailed and thorough. Risk assessments include suitable consideration of individual pupils' specific needs and ensure that sufficient staff are available to cater for these at all times. Risk assessments also identify measures to ensure that the premises shared with the church are appropriate for pupils to use. Pupils feel safe at school because of the care taken over the suitability of the environment.
15. The school provides parents with all required information, including about the school's aims and ethos. Individual pupils' progress reports are sent to parents half-termly, and newsletters are sent out termly. Leaders provide relevant local authorities with all the required information relating to pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan for whom they provide funding.
16. A suitable complaints procedure is in place. Leaders log and respond to informal complaints effectively so that they are resolved swiftly. The school has not received any formal complaints over the past three years.
17. The school meets the requirements of equality legislation. The accessibility plan includes modifications for pupils who require wheelchair access, and counselling support is provided for those with social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff have received training on equality and diversity. Leaders effectively partner with external agencies, including health professionals, to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive help and support.

18. Trustees have undergone a wide range of training to inform their effective oversight of the school. They regularly visit the school to learn how well it works. Trustees ensure that leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills to effectively educate the vulnerable school population. They ensure that the aims to support pupils with additional needs are met. School leaders produce termly reports for the trustee board in addition to those for smaller focus group meetings. Trustees scrutinise these reports thoroughly and hold leaders to account effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

- 19. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The stimulating and well-considered curriculum is responsive to the needs of pupils. Subject plans are written with sufficient flexibility to enable them to be adapted to better suit pupils' needs. They identify many opportunities to develop pupils' communication, literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are also given many opportunities to develop their skills and understanding in creative areas, primarily poetry, artwork and photography.
21. Subject teachers and teaching assistants are highly effective in helping pupils learn. They are sensitive to the needs of individual pupils and provide high-quality support and guidance. They work together effectively to promote pupils' learning. Pupils progress well from their starting points in English, mathematics and science because teachers focus on effectively improving pupils' reading, writing and numeracy skills. Many pupils have experienced substantial previous disruption to their learning, with some missing two or more years of their secondary education. Those who have missed some years of schooling re-engage with their education successfully and achieve well.
22. Teachers set work at a well-judged level of sophistication or simplicity for individual pupils, including those who have experienced significant interruption to their studies, to ensure that they catch up quickly with their classmates and fill gaps in their knowledge and understanding. All Year 11 leavers gain a variety of nationally recognised qualifications. These include functional skills or GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, art and personal choice subjects. Many pupils achieve GCSE passes at grade 4 and above.
23. Teachers plan effective learning sequences that engage pupils' interests and extend their confidence, knowledge and skills. For example, younger senior pupils use drama to demonstrate their understanding of the characters being studied. Some pupils assessed as being otherwise non-confident communicators take on the role of these characters and use the script to talk with more self-assuredness.
24. Pupils have the confidence to ask and answer their teachers' questions because their professional relationships are very positive. Teachers use their subject knowledge and vocabulary effectively to extend and support pupils' understanding. For example, in a sixth-form lesson about stereotypes, the teacher paused the lesson to ensure that pupils understood the relationship between two 'voices' in a written extract. In art, pupils are guided to use new techniques in the style of professional artists and to adopt specialised vocabulary used by their teachers.
25. Older pupils have high standards in writing and creative work. For example, their sophisticated poetry analysis shows appreciation of works such as Shelley's *The Cold Earth Slept Below*. The same comments can be made about the quality of pupils' artwork, which demonstrates accomplished skills and thorough attention to detail. This is exemplified by the number of pupils who produce high-quality creative writing across the age groups.
26. Time is used well in lessons. Regular, detailed and accurate checks on work and progress against shared success criteria help ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress. Leaders implement an assessment framework that evaluates how well pupils are progressing in each subject against national age-related expectations and provide parents and carers with six reports a year that include this information. Leaders ensure pupils are challenged effectively and measure their progress against personalised programmes.

27. Recreational activities at morning break and lunchtime are based on pupils' interests and demands. These can range from supervised walks by the river with tutors to physical education (PE) at the local recreation ground, including frisbee, rounders, swings and slides. There are also organised indoor activities such as table tennis, badminton, dance and an end-of-term games day. These activities help develop pupils' skills in the areas of interest they choose to participate in.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

29. Leaders and staff are highly skilled at linking the planned curriculum to pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. School staff help to foster an environment of mutual trust and respect, which is at the heart of the school ethos. Pupils spiritually share their emotions and feelings through the art they produce and describe, and during therapy sessions.
30. Relationships between pupils and staff are trusting and respectful. Staff are very aware of their responsibility to model positive caring relationships to pupils whose circumstances often make them vulnerable. They do this very successfully. As a result, pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem are nurtured effectively.
31. PSHE education is woven into the curriculum and specific lessons. These include weekly citizenship sessions and classes on gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships. They include life skills, including how to support one's own personal safety, wellbeing and reflection, identity and body positivity. All pupils have a pastoral plan to support their mental health and help build self-esteem. Weekly meetings with a counsellor or mental health pastoral leader help them address worries or anxieties. The school-based activities that promote emotional wellbeing, such as yoga or surf therapy, help build pupils' confidence and resilience. Pupils also go to therapy sessions at the local Premier League football club, which supports this work further.
32. The school has implemented the national expectations for RSE. They consult with parents and pupils annually, and the policy is published on the school website. It clarifies that a parent can request that a pupil be excused from sex education that is not part of the science curriculum. However, the RSE provision is not as effective as it could be in developing and securing pupils' knowledge and understanding in this area. The school's pupil surveys and discussions with them show that they have not fully appreciated or understood the lessons they have been taught.
33. The school is well maintained and tidy and co-exists well with the church, which shares the building. The school completes a comprehensive health and safety audit, which includes testing electrical equipment. All necessary maintenance and checks are carried out effectively. An appropriate and up-to-date fire risk assessment is in place. Since leaders cannot change the existing church building's doors into fire doors, they effectively mitigate this with twice the number of fire extinguishers required and frequent fire evacuation drills.
34. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with and comply with current statutory guidance. Leaders consider all EHC plans before admission and effectively follow up on any poor attendance. The school informs the relevant local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.
35. First aid records are easily accessible, and medication is locked away, with the appropriate administration recorded. Pupils' medical needs are effectively monitored and cared for.
36. Staff behaviour management is highly effective, and incidents of bullying or anti-social behaviour rarely occur, if ever. Lessons are orderly, and pupils engage effectively. Staff deal with any instances of negative behaviour swiftly and supportively by helping those upset by an incident or argument and those responsible for it through communication and repair. Dysregulated pupils often have time

to 'cool down' by walking with a trusted adult or relaxing in the church sanctuary. Leaders and staff utilise individual pupil risk assessments and thorough supervision to ensure all pupils feel supported and secure. Pupils are well monitored at all times.

37. Pupils are taught about different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and they know what to do if they have concerns. Every year group has an anti-bullying ambassador, and leaders use an ongoing questionnaire to check pupils' perspectives about the extent to which they feel affected by bullying. Inflammatory language, sarcasm or raised voices rarely happen.
38. All pupils participate in PE weekly with a specialist who works on developing specific skills as required. The non-competitive activities are tailored to pupils' interests and individual needs, promoting mental health.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

39. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

40. Leaders ensure that fundamental British values are actively promoted. Teachers are skilled at gaining pupils' interest and attention by encouraging them to discuss issues that they find relevant, such as law and order related to crimes committed. During the year pupils are taught about British fundamental values such as mutual respect. They engage effectively to discuss and debate issues relating to British society that will affect them. Through visits, celebrations and other activities, pupils learn about British institutions such as the Houses of Parliament and the monarchy. This also enables them to learn about law and democracy. The school actively encourages pupils to respect people from different backgrounds and treat everyone equally through the weekly 'life skills' lessons taught.
41. Staff often help pupils overcome trauma and become better versions of themselves, which allows pupils to make better life choices. Staff also help pupils learn to respect others and consider how they can contribute positively to society. Pupils are taught about the importance of valuing diversity and people's race, religion, beliefs and identities.
42. Pupils have many opportunities to seek and exercise responsibility through membership in the school council, antibullying, wellbeing and attendance groups. Their participation in such opportunities helps develop and find expression for their sense of social responsibility. The DofE programme allows pupils to volunteer for activities that suit them individually, such as supporting toddler groups in the church or volunteering in other classes at school. These activities encourage collaboration and empathy.
43. In 'life skills' lessons, pupils learn practical skills to effectively prepare for adulthood and citizenship, such as planning and budgeting meals, shopping, cooking and managing personal finances. Staff spend significant time helping pupils better understand what is right and wrong in society, by exploring themes such as crime and punishment. In computing, blog topics chosen by younger senior pupils include scenarios for discussion relevant to local interests, such as more effective use of open spaces in the local community. Older senior pupils engage in informed discussions on societal and ethical issues such as universal credit and wealth disparity.
44. Pupils also develop their economic awareness through selling plants and sweets at the local market. They learn how to successfully manage journeys, including on public transport, visiting the library to build independence and confidence in public spaces. As part of the school's work to promote their social development, pupils carry out economic activities such as buying train tickets, evaluating the costs of minibus journeys compared to train journeys, and buying coffee in shops.
45. All pupils receive effective careers advice. They meet with an external careers adviser, attend career fairs, visit careers hubs and businesses, undertake work experience placements and make regular trips to local further education colleges. Pupils also receive support in CV writing and applications, and preparation for college interviews. Subjects such as media studies and computing also prepare them for potential careers in social media, radio and other job roles where they can work remotely and independently. In 2023, all eligible pupils continued their studies in further education or work placements, including through apprenticeship and university study.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. Leaders effectively implement and monitor a comprehensive approach to protecting pupils and supporting their safety, mental health and wellbeing. Leaders and trustees ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders are acutely aware of the dangers of child sexual exploitation, gang culture, extremism and online safety, and ensure that staff are vigilant for any signs that pupils may be affected by these issues.
48. Safeguarding training takes place regularly, ensuring staff are kept up to date and know how to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns. Staff are highly aware of vulnerable pupils' specific risks and help them manage situations they encounter outside of school.
49. All staff undergo rigorous vetting procedures to ensure their suitability to work with pupils, particularly sensitive and vulnerable ones. The required pre-employment checks are completed before staff start working at the school and are recorded in an appropriate single central record (SCR) of appointments.
50. Leaders work closely with external safeguarding partners to safeguard pupils and protect them from harm by referring safeguarding concerns to the appropriate agency when required. Systems to record and track pupil concerns are effective and robust. They allow leaders to access important information about pupils quickly and securely. The school has a suitable process for responding to any low-level concerns about or allegations against staff. Posters around the school remind staff of the procedures to follow should they be concerned about another member of staff's behaviour.
51. Pupils know how to deal with issues related to online safety, such as keeping passwords confidential, managing digital footprints and dealing with online incidents. Consequently, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. Suitable filtering and monitoring of internet activity is in place.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 52. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Connie Rothman School
Department for Education number	839/6014
Registered charity number	1171812
Address	Connie Rothman School Millhams Street Christchurch Dorset BH23 1DN
Phone number	01202 122922
Email address	hello@crlt.org.uk
Website	http://www.crlt.org.uk
Proprietor	Connie Rothman Learning Trust
Chair	Mr Haymo Thiel
Headteacher	Mrs Rozanne Parsons
Age range	11 to 21
Number of pupils	29
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2024

Information about the school

53. Connie Rothman School was registered as a school in October 2020. It educates pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school is a charitable foundation, and a board of trustees oversees its work. The school was previously known as Connie Rothman Learning Centre.
54. The school shares the premises for teaching and learning with the local church.
55. The school has identified all pupils as having SEND, and all have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. These are primarily linked to social, emotional and mental health needs, including autism and anxiety.
56. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
57. The school states its aims are to support pupils with additional needs to have the opportunity to transform their lives through education and social growth.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

10 to 12 December 2024

58. A team of two inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of trustees
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

60. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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