

Inspection of Cambian Great Dunmow School

Unit 13, Flitch Industrial Estate, Chelmsford Road, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 1XJ

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 September 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils achieve well at school. They join having previously experienced disruption to their education. Pupils value how staff take the time to get to know them as an individual. Staff provide the support pupils need to turn their attitudes to learning around.

Staff skilfully help pupils to manage their feelings and emotions. Approaches to behaviour are underpinned by strong relationships. This all starts in the morning, where pupils are greeted warmly by staff before settling into breakfast and a chat with their key worker. This sets pupils up well for the day ahead. Pupils are motivated to learn. They work hard and show resilience. This helps them to achieve the high expectations that staff have of them.

Pupils value the new and exciting opportunities the school offers them. Prefects and older pupils are proud to be positive role models. The curriculum is well supported by an ever-expanding range of enrichment activities. Pupils love attending these in school and when learning off site. Whether studying car mechanics, taking part in parkour, or learning how to ski, pupils are inspired to learn new skills. These experiences also help to spark interests in pupils for life after Cambian Great Dunmow.

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

The school has made significant improvements. It has trained staff to better understand how to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Staff do this skilfully. For example, they consistently apply the established approaches to behaviour. This has created the calm and purposeful atmosphere that permeates the school.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Clearly understood induction processes ensure that the school has a full picture of pupils' specific needs and gaps in knowledge when they join. The school uses information contained in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to set clear, precise and measurable targets for pupils. Staff typically use this information well to tailor learning for pupils. For example, in mathematics, staff carefully check pupils' understanding before they ask them to solve more complex mathematical problems. This helps pupils to secure their understanding, so they are ready to move on to new learning.

Across subjects, the school has clearly designed the curriculum to help pupils build on their knowledge over time. Pupils engage well across subjects. They secure some useful qualifications and accreditations for their next steps. However, the school has not established a clearly understood and agreed approach to teach pupils to write at increasing depth or accuracy. As a result, pupils' writing skills do not develop as quickly as they could.

The school has rightly focused on establishing a consistent approach to the teaching of reading. Well-trained staff quickly identify any pupil who needs help. Staff ably support pupils to become more confident and fluent readers. The school has also prioritised developing pupils' wider reading habits. There has been much success with this. Pupils are much more positive about selecting a book or magazine to sit and read from the well-stocked school library.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a crucial subject. The carefully designed PSHE programme helps pupils to secure their understanding of important content. Staff skilfully adapt the curriculum to fill pupils' gaps in knowledge. This makes it relevant and engaging for pupils. Pupils develop important life skills, such as how to form healthy and positive relationships. This is then reflected in the positive interactions pupils have with their friends during lunchtime.

Pupils receive useful careers guidance and information. This helps many pupils to identify and transition well to their next destinations. The school has recently introduced new strategies to further integrate the careers offer throughout the curriculum. Some of this work is at an early stage of implementation. Consequently, the full impact is yet to be seen.

The proprietor keeps a close eye on the school. It has ensured that the school meets the independent school standards (the standards) including schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The site is well maintained and conducive to meeting the specific needs of the pupils who attend. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Quality assurance processes provide appropriate layers of challenge and support. This helps the proprietor, and the school, to understand what the school is doing well and where to target future school improvement priorities.

Leaders have successfully brought about the rapid improvement that has been needed. They have done this while carefully managing staff workload and well-being. Staff feel very well supported and are exceptionally proud to work at the school. This helps staff to provide the bespoke and individualised support pupils need to be ready for their futures.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Teaching strategies to support pupils' writing development across subjects are not as consistently matched to pupils' needs as they could be. This limits the depth and accuracy of pupils' written work. The school should ensure staff have the required expertise to develop pupils' writing effectively.
- Some of the careers curriculum is at an early stage of implementation. While pupils benefit from some useful careers guidance, this does not consistently

provide them with the depth of information they need to inform future choices. The school should ensure that careers education is fully embedded. This is so pupils are better supported to identify and transition to appropriate next stages.

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	149357
DfE registration number	881/6091
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10391815
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Childcare Limited
Chair	Farouq Rashid Sheikh
Headteacher	Carrie-Ann Gibbs
Annual fees (day pupils)	£69,726 to £100,626
Telephone number	013 7170 5623
Website	www.cambiangroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/semh-schools/cambian-great-dunmow-school/
Email address	Carrie-ann.gibbs@cambiangroup.com
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 October 2023 and 16 to 18 April 2024

Information about this school

- The proprietor body is Cambian Childcare Limited, which is part of the Caretech group of companies. The Caretech group provides a range of services for children nationally, including other registered schools.
- The school operates from one site. Unit 23, Flitch Industrial Estate, Chelmsford Road, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 1XJ.
- The school is registered to admit up to 25 pupils between the ages of 11 to 19.
- There are currently no pupils on roll in key stage 5.
- The school provides education for pupils with SEND, who have an EHC plan for their SEMH needs.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority.
- The school currently uses two unregistered providers of alternative provision.
- The headteacher took up post in May 2024. The deputy headteacher joined in July 2024.
- The school's first standard inspection was completed in April 2024. At this inspection, the school was evaluated to require improvement with unmet standards.
- After the standard inspection the DfE asked the school to submit an action plan. This was evaluated by Ofsted in July 2024. It was deemed acceptable, if modifications were made. There was a progress monitoring inspection in October 2024. At this, the school was evaluated not to meet the standards. The DfE asked the school to submit an action plan. This was evaluated by Ofsted and deemed acceptable in January 2025.
- In March 2025 there was a second progress monitoring inspection. At this inspection, all previously unmet standards were evaluated as being met.

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.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with the director of education for Caretech, the national quality assurance lead, the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, staff, and a representative from a local authority that commissions places at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects; English, mathematics, creative arts and PSHE. Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, considered curriculum information, visited lessons, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with pupils.
- Inspectors also reviewed evidence of work and spoke with leaders and pupils about some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- To check compliance with the standards, inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. They visited classrooms, toured the site, reviewed pupil information, school policies and records relating to a range of aspects of the school, such as behaviour and health and safety.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with some parents and carers.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff. Inspectors also met with staff and pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Daniel Short

His Majesty's Inspector

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