

# Higford School

Independent school standard inspection report

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

Higford School provides education for boys and girls aged eight to nineteen years who have autistic spectrum conditions and associated complex needs, and challenging behaviours. It is located in Higford, near to Shifnal in Shropshire. The school is owned by New Options (3) Ltd which also owns a number of children's homes. The school is registered for 20 students. There are 17 students on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Fourteen of the students live in one of the company's children's homes; nine of the students are looked after children. The school opened in 2007 and was last inspected by Ofsted in April 2008.

The school aims to, 'provide an innovative and holistic service' for its pupils enabling them to access the, 'same positive outcomes which matter for all children' through, 'bespoke programmes... high expectations' and, 'reflective practice'.

## Evaluation of the school

Higford School provides a good quality of education. Its highly specialist provision meets the needs of its students well. Procedures to manage students' behaviour and to keep them safe are exemplary. Consequently, their behaviour is outstanding. The school has grown in size and improved considerably in all areas since its previous inspection. The school meets all of the regulations for registration as an independent school.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is centred around the school's excellent specialist environment including a wide range of high-quality facilities and extensive grounds. Curriculum planning is underpinned by a very clear curriculum policy which outlines the school's clearly defined aims and principles to meet the needs of its particular students, including provision to ensure that all students receive their entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. The school very successfully uses a commercial scheme to plan personalised programmes of work for individual students based on the National Curriculum. It adopts a thematic approach which runs through the entire school. This approach allows for individuality as well as effective cross-curricular links. Students' programmes are highly detailed with very clear and measurable targets linked to nationally recognised attainment levels.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

Post-16 students follow an appropriately broad personalised scheme of work. They also have the opportunity to undertake land studies at a local farm. These activities contribute well to their social development. They are supported to develop life skills through a structured programme of work including Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes. For example, the personal progress award includes opportunities for students to develop their basic skills such as speaking and listening, and numeracy as well as their social skills through planning and undertaking shopping trips to purchase food and then prepare a meal for an invited guest. Work experience opportunities are planned to meet students' needs. They range from taking responsibilities to help in the school's 'Bistro' or the local community to taking on jobs at the farm.

The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of activities away from the school site including equestrian skills and swimming. Strong links with the company's care staff extend learning and development further by enabling students to participate in activities such as Scouts, youth club, swimming and climbing as well as activities to develop their life skills such as shopping, leisure and social activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and students make good progress. Teaching is very personalised and most of it takes the form of one-to-one sessions. There are good opportunities for social interaction through circle time at registration and during group activities such as singing. Staff are very knowledgeable, especially with regard to the specific needs of students with autism. They are supported by a comprehensive multi-disciplinary team. As a result, teaching is highly focused towards the specific needs of the students. Behaviour management is excellent; its effectiveness is evident in the way students have learnt to manage their own behaviour and in how they confidently mix with others in public places. The sensory area is used especially well to help students to lower their levels of anxiety. Adults make very good use of appropriate systems, including signing and visual clues to communicate with students and develop trusting relationships. They use questioning well, such as on a shopping trip to a local supermarket when staff asked students questions to help them make choices and pay for their shopping. Routines are clearly established and staff use visual schedules very well leading to smooth transitions between activities and when moving around the school. A good variety of activities and the effective use of rewards help to maintain good levels of engagement and a good pace of learning.

Although there are many very strong features, teaching is not outstanding because staff do not always maximise opportunities to extend students' learning and development. On a few occasions, adults miss opportunities to challenge students fully such as by encouraging them to complete more of a focused task or by raising expectations of what they can do independently or asking them to refine the quality of their work. Consequently, the balance between the planned learning and activities or rewards selected by students is not conducive to the very best learning.

Education staff have established excellent communication systems with care staff in the company's homes through detailed handover periods and 24-hour logs ensuring that learning and development is continuous between home and school.

The school's detailed initial referral and assessment process, involving the multi-disciplinary staff team, takes place prior to admission. This enables the school to plan well to meet the individual needs of the students. Rigorous assessment continues throughout each student's time at the school and through transition to other services. This rigorous process is used well to modify programmes as students learn and develop. The comprehensive annual education review process ensures that the school meets the provisions required by individual statements of special educational needs. These reviews are underpinned by detailed assessments and reports ensuring that statements are amended to best suit the students' developing needs.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Staff and students relate extremely well to each other because staff have a thorough understanding of the students' needs. Consequently, students show good levels of enthusiasm and very good attitudes to their work. Students develop high levels of self-confidence and show pride in their achievements. They overcome the difficulties they initially face in interacting with others and are able to relate well to visitors. Attendance levels are very high; a large majority of students currently have 100% attendance this year.

Staff implement behaviour management strategies consistently and these are highly effective in helping students to manage their own behaviour. For example, students occasionally choose to take time to cool down before their anxiety levels become too high. Staff recognise the symptoms quickly and respond extremely well ensuring that anxiety levels are reduced and students quickly return to purposeful learning activities. The school's records show that there are very few incidents of unacceptable behaviour and these are reducing. Consequently, students' behaviour is outstanding.

Students from a range of different ethnic backgrounds get on well together. Through the rich thematic curriculum and a comprehensive assembly programme students have very good opportunities to develop an understanding of different cultures. They recognise national events such as harvest festival, Remembrance Day and Christmas as well as festivals from a wider range of cultures including Jewish New Year, Eid, Diwali and Chinese New Year. A range of visits, including to a war memorial, a Christmas market and to places of worship helps to bring these topics to life. All students participate in charitable events such as Children in Need, Comic Relief and National Autism Awareness Day.

Students are very well prepared for their lives beyond school through life skills work with a strong focus on independence, social and leisure skills. They have excellent opportunities to develop their social and independent living skills when they go out

on regular visits to the supermarket and library. They plan their visits, including making lists, select their goods and pay at the checkout. They behave extremely well and relate well to employees and members of the public.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has implemented all of the required policies. These are very clearly written and tailored extremely well to the specific needs of the students. Comprehensive recruitment procedures and induction arrangements for new staff, including training in first aid and safeguarding, ensure that all of the adults working in the school are well prepared to care for the students.

Procedures to identify and minimise risks are extremely robust. Very good quality individual risk assessments, evacuation plans and health care plans have been implemented to ensure that attention to safety, health and well-being is outstanding. There is a strong link between education and care provision ensuring excellent continuity of care. The school's meticulous records indicate that systems for checking electrical appliances, fire alarms and emergency lighting are exemplary. Comprehensive arrangements are in place to ensure excellent levels of supervision without inhibiting students' freedom.

Students have good opportunities for physical exercise as part of their individual programmes contributing towards their healthy lifestyles.

The school building is new and purpose-built providing very good facilities and ensuring that it is fully accessible to disabled people. Strategies for communication with disabled people and meeting the needs of students and visitors are excellent. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school carries out all of the required checks on staff prior to their appointment and maintains a single central register in line with requirements.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The buildings and grounds provide an excellent learning environment for the students. Teaching rooms have been well designed and are maintained in a clean and attractive state. Specialist indoor and outdoor areas meet the students' specific needs extremely well. The sensory hub has been thoughtfully designed and provides a range of high-quality facilities including a water-play room, well-being room, multi-sensory room, soft-play room and sauna. The extensive and well planned grounds provide good opportunities for recreation and gardening activities.

## **Provision of information**

The school provides all of the required information for parents, carers and others. Parents and carers are provided with clearly written and informative annual reports about the attainment and progress of their children. The reports benefit from helpful photographic evidence of the students' work.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which fulfils the regulations.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

## **What the school could do to improve further**

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development.

- Maximise all possible opportunities for learning and development by:
  - having the highest expectations of what students are able to achieve at all times
  - providing every opportunity for students to develop their skills of independence.

## Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Independent special		
<b>Date school opened</b>	16 November 2007		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	8–19		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 13	Girls: 3	Total: 16
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 14	Girls: 3	Total: 17
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 8	Girls: 1	Total: 9
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£62,687 to £88,712		
<b>Address of school</b>	Higford Hall, , Shifnal, TF11 9ET		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01952 630600		
<b>Email address</b>	anne.adams@higfordschool.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anne Adams		
<b>Proprietor</b>	New Options (3) Ltd		

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



16 March 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Higford School, Shifnal, TF11 9ET**

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school this week. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with some of you.

You get a good quality of education at Higford School and make good progress in your learning. This is because the adults who work with you know you all very well and have an excellent understanding about how they can help you to learn. They plan good activities for you to do and you all try hard to do your best. Occasionally, you could achieve a little more before you have your reward. Therefore, I have suggested that your teachers encourage you to complete a bit more work during some of your activities. I have also suggested that they encourage you to do a few more things for yourselves, such as picking up the cones at the end of an exercise session outside.

The staff help you to manage your behaviour very well. You understand very clearly what you are expected to do and respect the staff. As a result, your behaviour is outstanding. The staff work extremely well to make sure you are safe; they take excellent care of you. I enjoyed going shopping with some of you and visiting the library. These sorts of opportunities will help you to develop important skills as you grow older and try to become more independent.

Please keep working hard and try to achieve as much as you can while you are at Higford. My very best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby  
Her Majesty's Inspector