

Earley Springs

Ashford Road, Harrietsham, Maidstone ME17 1BL

Inspection date

7 January 2026

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards. It is currently operating without registration

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii) and 2(2)(h) to 4

- The proprietor has ensured that the required range of curriculum documents are in place and likely to be fit for purpose. The intended curriculum demonstrates ambition as well as an understanding of pupils' likely needs and starting points. It draws on a range of relevant guidance and statutory requirements for maintained schools.
- The proposed school's curriculum is structured into three pathways: 'explorers', 'discoverers' and 'investigators'. These pathways have been designed to meet the anticipated range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils who do not communicate through speech will experience a curriculum and approaches that are multisensory and highly individualised through the 'explorers' pathway. There is a strong emphasis in the 'discoverers' pathway on preparing pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to access subject-specific learning. The 'investigators' pathway is for pupils who can access the national curriculum, when adapted, to meet their needs and starting points.
- A focus on promoting pupils' communication, interaction and independence underpins all pathways. The proposed school's ultimate long-term focus is on preparing pupils for their future lives and adulthood, whatever shape this may take. The proprietor is ambitious about what pupils can achieve given the right conditions and support. Across pathways, the curriculum will be personalised according to the outcomes that are set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- The curriculum includes the required breadth. For those accessing a subject-based curriculum, this will include English, mathematics, science, history, geography, art and design, music, computing, physical education, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE). Many of these subjects will be taught using a topic-based approach. The proprietor has deliberately designed the curriculum in this way to provide opportunities for pupils to revisit and deepen their understanding.

- The proprietor is clear about the importance of reading. A positive reading culture is already evident throughout the environment. The proposed school is already well stocked with books. Planning takes account of the full range of pupils' needs, from those not yet ready to access formal phonics teaching to fluent readers. The proposed school will follow a validated phonics scheme when teaching pupils to read. This will be implemented by appropriately trained staff using the correct bespoke materials.
- The proposed curriculum prioritises pupils' personal and social development through PSHE, RSHE and beyond. The proprietor has carefully considered how to engage with parents and carers to enable them to contribute their views. One of the core strands of the PSHE curriculum is preparing pupils for adulthood. For secondary-age pupils, arrangements for providing careers education and advice are likely to meet requirements. Pupils will receive independent external advice and guidance.
- The proprietor is determined to recruit well-trained staff, including only qualified teachers. There are rigorous recruitment processes in place. The proprietor has planned appropriate school-specific training for staff induction and beyond. Inspectors made two visits to the alternative provision offered by the proprietor at the premises while it was operating. Adults engage pupils well. Interactions between adults and pupils are of a high quality. Staff are effective in supporting pupils' language development as well as promoting their progress in phonics, early mathematics and transcription skills.
- The proposed school is already well resourced. The proprietor's investment has been enhanced by community donations, reflecting the proposed school's success in building links and establishing relationships in the local area.
- There is a suitable assessment framework in place. This aligns closely with the intended curriculum. It also allows for pupils' progress towards their EHC plan targets to be carefully tracked. The proprietor has made suitable arrangements to share information with pupils' parents about the progress pupils are making.
- The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards (the standards) contained in this part are likely to be met.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- The proprietor has identified and mapped opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development systematically across the curriculum, as well as through assemblies and a range of wider activities.
- Pupils will be provided with practical opportunities to understand their role in modern Britain. For example, the proposed school will reinforce the importance of rules and laws through establishing routines. The curriculum and books pupils will encounter reflect the diversity of the wider community. Policies and curriculum plans pay close attention to the protected characteristics. Pupils will explore different types of families, cultures and faiths through a range of texts. They will participate in democratic activities, such as voting for their favourite book.
- The proprietor has carefully curated planned approaches to support pupils' personal development, mental health and wellbeing. Themes such as kindness will help

promote emotional awareness. Activities will include purposeful community visits to help pupils learn vital skills such as road and personal safety. The proprietor has carefully considered how to use the proposed school's immersive technology to prepare pupils for wider-world experiences.

- The proprietor demonstrates strong knowledge about teaching pupils with a wide range of needs how to keep themselves safe. The proposed school will prioritise equipping pupils with the skills and confidence to communicate their thoughts, wants and needs. Pupils will be taught to recognise their own and others' needs and understand natural consequences, helping them to develop a sense of personal responsibility.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)

- There is a suitable safeguarding policy published on the proposed school's website. It takes account of relevant guidance and clearly spells out everybody's responsibility for safeguarding. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies are appropriately trained. The DSL has experience fulfilling this role in maintained schools.
- The proprietor has set out a range of deliberate steps to avoid any risk of the proposed school becoming a 'closed' community. This is reflected in policies, safeguarding arrangements and training. An important part of this has been the proprietor's decision to form a well-qualified 'executive board' as an external layer of governance. The executive board chair understands the important part the executive board is intended to play, including regarding safeguarding. Roles and responsibilities are set out clearly in writing.
- The proprietor's initial proposal is that the proprietor chair and headteacher will be the DSL. Once the school is operating and begins to grow, the proprietor intends to appoint a deputy headteacher who would take on the role of DSL. In the meantime, there are sufficient mitigations in place. Policies, staff induction and training include appropriate guidance about what to do in the event of a concern about the proprietor. These important messages are prominently displayed on safeguarding posters throughout the school.
- The proprietor is knowledgeable about safeguarding and the particular context in which the proposed school will operate. This includes clarity about the contextual risks, including safeguarding pupils who do not communicate through speech. The proprietor is strongly committed to giving every pupil a voice. The proposed school has a suitable electronic system for recording concerns, using a package designed for the purpose. Staff will be trained in its use at the point of induction.

Paragraphs 9 to 10

- The school aims to create a calm, safe and predictable environment where every child can thrive and feel valued. The proprietor intends for staff to tailor approaches to individual pupils to support them to develop self-regulation, confidence and resilience.

Proposed arrangements demonstrate strong awareness of pupils' likely needs and suitable approaches to meet these.

- This understanding extends to approaches to bullying and other behaviours of concern. Policies acknowledge that although some pupils may struggle to recognise the impact of their actions, all incidents that cause harm or distress must be appropriately and sensitively addressed. Policies convey a clear commitment to communicate promptly and openly with parents.
- Staff induction training will include the comprehensive behaviour policy. Staff will also be trained in accredited approaches to safe positive handling. However, the proposed school's ethos places an explicit emphasis on de-escalating situations to avoid the need for physical intervention, with such action seen as a 'last resort'. The proprietor believes firmly in protecting pupils' rights and autonomy, with any physical intervention being only justified by significant risk to safety.

Paragraphs 11 to 16(b)

- The proprietor has published suitable policies for health and safety, risk assessment and first aid. There are systemic arrangements in place for making and recording a range of routine health and safety checks. Leaders are vigilant regarding site security.
- Those responsible for the oversight of health and safety demonstrate a proactive and responsive attitude to managing and mitigating risk. Detailed written risk assessments for a range of purposes reflect a robust approach to risk management. Commissioning and acting on expert advice, the proprietor has ensured that appropriate fire safety arrangements are in place.
- Staff are suitably trained for their various roles, including administering first aid. Proposed ratios of pupils and staff are likely to provide for adequate supervision throughout the school day. Supported by software dedicated for the purpose, there are arrangements in place to maintain compliant admissions and attendance registers.
- The proprietor has planned how welfare, health and safety arrangements will be monitored and reviewed. This includes dedicated leadership meetings to ensure that policies are implemented effectively and that improvements are secured where necessary.
- The proprietor has ensured that all standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b) and 21(5) to 21(6)

- The safer recruitment policy sets out clearly each stage of the proposed school's processes. Selection and recruitment arrangements align closely with best practice guidance. The proprietor has commissioned a specialist external company to support with pre-employment vetting, including overseas checks as needed.
- The single central record makes provision for recording all necessary information, including the dates that checks were made or certificates were seen. The record already details the pre-employment checks of staff appointed to date, as well as members of the proprietor body and executive board. Although the proprietor hopes

not to use agency supply staff, leaders understand the requirements should the need arise.

- The proprietor has ensured that all requirements of this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to (24)(1)(b) and 24(2) to 29(1)(b)

- The proprietor has completely redeveloped and designed the proposed school's interior and exterior space for the intended purpose. Renovations throughout are finished to a high standard. The environment is warm, inviting, attractive and functional. Lighting and acoustic conditions are unlikely to present any issues throughout the premises.
- As well as 6 large classrooms, a dedicated dining hall and numerous break-out rooms and offices, there is a generous allocation of common areas. These have been specifically purposed to meet pupils' sensory and other needs. Facilities include a sensory room, a large soft-play room and a sensory 'immersive' room. Outside space is similarly thoughtfully designed and is likely to provide well for pupils' learning, social and physical development needs.
- Separate toilets for staff and pupils exceed recommended ratios. Pupil toilets are adjacent to classrooms, with some including wet rooms and showers. The allotted medical room meets all requirements, including an integral sink and nearby toilet facilities. Plentiful sources of drinking water are clearly labelled throughout the school. Hot water is appropriately regulated and does not present a scalding risk.
- The proprietor has ensured that all standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f) to 32(2)(b) and 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(4)(c)

- The proprietor is well informed about the information that the school must provide or make available to parents, local authorities, inspectors and the Secretary of State. Relevant information is publicly accessible on the proposed school's website or available on request.
- The proprietor is also aware of the information that needs to be published or made available once the school is operating. Proposals for providing written reports to parents, and for annual reviews of pupils' EHC plans, are likely to meet or exceed requirements.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)

- The proposed school's written complaints policy sets out appropriate arrangements to consider both informal and formal complaints. It specifies the timescales for seeking resolution to such concerns. The proprietor has carefully considered arrangements for

complaints that cannot be resolved internally. This includes provision for a complaints panel that includes representation independent from the proposed school's leadership and management. Record-keeping arrangements are likely to meet requirements.

- The proprietor has ensured that the standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor has a clear and convincing vision for the proposed school. The chair of the proprietor body, who will also be the headteacher, is clear about the needs of pupils for whom the school proposes to cater. She conveys appropriate ambition and has a breadth of relevant knowledge and experience. This includes leadership roles across maintained primary, secondary and specialist provision. She values highly the importance of relevant expertise and qualifications and personally holds professional qualifications for headteachers and SEND coordinators.
- Beyond the requirements of an independent school, the proprietor has already secured an additional layer of governance by forming an executive board. Volunteer members bring a range of pertinent expertise and experience. Their roles and responsibilities are set out clearly in terms of reference and the proposed school's policies. The executive board chair conveys a convincing sense of moral purpose alongside suitable knowledge to fulfil the role. She is mindful of the need to oversee the wellbeing of the proprietor chair and headteacher as well as providing challenge as a 'critical friend'. Arrangements for reporting, monitoring visits and meetings are likely to support effective governance.
- The proprietor has already commissioned specialist external school improvement support. Leaders have also visited a range of established independent schools to learn from effective practice. Policies, documents and plans for the proposed school demonstrate convincing awareness and knowledge of the standards and associated requirements. The proprietor demonstrates a firm commitment to meeting these consistently.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standard in this part is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has been proactive in prioritising accessibility from the outset when designing and developing the proposed school. The accessibility plan covers all of the required elements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	152328
DfE registration number	886/6195
Inspection number	10431004

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent day school
Proprietor	Earley Springs Limited
Chair	Harriet Carter
Headteacher	Harriet Carter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,000 to £72,000
Telephone number	01622 805222
Website	http://earleyspringsschool.com/
Email address	officeadmin@earleyspringsschool.com

Provider already operating

Number of pupils of compulsory school age	5
Number of pupils of compulsory school age who have an education, health and care plan, or who are looked after by a local authority	5
Total hours operating as a school per week	30
Total hours of teaching provided per week	30

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	5 to 11	5 to 13	5 to 13
Number of pupils on the school roll	5	72	72

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	0	72
Number of part-time pupils	5	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	5	72
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	5	72
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	3	72

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	2	7
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0

Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is located in Ashford Road, Harrietsham, Maidstone ME17 1BL. It is housed in a detached single-storey property that stands within its own grounds in a semi-rural location on the main road between Harrietsham and Lenham.
- The proprietor is Earley Springs Limited. The headteacher is one of two directors and is the proprietor body chair. The proprietor does not operate any other independent schools. The proprietor has also formed an executive board to provide an additional layer of governance for the proposed school.
- The proprietor expects that most pupils will have an EHC plan. Many are likely to be placed by a local authority. The school intends to cater predominantly for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. Pupils may also have the following SEND: cognition and learning needs; speech, language and communication difficulties; autism;

and moderate learning difficulties. The school is also accessible for pupils with physical disabilities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to determine whether the proposed school is likely to meet the standards if it is given permission to open. This was the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection.
- Inspectors toured the proposed school premises. They discussed and reviewed all relevant proposals and plans for the new school with the proprietor and other leaders. The lead inspector held an online meeting with the chair of the executive board.
- Before and during the on-site visit, inspectors scrutinised a wide range of policies, documents and records presented by the proprietor as evidence of the school's likelihood to meet the independent school standards.
- Earley Springs Limited currently offers alternative provision from the same premises it proposes to register as an independent school. Pupils may attend this provision for a maximum of 15 hours, and some attend for much less. The first pupils began attending the provision on 4 September 2025. It currently has 5 registered pupils, including pupils who have an EHC plan. Inspectors observed the provision operating as part of this inspection and spoke with staff and pupils. The proprietor intends to cease operating the part-time alternative provision if the Department for Education registers Earley Springs as an independent school.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Laura James

His Majesty's Inspector

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