

# Inspection of Avocet House

The Old Vicarage, School Lane, Heckingham, Norfolk NR14 6QP

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Inspection dates: 21 to 23 September 2021

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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| The quality of education                               | <b>Good</b>        |
| Behaviour and attitudes                                | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Personal development                                   | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Leadership and management                              | <b>Good</b>        |
| Sixth-form provision                                   | <b>Good</b>        |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection           | Outstanding        |
| Does the school meet the independent school standards? | <b>Yes</b>         |

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are provided with a secure, safe and supportive environment in Avocet House. Pupils have often experienced difficult times. Most of them have spent extended periods out of education. Pupils enjoy highly positive relationships with their teachers, who know their individual needs well. This ensures that pupils re-engage with their learning and rebuilds their sense of worth and belonging.

Pupils behave very well. Leaders have very high expectations, coupled with an excellent nurturing approach. If pupils become distressed or upset, staff skilfully deal with pupils' concerns in a sensitive and calm manner. Pupils settle quickly and flourish in their learning.

Pupils are polite and well mannered. They are respectful when speaking about their experiences of school. They feel safe because adults are always available and ready to listen to any worries or concerns that they may have.

Pupils enjoy a variety of rich experiences personalised to their own interests. Activities include cycling, horse riding and learning different skills of construction. These additional activities make a significant contribution to pupils, building their self-esteem and confidence.

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

Since the previous full inspection, the new head of school and the staff have developed the curriculum. Leaders make use of the national curriculum to identify what pupils need to know and learn. Leaders have designed subject plans to include the important knowledge pupils will learn. This helps teachers to decide on and plan lessons in a logical order so that pupils can learn well. In a few subjects, such as history and geography, leaders have not completed their curriculum plans. Leaders have not yet included all the key knowledge pupils need to learn.

Many pupils start at Avocet House with significant gaps in their knowledge due to the time they have previously spent out of school. Teachers quickly assess the personal needs of individual pupils. They craft plans to help enthuse pupils back into learning by focusing on pupils' interests. For example, teachers provide pupils with the knowledge they need to set up different enterprise projects.

Teachers question pupils effectively to check what pupils remember from previous learning. They use this information to fill any gaps in pupils' understanding. Staff are alert to how pupils are feeling. Adults know how to respond if pupils become anxious. They understand how to address pupils' concerns. This ensures that pupils are better prepared for learning.

All pupils who attend the learning centre are carefully helped to learn to read. A well-structured phonics programme is in place. Teachers promote pupils' reading

skills and interest in reading through the effective use of a book club. Pupils are developing their confidence and fluency in reading.

Pupils who attend Avocet House develop a highly positive approach to learning and are eager to do well. Pupils show a deep respect for one another. Pupils understand how to regulate their own behaviours when they become stressed. Adults use effective strategies to help pupils during these times. Pupils' exemplary behaviours contribute extremely well to making the school a happy place in which to learn.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. Leaders pursue every opportunity to reflect the school's 'no limits' ethos. Leaders provide a wide range of activities that build on pupils' interests. These activities are woven through leaders' plans to develop pupils' self-awareness and confidence. Pupils enjoy learning to ride horses, climb and sail. Pupils have a well-tuned sense of right and wrong. They broaden their understanding of different communities and faiths. Pupils learn important skills for life, such as self-care and managing personal finances.

Leaders provide effectively for pupils' careers education. This is a strong aspect of the school's provision. From the very start of their time at Avocet House, pupils are well prepared for their next stages. Staff talk and guide pupils to help them understand how to make best choices. The school uses local colleges to provide placements for pupils' further education.

The proprietor has regular involvement in the leadership of the school. Management teams are well structured. Leaders provide important information to the proprietor about how the independent school standards continue to be met and how the quality of education is delivered. The proprietor ensures that external professional expertise and advice are available for leaders so that the school continues to improve.

The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards are met. The school complies with the Equality Act 2010. The buildings are well maintained, and the outside area is well kept. The learning centre has been thoughtfully refurbished to create workstations for pupils to use for their learning. Leaders have included detailed information in the health and safety policies. Procedures are clear, ensuring that the school is maintained as a safe place. The school's safeguarding policy is on the school's website and is also made available to parents and carers on request.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding leads work effectively together. They provide appropriate training for staff. Staff carefully follow the procedures for keeping pupils safe. Staff are alert for, and report any signs of concern. Leaders work well with external agencies to support highly vulnerable pupils. Leaders' records of the checks carried out when employing staff are thorough and well maintained.

Pupils learn about the appropriate use of online technologies as part of the curriculum.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- In some subjects, such as history and geography, leaders have not identified all the important knowledge to be taught to pupils over time. This means that pupils do not build their understanding from what they already know. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are coherently planned and logically sequenced, and that staff are trained to teach all areas well.

Transition arrangements have been applied. This is because the school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned to include all the key knowledge in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken in planning the curriculum and training staff in how to deliver it that they are in the process of bringing this about.

## **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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

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|---|--|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 134978   |
| <b>DfE registration number</b>                    | 926/6419   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Norfolk  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10203405   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Other independent special school   |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Independent special school   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 8 to 18  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Boys   |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>         | Boys   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 6  |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 2  |
| <b>Number of part-time pupils</b>                 | 0  |
| <b>Proprietor</b>                                 | Jon Lees   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Helen Waring   |
| <b>Annual fees</b>                                | £298,000   |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                           | 01508 549320   |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.specialisteducation.co.uk">www.specialisteducation.co.uk</a>       |
| <b>Email address</b>                              | <a href="mailto:office@specialisteducation.co.uk">office@specialisteducation.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | 9 to 11 May 2017   |

## Information about this school

- Avocet House is part of Specialist Education Services group. It is a small independent special school that is registered for 10 boys between eight and 18 years of age.
- A single proprietor provides governance of the school.
- Since the previous full inspection, a new head of school was appointed in April 2020.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs, and personal education plans.
- The school makes use of the following providers: East Coast College and City College, Norwich.
- The school does not use supply staff.
- The school was last inspected in May 2017, when the overall quality of education was judged as outstanding, and all the independent school standards were 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The standard inspection was carried out at the request of the DfE. As part of this inspection, a material change request was considered to allow the school to admit girls.
- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with the head of school, the deputy head of school and the operational director. They also spoke to the designated safeguarding leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the proprietor. He looked at documents relating to leadership and management.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science, and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). Inspectors met with the curriculum leaders for these subjects, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teaching staff and pupils.

- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally in class and around the school at breaktimes. The lead inspector spoke more formally with a group of pupils to seek their views about the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documents, including the school's own self-evaluation and improvement plans, school policies, child protection and safeguarding information, curriculum plans, attendance and admissions registers, and the minutes of leadership team meetings, including those with the proprietor.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. During the inspection, the lead inspector had phone conversations with a relative of a pupil. Inspectors took account of the five responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.

### **Inspection team**

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop

Her Majesty's Inspector

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