

# Sheridan House School

Thetford Road, Northwold, Thetford, Norfolk IP26 5LQ

**Inspection dates** 24–26 May 2016

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The dynamic and capable principal, supported by the passionate headteacher, promotes continuous school improvement. Their insightful understanding of the school's strengths is based on an accurate evaluation of teaching and achievement.
- Governors provide good support and challenge; they hold senior leaders and staff to account for the progress of pupils.
- Pupils gain from the positive relationships they have with staff, which support their growing self-confidence. Pupils feel safe in the school and are confident that staff will keep them safe.
- Pupils develop greater levels of independence and self-control in their everyday lives. Staff routinely review and support their pupils' progress in this area very effectively. As a result, pupils develop the skills necessary to control their own behaviour.
- The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Pupils make good progress in their learning, often from very low starting points, because of high-quality teaching which meets their needs.
- Pupils have increasingly positive attitudes towards their educational experience. Pupils value their relationships with school staff and, as a result, are willing to attend school more regularly. Many are rightly proud of their achievements, particularly their improved attendance.
- Pupils are well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education, training or employment. Well-trained staff skilfully support pupils to find destinations that are appropriate and relevant to their aspirations and ability. They support them well in accessing these provisions.
- The off-site educational venues used for the few pupils who require specialised support meet their needs very well. Leaders identify, monitor and review this provision thoroughly, ensuring that pupils make good progress on these courses.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some senior and middle leaders are not confident in using the school systems to check how much difference teaching is making to the achievement of pupils.
- Some elements of the curriculum are not as effective in supporting pupils with slower processing skills to make as much progress as they could.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards').

## **Full report**

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

- Develop senior and middle leaders' confidence in using the school's information systems so that they can more thoroughly monitor the difference teaching makes to pupils' achievement.
- Refine the curriculum provision for pupils with slower processing skills to ensure that they do not fall behind in their learning and are fully equipped to catch up with their classmates.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The exceptional leadership of the principal, headteacher and governors has led to significant improvements in the school. Leaders do not set limits on the ambitions that they have for the young people in their care. Rigorous monitoring rapidly identifies where changes are needed and leaders take the right actions to secure success. As a result, leaders' and governors' evaluations of the school's effectiveness are accurate and they have an increasingly clear vision for improvement. They are tenacious in their dedication to provide high-quality teaching, learning and assessment for all pupils. As a result, pupils are making better progress, attending regularly and behaving well.
- The culture of the school is strong. There is a very positive atmosphere which promotes pupils' involvement in their learning. Staff morale is high, and difficulties are seen as positive challenges to improve. The staff are all proud to work at this school and say that it is quickly improving.
- Pupils are confident about the measures taken to ensure that they are kept safe. They feel that staff care about them as individuals. As a result, they are keen to come to school as often as they can and attendance is improving.
- Leaders are improving teaching through high-quality training and monitoring. There are clear and well-defined links between leaders' monitoring of teaching and the training staff receive. Tailored training meets the needs of staff and reflects the very specific and ever-changing needs of pupils. Follow-up monitoring also ensures that staff are using this guidance to help pupils learn more effectively. Teachers have lots of opportunities to share good ideas with other colleagues. These mechanisms all inform leaders' decisions about staff salary increases and are improving the teaching that pupils receive.
- Leaders are developing a broad and balanced academic curriculum which also meets pupils' varying social and emotional needs. At key stages 3 and 4, the range of subjects that pupils take part in has significantly improved with the introduction of new accredited subject courses over the past 12 months. Additionally, a bespoke curriculum for pupils with autism ensures that they can access a balanced choice of subjects while removing the barriers to learning that they may face because of their particular needs. However, the curriculum for the pupils with slower cognitive skills is not yet as well matched to their needs and, as a result, these pupils make less rapid progress.
- Leaders prepare pupils well to be independent and ready for the next steps in their lives. The development of pupils' social and emotional skills is carefully tracked. Where pupils need extra help or support, this is given immediately and the effect monitored. This includes the use of effective therapeutic interventions and staff coaching and support. School-based assessment information shows that pupils are gaining in all aspects of their personal development. Visits and visitors help foster pupils' understanding of fundamental British values and promote their excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. For example, pupils made a visit to the Supreme Court in London, where they witnessed at first hand the justice system. They were keen to share with inspectors all they had learned. Assemblies led by staff and visitors such as the local police and community support officer also support this good development.
- Leadership at all levels is improving. Leadership roles, including middle management responsibilities, have been redefined. Some senior and middle leaders are using school information systems effectively to make rapid improvements in their areas. However, some leaders are still not confident in using the school's systems as effectively as they could to make even more of a difference to pupils' progress.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governors have an accurate view of the performance of the school. Through increased regular monitoring visits they ensure that they are kept up to date with developments and improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.
  - Improved quality assurance procedures are ensuring that governors remain well informed and are able to challenge leaders robustly, ensuring that the information shared is accurate and up to date.
  - Governors have a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching and are fully involved in all aspects of performance management, including the appraisal of the principal. They know what is being done to reward and challenge teaching and are rigorous in ensuring value for money.
  - Governors are aware of the performance of every pupil, and celebrate their achievements while always challenging the school to improve pupils' progress.
  - Governors, alongside the principal, have a range of expertise which they use robustly to monitor the impact of interventions and therapies, including speech and language therapy. Governors and leaders are ensuring that pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide good academic and personal

support for disadvantaged pupils so that they do equally as well as their peers. The close tracking and detailed analysis of the progress these pupils are making means that immediate action is taken when they are at risk of falling behind their peers.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good**

- Teachers use questioning effectively. They do not always accept the first answer they receive, but encourage pupils to think for themselves. Consequently, pupils are constantly developing their answers and making better progress than before.
- Teachers use assessment well to plan effective learning strategies that meet the needs of different pupils. Academic performance, alongside progress in their physical and emotional development, is fully considered when pupils' overall progress is reviewed. Pupils are able to discuss their progress in all aspects of their learning and development, and are confident in the steps they need to take to make further progress.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to excel in a broad range of learning opportunities as well as developing their life skills and independence. Teachers plan lessons so that they interest pupils, stimulate learning and meet their academic needs. Pupils are proud of the gains they make in their learning and are keen to improve even further.
- Teachers encourage pupils to support one another to learn more effectively. Pupils share their ideas, investigate new concepts and problem-solve effectively. For example, during a science experiment, pupils were able to learn and then reinforce their learning by teaching a friend the experiment that they had carried out. Additionally, pupils listen to one another in lessons and are respectful of one another's ideas. Pupils of all ages work well together, as seen when older pupils support younger pupils in a range of activities, such as reading.
- Pupils value the contributions that staff make to their learning. Staff know their pupils very well and the strength of positive relationships means that pupils want to work hard and be successful. Pupils also value the positive comments that staff make about their achievements. Feedback to pupils, both verbal and written, is used consistently well by most teachers. Most pupils welcome this guidance and use it to improve.
- Teachers challenge pupils to achieve even higher standards. Most teachers insist that pupils maintain high standards in their written work, emphasising age-appropriate levels for spelling and punctuation. Pupils' presentation of their work is improving, but the school has rightly identified that there is sometimes a little variation in the expectations of different teachers which needs to be regularised.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are listened to and feel confident in expressing themselves. The principal takes an active interest in pupils' opinions as a way to improve the provision offered to them. There is a well-developed school council, along with a 'buddy' and 'ambassadors' programme which gives pupils the chance to experience leadership and independent responsibilities. Pupils use these forums as opportunities to raise any issues that concern them, especially linked to their growing awareness of equality and diversity. As a result, pupils are very happy to share their concerns with those they trust and are confident that they will be dealt with well.
- Pupils in all key stages have the opportunity to access and play in the well-equipped outside space. Adults' and pupils' excellent management of potential risks means that pupils know how to avoid risk to themselves and to others and act in a responsible manner.
- Pupils access programmes which make them better prepared for the responsibilities of being an adult in modern Britain. Pupils say that the work-related learning in the life-skills programme that they access has changed what they do at home and out in the community. This provision also enhances pupils' understanding about how to keep themselves safe in the wider community and how to be active and successful participants in activities with their peers.
- Pupils feel safe. They are well educated on how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Outside visitors help them to learn about staying safe in the wider community, and school lessons continually

reinforce how to keep safe when using the internet. Pupils say they can talk to any adult if they are worried, and many of them say how the headteacher will always listen to their concerns. Parents consider that their children are safe in school.

- The off-site education that is provided for a small number of pupils is highly effective in meeting their needs. The school is thorough in making sure that pupils get the right placement for their needs and makes effective use of the two alternative providers. Pupils seen during the inspection while attending one of these provisions were delighted in their achievements. The carefully chosen off-site learning environment is safe and caring. Pupils are confident in attending these provisions and enjoy many of the learning opportunities that they receive, for example being able to independently rebuild parts of a car engine.
- Through the appropriate identification of pupils' needs, staff are able to ensure that the wide-ranging needs of pupils are provided for. This continuous assessment process enables staff to identify where pupils need further support and how to direct this support from the newly formed therapy team. These appropriately qualified consultants work well on an individual basis to meet pupils' needs as identified through statements, education, health and care plans or the school's own monitoring.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good given the high level of needs some pupils have when they start at the school. Some pupils, in all key stages, behave in an exemplary manner. Pupils are usually able to control their behaviour. However this is not achieved consistently throughout the school or across all subjects. Good behaviour is too often dependent on the teacher. Where adults have high expectations of behaviour, pupils are trying hard to meet these standards. Any disruption is rare in these lessons, because staff are quick to intervene and they manage pupils' behaviour well. Any digression from these high standards is quietly and calmly addressed.
- Pupils attend school more regularly now because they value their education and feel that staff care for them. Pupils say they like this school and that is why they attend regularly. Many pupils who are new to Sheridan House School have not accessed education properly due to poor attendance. Teachers and support staff work well with pupils to encourage and support them to improve their attendance now. Almost all pupils have significantly better attendance than they have had in their previous educational settings. A significant minority of these pupils are achieving 100% attendance at Sheridan. As a result, they have become more confident learners and speak passionately about the positive changes the school is making to their lives.
- Fixed-term exclusions and the frequency of physical interventions by staff have reduced dramatically over the last two terms because pupils increasingly take responsibility for their own behaviour. Inspectors found that the great majority of pupils engage well in learning and enjoy their work. Very occasionally, pupils become distracted or misbehave when the work provided does not take full account of their abilities.
- Staff record incidents of poor behaviour in detail and use this to inform a well-planned approach to managing difficulties. All pupils have a support plan to help staff understand how best to manage challenging situations but which also identifies triggers which make it more difficult for pupils to control their own behaviour. Well-trained staff use this information to plan and risk assess difficult situations well. As a result, pupils are given the best opportunity to develop self-control but are supported well when they are in a time of crisis.
- Parents spoken to state that the behaviour of pupils is much improved and staff care about how well their child is doing. As a result, parental confidence is increasing and they say they are pleased with the social and academic progress being made.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **are good**

- Children with social, emotional and mental health issues in addition to autistic spectrum needs are well catered for. Their needs are well met and, as a result, standards are rising quickly.
- For the vast majority of pupils, this school is seen as their 'last chance'. Pupils arrive at the school following difficulties experienced at previous provisions, either with behaviour or other aspects of their learning or social development. As a result, their individual starting points are low.
- Much work has been done to improve the accuracy and use of assessment information. The systems in place now are tested across teachers, classes and with other schools. Leaders now know exactly how well

pupils are achieving and use this information to ensure pupils are challenged to learn quickly, as well as for setting challenging predictions for their end-of-year performance expectations.

- There are now opportunities for all pupils to achieve external academic and vocational qualifications through different routes or pathways, which include both English and mathematics as well as triple science. The addition of functional skills programmes is enhancing pupils' understanding of the use and application of their numeracy and literacy skills. All pupils are well supported to move on to further education, employment or training.
- Key stage 2 pupils, regardless of need, are making good progress from their starting points, particularly in reading where they are making rapid progress. Pupils are now confident readers and were happy to read aloud to the inspection team.
- At key stage 4, most pupils are making good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The expanding curriculum means that some pupils are gaining skills rapidly. Increasing proportions are offered the opportunity to achieve their functional skills qualification in Years 9 and 10. This allows them to focus on additional qualifications such as level 1 or 2 motor vehicle repair, preparing them well for their chosen college course on leaving school.
- The developing provision for pupils with autistic spectrum needs ensures that they make excellent progress from their starting points, in a safe secure and well-thought-out environment.
- The most able pupils are well supported by the rapidly developing curriculum and the increased challenge they are offered through the improved quality of teaching. As a result, these pupils achieve well.
- While the transition into school is often not at normal transition points and pupils often refer to this as their 'last resort', leaders and staff determinedly manage this transition to make it as positive as possible, taking into account the needs and preferences of the young person, but also considering how the impact of previous education failures will have added to their worries. As a result, the vast majority of transitions into the school are successful.
- Transitions to the next steps in learning or to the world of work are highly planned. Staff are thoughtful about pupils' aspirations and consider how to best support them to meet these. College taster days and alternative providers are exceptionally well used to give pupils an insight into 'what they might do next' but also to help them to plan for this important change in their lives.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	121246
<b>Inspection number</b>	10006048
<b>DfE registration number</b>	926/6133

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential/Day special school
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	8–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	53
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	1
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mark Underwood
<b>Chair</b>	James Imber
<b>Headteacher</b>	Michelle Smith
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£40,000–£90,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01366 726040
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.priorygroup.com">www.priorygroup.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:sheridanschool@priorygroup.com">sheridanschool@priorygroup.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28–29 November 2012

## Information about this school

- Sheridan House School, in rural Norfolk, is part of the Priory Group's education provision. Sheridan House School is a specialist therapeutic school for boys and girls aged eight to 19 who have complex needs which include social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some of the pupils have additional needs such as autism, post-traumatic stress disorder or attachment disorder.
- There are 53 students on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Pupils are placed by local authorities in the east of England. All pupils are at risk of exclusion or have been excluded permanently from mainstream schools and/or maintained special schools.
- A number of pupils are weekly or full-time boarders, either on site or at Brook House and Gamekeepers Cottage near Thetford, and the others attend as day students, some travelling considerable distances each day. The residential provision is inspected separately and did not form part of this inspection.
- The vast majority of pupils have a White British heritage and their first language is English. Most pupils (above the national average) are entitled to support provided by the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after). There are very few girls.
- The school makes use of two alternative providers. A number of older pupils do vocational training courses at either the farm provision or at a motor vehicle workshop. An off-road motor vehicle workshop was visited during this inspection.
- While the school currently has one student in the sixth form, any judgements made would identify this pupil and therefore aspects of this provision are included in each judgement section of the full report.

## Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the principal, the headteacher and other representatives of the senior team.
- Meetings were held with members of the teaching staff, a range of pupils and governors.
- Inspectors observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and lunchtime, and as they moved around the school.
- Pupils' work was reviewed. Recent progress information was discussed and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised.
- Inspectors also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which collects parents' views about the school's work and took into account information shared by parents through telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings.
- An inspector visited one of the two alternative providers used by the school.

## Inspection team

Mary Rayner, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Heptinstall

Ofsted Inspector



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