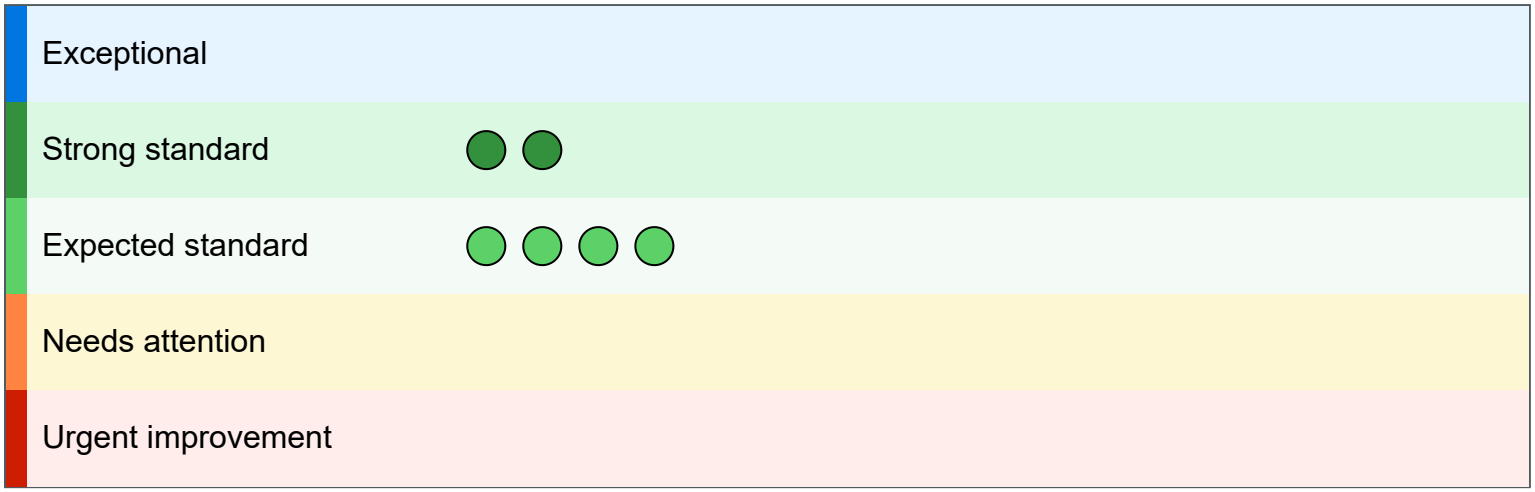
Life Skills Enterprise

Address: Northdown House, Northdown Park Road, Cliftonville, Margate, Kent, CT9 3TP

Unique reference number (URN): 151899

Inspection report: 3 November 2026



Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- Insufficient evidence: Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard

Attendance

Leaders understand the significant barriers to attendance faced by pupils in great depth. These often include anxiety and lengthy periods out of education. They combine high expectations with carefully tailored individual plans, close contact with families and coordinated pastoral support. This enables pupils who previously accessed very little education to make substantial improvements in their attendance. Leaders regularly review support, working persistently with families and other professionals to respond to changing needs. Carefully planned reduced timetables effectively support staged increases towards full-time attendance.

Behaviour and attitudes

Pupils usually behave very well and have enthusiastic, positive attitudes to learning. Clear routines, trusting relationships and consistent therapeutic approaches help them manage anxiety, regulate emotions and engage in lessons. Staff anticipate triggers, adapt support skilfully and use de-escalation and restorative approaches effectively. Pupils increasingly manage conflict appropriately and value restorative conversations following disagreements. Leaders analyse incidents to refine behaviour plans, target staff training and adapt the curriculum. For example, pupils attended a workshop on the ‘manosphere’ after leaders identified inappropriate language being used. Restrictive interventions are recorded and reviewed. Pupils value friendships and trust adults to address concerns, including bullying. The calm, friendly atmosphere, including at social times, reflects this consistent, preventive approach.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

The headteacher has provided highly effective leadership in establishing and developing Life Skills Enterprise. Under his guidance, leaders have created an ambitious, inclusive environment for pupils whose education has often been severely disrupted. Despite substantial growth, they have maintained a calm, nurturing culture in which pupils rebuild confidence and increasingly participate in learning. Leaders know the school extremely well. Their accurate self-evaluation informs priorities, including improving consistency in teaching and assessment.

Staff embrace the shared vision and speak with pride about the school. Leaders prioritise staff wellbeing, professional learning and opportunities to collaborate. Education, pastoral and therapeutic teams work closely together, drawing on specialist expertise to support pupils' complex needs. This collective commitment is reflected in pupils' growing sense of belonging and positive experiences.

The proprietor and governors provide highly effective scrutiny and challenge. Clear lines of accountability, regular visits and systematic quality assurance give them a detailed understanding of safeguarding, pupils' experiences and the school's development. Their challenge has influenced decisions about staffing and leadership capacity as the school

expands. The proprietor strengthens this work by providing specialist expertise, established professional networks and rigorous external scrutiny. The proprietor's commitment to supporting the school's continued development is evident in its careful planning and investment. This combination of challenge and practical support enables leaders to act promptly and confidently.

The proprietor and leaders ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently. Their ambition, clear-sighted evaluation and capacity to respond to emerging needs place the school in a strong position to improve further.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils make significant progress from differing starting points, often after extensive interruptions to their education. Initially, most need to rebuild confidence, establish relationships, develop routines and strengthen foundational knowledge. Reading is prioritised. Pupils engage with rich texts daily and recognise how reading supports wider learning and future opportunities.

Leaders assess pupils' knowledge on entry, using checks and scrutiny of work to identify gaps. A new assessment framework is helping staff track pupils' progress more precisely. Pupils develop knowledge and skills across the curriculum alongside communication, emotional regulation and independence. Pupils' progress is evident in assessment records and workbooks. It is also reflected in pupils' increasing willingness to engage purposefully with peers and staff across a range of learning activities. The school's 'wheel of independence' helps pupils develop practical skills very well. Older pupils work towards suitable qualifications, which provide them with formal recognition of their achievements.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have established a well-planned, 'dual-stranded' curriculum that gives equal priority to academic learning, communication, therapeutic support and preparation for adulthood. English, mathematics and other subjects in the school's 'formal' curriculum are complemented by daily practical experiences. The school's 'wheel of independence' ensures that pupils across the school learn essential life skills, including hygiene and using public transport. The curriculum takes account of pupils' varied ages, starting points and significantly interrupted education. Leaders are developing assessment arrangements to identify gaps in learning and inform the next steps for individual pupils, but there is more work to do here.

Teaching is typically effective. Staff know pupils well, establish calm routines and adapt activities thoughtfully. In reading lessons, for example, pupils revisit previous learning, discuss vocabulary and explain their understanding of texts. Timely phonics support helps pupils, who require additional help with learning to read. Teachers increasingly use questioning to develop pupils' spoken language, reflecting recent professional learning.

The quality of teaching, nevertheless, varies between subjects and class groups. For example, in some mathematics lessons, there is insufficient modelling and practical exploration of new concepts. Teaching assistants do not always contribute effectively to developing pupils' knowledge and skills. Leaders recognise these variations. They are providing appropriate training and support, including to ensure that assessment information is used precisely to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders understand the needs and experiences of pupils very well. Many pupils have previously struggled to attend school. A psychotherapist gathers detailed developmental histories before admission. Leaders combine this information with pupils' education, health and care plans and initial assessments. This enables leaders to identify pupils' diverse barriers to learning and wellbeing. Pupils' provision maps and individual passports help staff understand the adaptations and support they require.

Teaching, pastoral and therapeutic staff work closely together. Their coordinated approach enables pupils to access learning, develop communication and manage anxiety. For example, personalised occupational therapy activities help pupils practise fine motor skills and everyday tasks. Carefully supported community visits build confidence with unfamiliar adults. Staff use appropriately adapted teaching and targeted support to address gaps in foundational knowledge. Pupils, including those known or previously known to social care, develop trusting relationships and a growing sense of belonging.

Leaders review individual pupils' needs and adapt support accordingly. However, their analysis of which academic and therapeutic interventions have the greatest impact is not yet sufficiently systematic. This limits how precisely they can use evaluation findings to refine future provision.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders provide a highly personalised personal development programme that prioritises pupils' emotional wellbeing, communication and independence. Teaching, pastoral and therapeutic staff work together to help pupils build confidence, form friendships and participate in school life. Pupils value these relationships and opportunities to try new and unfamiliar experiences.

The school's 'wheel of independence' gives practical life skills a prominent place in the curriculum. Pupils practise preparing food, managing money, travelling and personal care at school and in the community. Visits to cafés help pupils apply these skills in everyday situations. Outdoor learning, woodwork, sport, creative activities and the Duke of Edinburgh Award broaden pupils' experiences further. Leaders monitor participation and adapt opportunities to suit individual pupils' needs.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies, reflection and wider experiences. Themes include kindness, Black History Month, Remembrance and environmental awareness. Theatre visits and creative activities

extend pupils' cultural experiences. These opportunities help pupils appreciate differences, consider others' perspectives and develop a sense of belonging.

Personal, social, health and economic education, including relationships and sex education, covers healthy relationships, online and offline risks, respect and fundamental British values. Staff adapt teaching sensitively, and pupils confidently describe ways to keep safe and seek help. However, pupils do not consistently retain and deepen their knowledge across this curriculum over time.

Careers education is developing appropriately. Visitors, workshops, college links and individual guidance help older pupils consider future pathways. However, sustained engagement with employers and meaningful workplace experiences are at an early stage, particularly for the school's first Year 11 cohort.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are part of an extremely warm and welcoming school community. Many have experienced prolonged disruption to their education. Before pupils start at school, staff gather extensive information about their backgrounds, interests, educational experiences and needs. This helps staff design a personalised introduction, so pupils feel understood from the outset.

Pupils are clear that they are safe, happy and supported at school. They enjoy a wide range of learning activities. Pupils describe adults as kind, patient and ready to listen. Positive relationships characterise the school day. Pupils are welcomed individually each morning as they arrive at school. They enjoy chatting with staff and friends at lunchtime and love that adults join their games. One pupil summed up school life as 'a cup of joy'. Pupils develop friendships and a sense of belonging. They trust adults to help with worries, including bullying, and are increasingly able to manage their emotions and resolve disagreements.

Pupils enjoy learning in small classes, where adults know them extremely well. They make progress in academic subjects while developing confidence, communication and practical independence. Preparing food, handling money, gardening and woodwork give learning a real purpose. Pupils are proud of what they can achieve and are increasingly willing to try unfamiliar activities.

Pupils particularly enjoy the extensive outdoor spaces, including the 'jungle', a wooded garden with places to explore and spend time together. They talk enthusiastically about playing hide and seek with staff there. Caring for animals, outdoor activities, sport and visits into the community provide further opportunities to develop confidence and social skills.

For pupils who once found attending school difficult, participating well in daily school life represents important progress. Older pupils are beginning to explore qualifications and future opportunities. Across the school, pupils learn, make friends and become more confident about their futures.

Next steps

- Leaders should embed consistent use of assessment to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapt teaching across subjects, so that pupils learn and remember more over time.
- Leaders should strengthen pupils' retention of knowledge in personal, social, health and economic education and extend meaningful employer engagement and workplace experiences to further improve preparation for adulthood.

About this inspection

The inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This inspection took place from 3 November to 5 November 2026.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, teaching, pastoral and therapeutic staff, the proprietor and governors. Inspectors visited lessons across the school, spoke with pupils, reviewed their work and considered documents, including those relating to safeguarding, curriculum and behaviour.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school provides full-time education for up to 66 pupils aged between 10 and 18. At the time of the inspection, there were 37 pupils at the school.

All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils attending the school have social, emotional or mental health needs. A significant proportion have autistic spectrum disorder.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school was registered by the DfE on 11 September 2025. This was the school's first standard inspection.

The proprietor body is Cavendish Education Ltd. The chair of the proprietor body is Atif Hassan.

The fees currently charged are £59000.

The school's email address is office@lifeskillsenterprise.co.uk.

Headteacher: Paul Barrett

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided — Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils — Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils — Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors — Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools — Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information — Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:
Hilary Macdonald, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspector:
Louise Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

This data is from 3 November 2026

Total pupils

37

School capacity

66

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

37

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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