

Doucecroft School

Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex CO6 3QL

Inspection date

11 October 2017

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 9, 9(a), 9(b) and 9(c)

- At the standard inspection in February 2017, the arrangements to promote good behaviour among pupils were not met because:
 - although records of all incidents are filed, they were not all completed fully and there is a lack of oversight and monitoring of the records
 - the guidance to staff in the behaviour policy was inaccurate; the behaviour policy lists only two possible sanctions and the incident book for recording unacceptable behaviour contained additional sanctions that are not referenced in the behaviour policy.
- In the school's action plan, the proprietor undertook to:
 - update the behaviour policy to reflect the requirements of the independent school standards and the national minimum standards
 - create and implement a new tracking system for monitoring sanctions and incidents
 - share findings from monitoring with staff, record actions required and implement the changes needed.
- Following the inspection in February 2017, school leaders reviewed the school's behaviour policy in consultation with staff. The new policy is based on the context of Doucecroft School and emphasises a positive approach to behaviour management.
- The behaviour policy includes a comprehensive anti-bullying policy. This policy gives staff and parents helpful information about autistic spectrum disorder and bullying, as well as strategies for preventing bullying, including cyber bullying.
- The school has adopted a new tracking system for monitoring sanctions and incidents. At the time of this inspection, this system was at an early stage of introduction. As a result, leaders are not yet confident that it allows them to monitor and analyse sanctions and incidents.
- The new behaviour policy has been approved by governors, and staff have received training. The current monitoring of behaviour has helped school leaders to identify that

the new policy is not consistently applied. Additional training for staff is planned.

- In the case of serious misbehaviour by pupils, the school now records sanctions it has used. While the sanctions are in line with the new policy, the school is not always rigorous in monitoring their effectiveness.
- Governors receive regular reports about the use of restrictive physical interventions but it is not clear how they check that staff are debriefed following the interventions.
- Leaders have not ensured that this independent school standard is met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c); Part 3 Paragraphs 8, 8(a) and 8(b)

- These standards were not met at the inspection in February 2017 because:
 - the school’s policies and procedures did not specifically reference what happens and what was expected in the boarding provision and, as a result, the residential service did not have a clear and positive profile promoted within the school
 - the leaders and managers across the school were not fully effective in working together to identify and tackle weaknesses
 - the senior management team did not consistently challenge practice or drive improvement in the boarding service
 - school leaders, governors and trustees did not demonstrate the skills needed to fulfil their duties to ensure that the independent school standards and minimum standards for residential special schools are met
 - leaders and governors did not review the school’s policies and procedures frequently enough to establish how well they are implemented or how well they promote good practice and meet current guidance
 - governors did not hold leaders to account for the progress that different groups of pupils are making across the full range of subjects
 - governors oversee the arrangements for appraisal effectively but not all had an accurate view of the school’s priorities for development.
- In the school’s action plan, the proprietor undertook to:
 - use the National Governor Association’s principles to identify experience and training needs of governors and trustees
 - establish monitoring procedures and meeting cycles that are used to evaluate the school’s performance, with protocols and records to guide their monitoring and evaluations
 - identify staff who will develop and report on policies to the senior leadership team
 - amend safeguarding practices through policies and flow charts, and undertake monthly safeguarding meetings to check that the arrangements are adhered to
 - require the senior leadership team to undertake progress reviews in school and the residential provision to evaluate policies and procedures, and staff’s understanding of them, and to present the findings to the governing body
 - require governors to meet with staff to review pupils’ progress from baseline

- assessments and in relation to targets for groups of pupils
- track pupils' progress and achievements termly and report the findings to governors termly
 - make sure that all policies reference the residential provision.
- Following the inspection in February 2017, school leaders developed detailed action plans so that staff at the school and the boarding provision remain focused on key priorities.
 - School leaders understand their responsibilities. They work as a team, support one another and ensure that less experienced leaders are mentored so that they can work effectively.
 - School leaders have reviewed school policies to ensure a consistent approach across both the education and boarding settings at the school.
 - School leaders have strengthened safeguarding practice. The school now has six designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) across the school and boarding houses. They use the same protocols and procedures throughout and information about referrals is accessible to DSLs in both settings. This means that important information is shared quickly if required.
 - Leaders who are responsible for safeguarding maintain a log of referrals. Leaders from the school and the boarding accommodation meet each month to review safeguarding. However, records of the meetings do not demonstrate how the school maintains an overview of ongoing safeguarding concerns, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils.
 - There is a suitable safeguarding policy on the school's website.
 - Governors have audited their skills and experience, with guidance from a national leader of governance. This is informing their search for additional governors.
 - School leaders and governors do not carefully monitor whether the school meets all the required national minimum standards (NMS) for residential special schools and the independent school standards. Full details of the NMS currently not met are contained in a separate social care inspection report.
 - Governors now have a plan of monitoring activities for each half term. This helps them to focus on the strategic priorities of the school. Governors make routine checks of specific aspects of safeguarding, such as the single central register.
 - Senior leaders, including boarding staff, report to governors about their areas of responsibility. Governors' understanding of how to interpret this information, and their effective challenge of school leaders, are developing, and they are starting to understand better the school's work. For example, two governors visited the school to find out more about the progress that pupils are expected to make. This work is at an early stage and it is not clear what happens as a result of their visits.
 - Leaders have not ensured that this independent school standard is met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent

School Standards) Regulations 2014 (‘the independent school standards’) and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain unmet at this inspection

■ The proprietor must ensure that:

- arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school; and
- such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools or, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools or the National Minimum Standards for Accommodation of Students under Eighteen by Further Education Colleges

(paragraphs 8, 8(a) and 8(b)).

■ The proprietor must promote good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that the behaviour policy is implemented effectively (paragraphs 9 and 9(b)).

■ The proprietor must ensure 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; and
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
- actively promote the well-being of pupils

(paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

School details

Unique reference number	115426
DfE registration number	881/6032
Inspection number	10039953

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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	13
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Chair	Clive Stobbs
Headteacher	Alison Smart
Annual fees (day pupils)	£89,821 to £184,148
Telephone number	01206 771234
Website	www.autism-anglia.org.uk/doucecroft-school
Email address	jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	7–9 February 2017

Information about this school

- Doucecroft is a day and residential special school for boys and girls, aged from three to 19 years, who have autistic spectrum disorder. Many pupils have moderate or severe learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs, and are funded by their local authorities.

- There have been no children of Nursery or Reception age and no pupils at key stage 1 on roll for the past three years.
- The school is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) to admit 64 pupils. There are 43 pupils on roll, including 13 students in the sixth form.
- Four pupils are looked after by their local authorities.
- The school is privately owned by Autism Anglia.
- The school first opened in 1977 and has been established at its current site since 2005.
- The school uses a range of alternative providers for older pupils and sixth-form students. Alternative providers include:
 - Chelmsford and Colchester Colleges, for vocational training
 - Butterfly Lodge near Colchester, for animal care and horticulture
 - Halstead swimming pool
 - Mersea youth camp, for outdoor activities
 - Zinc Arts in Ongar
 - The Art Café in Colchester, for work experience.
- Residential care for up to 294 nights per year is provided for 11 pupils and some respite residential provision is available for day pupils. The school's residential provision was previously inspected on 9 to 11 February 2017, when the overall experiences and progress of children and young people were judged as 'requires improvement'.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2016 and new senior leaders took up post in January 2017.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- Following the school's standard inspection in February 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a statutory notice in April 2017. The school was required to submit an action plan to address the unmet independent school standards. Ofsted evaluated the action plan in June 2017 and judged it to be acceptable.
- This is the school's first progress monitoring inspection since its standard inspection in February 2017. It was carried out without notice.
- The inspector was asked to report against the independent school standards contained within Part 3 Welfare, health and safety of pupils, and Part 8 Quality of leadership in and management of schools.
- The inspector held discussions with senior staff, teachers and governors.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation related to safeguarding and child protection and visited classes in key stages 2, 3, 4 and 5 with the headteacher.
- A standard social care inspection of the school took place from 9 to 11 October 2017. There is a separate report for that inspection.

Inspection team

Jenny Carpenter, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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