

Options College Shifnal

Lamlodge Lane, Shifnal TF11 8SD

Inspection date

24 February 2016

Overall outcome

Unmet independent school standards identified

Reason for the inspection

- This unannounced emergency inspection visit was requested by the Department of Education (DfE), the registration authority for independent schools, to check the college's continued compliance with the independent school standards. The DfE requested that the inspection focus on pupils' behaviour and its management, specifically the requirements relating to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Part 2) and pupils' welfare, health and safety (Part 3).

Main findings

- A small number of pupils were on the school site on the day of this visit, as a significant proportion of those in Key Stage 3 and above were playing in an inter-school football tournament.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- The requirements for this standard continue to be met. The college promotes pupils' emotional well-being and understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Pupils' good working relationships with staff were evident on a number of occasions during this inspection visit. Pupils say that there is always someone who will listen to them, however minor the matter may appear.
- The college continues to promote pupils' understanding of British traditions and values; on the day of this inspection visit, learners in the sixth form were discussing the Prime Minister's recently concluded negotiations about the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union.
- Pupils develop their understanding of the meaning of individual liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect and tolerance for others. As they prepare for their next steps in education and life in modern Britain, pupils reflect on other people's lifestyles, faiths and needs, and develop an awareness of radical or extremist views.
- Pupils know right from wrong; in discussion, pupils say that they are encouraged to develop strategies to help them make the right decisions when faced with a dilemma. Older pupils acknowledge that this strategy is mostly, but not always, effective.
- As reported at the time of the inspection in July 2015, pupils reflect on their own needs and make progress in managing their own behaviour. At two different points during this inspection visit, pupils went to the garden area to de-escalate situations where they felt stressed. In both instances the strategy was effective; throughout, staff were available for support, maintaining a calm and caring presence.
- Pupils are clear about the school's rules and understand that these are primarily to ensure their safety and that of others. At the time of the last inspection, pupils indicated that they were aware that, on occasions, staff did not apply 'the rules' consistently; due to the small number of pupils on site, it was not possible to follow this up on the day of this inspection.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- The college continues to meet some, but not all, of the requirements for this standard. This inspection visit identified requirements relating to safeguarding pupils that are no longer met.
- The college provides regular safeguarding training for staff, including in recognising and responding to incidents involving pupils relating to radicalisation, extremism, female genital mutilation and sexual exploitation. The proprietor has also ensured that, in line with requirements, staff have read Part 1 of *Keeping children safe in education* (July 2015), which outlines their statutory responsibilities for responding to any safeguarding concern.
- However, the proprietor has not updated the school's safeguarding policy to reflect the latest statutory requirements; the policy provided for scrutiny during this inspection and published on the college's website on, and prior to, the day of the inspection reflected the previous guidance published in March 2015. This means that aspects of the school's practice are not supported by clear policy statements or up-to-date guidance.
- The college's policies to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying reflect national guidance. Many pupils have a history of extremely challenging behaviour when they enter the college; as reported at the time of the inspection in July 2015, incidents and fixed-term exclusions reduce as pupils re-engage in education.
- The college assesses the risk posed by each pupil and provides guidance as to how this should be addressed; this is designed to minimise the risk to pupils and others.
- Where pupils feel unable to cope with a situation, staff typically help them to de-escalate the situation, often by using the reflection room or having a breath of fresh air in the garden. As observed during this inspection visit, this approach is usually effective and the tension melts away.
- Staff have been trained in the use of de-escalation and physical intervention techniques to prevent pupils harming themselves or others, and there are systems in place to support staff in managing and recording incidents.
- Since the last inspection, eight incidents involving physical intervention by staff have been reported to Shropshire's Safeguarding Children Board. Procedures for dealing with such cases are set out clearly. The college's records show that each incident has been investigated by senior staff and the evidence, including contemporaneous minutes of interviews, is documented in detail.
- To date, the proprietor has held and concluded disciplinary hearings for four of the incidents. There are currently four cases where investigations are either ongoing or have yet to be formally concluded. Accordingly, it is not possible to make judgements on the college's implementation of its behaviour policy or risk assessments over time for this inspection report.

Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- None of the requirements for this standard are met. This is because the proprietor has not ensured that the requirements relating to the college's safeguarding policy, as detailed above, are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school must take action to meet The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements

- The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7, 7(a) and 7(b)).
- The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently; fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and actively promote the well-being of pupils (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

Inspection team

Michael Best, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Information about this school

- Options College Shifnal is a purpose-built independent day school that provides education for up to 50 pupils, aged between seven and 19 years, who may have complex and severe social, emotional and mental health needs, often involving challenging behaviour. It is owned by the Options Group, which also owns other schools in England and Wales.
- Almost all pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. An increasing proportion of pupils have additional learning needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders or moderate learning difficulties.
- Pupils come from a large number of local authorities across England and Wales and occasionally further afield. Most pupils are White British. The large majority of pupils are in Key Stages 3 and 4. There are currently 46 pupils on roll; four attend the school's sixth form and a further 13 its Key Stage 2 provision. There are many more boys than girls on roll.
- Pupils join the school at any point in their primary or secondary school career, some as late as Year 11. Many have been excluded from schools previously or spent long periods of time not attending schools.
- The school makes use of alternative provision at Nova Training, Walford College and Telford College of Arts and Technology, as well as using local businesses or farms for work experience.
- The school receives pupil premium funding for a small number of pupils where the placing local authority passes on this payment in addition to the pupils' fees. Pupil premium funding is specifically for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by their local authority.
- The last full inspection of the school was in July 2015, when the college's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all the independent standards were met.

School details

Unique reference number	133478
Inspection number	10013087
DfE registration number	893/6025

This inspection was conducted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	46
Of which, number of pupils in the sixth form	4
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Options Group
Chair	Graham Baker
Headteacher	Julia Saint
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2015
Annual fees (day pupils)	£83,408
Telephone number	01952 468220
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