

# Doucecroft School

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

**Inspection dates**

27 March 2018

**Overall outcome**

**The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c)*

- The previous monitoring inspection found that tracking systems for monitoring sanctions and incidents of poor behaviour were new, and leaders were not yet confident in applying them in monitoring and evaluation processes. The new behaviour policy was not consistently applied by staff. School leaders were not rigorous in monitoring the effectiveness of the sanctions applied in the case of serious misbehaviour. It was not clear how governors check that staff are debriefed following the use of restrictive physical interventions.
- In the school's action plan, dated December 2017, the proprietor proposed to promote good behaviour by monitoring the impact of the sanctions imposed. The plan also stated that the school would ensure that all staff were aware of their responsibilities to apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. Leaders would check that the recording of behaviour incidents was embedded in practice and that the information would be used to inform training and policy development. Staff and pupils would also be debriefed within 24 hours following incidents requiring physical intervention. In the most recent revised plan, dated February 2018, measurable targets are set to help leaders to determine how well improvement strategies are working.
- Pupils arrive promptly at lessons. They are well behaved and respectful towards their teachers. Low-level disruption is not evident. Pupils respond swiftly to staff's instructions. Pupils are supportive of each other's learning; for example, they do not make derogatory comments about other pupils' answers to questions. Staff help pupils to interact positively with each other. They model appropriate ways to talk to other people and are categorical about the need to respect others.
- The proprietor has developed a comprehensive behaviour policy that takes into account the range of needs for individual pupils on the autistic spectrum, some of whom may also have other associated conditions, disabilities and vulnerabilities. It emphasises a positive approach to behaviour management. The policy explains clearly the expectations for pupils, and actions to be taken to ensure that high standards of behaviour are maintained. It includes a detailed anti-bullying policy, including strategies for preventing bullying and cyber bullying. Staff have received in-depth training about the behaviour

policy, ensuring that they are all aware of their responsibilities. The regular monitoring of behaviour by leaders ensures that the policy is consistently applied. Staff who spoke to the inspector shared a common understanding of the school's behaviour policy.

- The school maintains detailed electronic records of behaviour incidents which are carefully monitored by leaders. The recording of information is embedded in practice. Rewards and sanctions are recorded electronically to allow leaders to identify trends and the impact of any actions taken. The information on behaviour is used to inform staff training, the impact of staff training and policy development.
- Pupils told the inspector that they thought staff dealt with poor behaviour fairly and effectively. They said that any form of bullying is dealt with quickly by staff.
- Governors receive regular reports from leaders about the use of restrictive physical interventions. Practice is now sharper and consistent. Staff and pupils are debriefed within 24 hours following incidents requiring physical interventions.
- Leaders have ensured that this independent school standard is now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraphs 8, 8(a) and 8(b)*

*Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)*

- At the first monitoring inspection in October 2017, leaders and governors had not made sure that arrangements to promote the welfare and safety of pupils had regard to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for residential special schools and that the independent school standards had been met. Records of safeguarding meetings did not demonstrate how the school maintained an overview of ongoing safeguarding concerns, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Governors' understanding and use of performance information to challenge leaders was at an early stage of development.
- Governors now carefully monitor the arrangements for the welfare and safety of pupils at least every half term. They check that the NMS and independent school standards are met. The designated safeguarding team meet every fourth week to review safeguarding. The school maintains an electronic overview of ongoing concerns to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils.
- The action plan that followed the first monitoring inspection was judged not to be acceptable because success criteria were too vague and lacking in detail. Ongoing training for governors to help them improve their use and understanding of the school's performance information so that they could challenge leaders effectively had not been identified.
- A revised plan was scrutinised during this monitoring inspection. Leaders and governors have acted swiftly and determinedly to resolve issues that the inspector identified at the previous monitoring visit. Governors have successfully strengthened their own leadership skills, drawing on outside expertise, thus enhancing the capacity of leaders to monitor the school's work.
- The headteacher has appropriate leadership skills and knowledge of the independent school standards. The school's policies are clearly written, with the governing body

monitoring their implementation and impact.

- The trustees provide strong direction. They have high expectations and hold leaders to account. Trustees understand the needs of the school because they visit the school and check on its work.
- The new chair of the governing body is knowledgeable and provides a clear strategic vision for the school. Governors have received training to secure their understanding of their responsibilities in ensuring that the school meets the independent school standards. They carry out routine checks on the quality of the school's provision for behaviour, safety and welfare. Link governor meetings with leaders, at least termly, check compliance. Governors provide senior leaders with appropriate challenge to ensure that there is improvement in the school's provision.
- Senior leaders have refined the systems by which they check on pupils' behaviour. These systems have enabled leaders to develop a sharper understanding of behaviour. For example, they are able to identify quickly where pupils are not making the behaviour progress expected of them and ensure that these pupils receive appropriate support.
- There is a suitable safeguarding policy on the school's website. The headteacher's briefings include testing staff about 'Keeping children safe in education', DfE, 2016. The proprietor and leaders have established a culture where safeguarding is understood by everyone. High levels of staff supervision help to keep pupils safe. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe effectively. Leaders work well with external agencies when issues arise.
- In its current format, the action plan does not include robust milestones for reviewing the impact of actions on the objectives set. Governors know that they need to hold leaders to account more rigorously and are planning to update the development plan in the summer term to include this information.
- Leaders have ensured that these independent school standards are now met.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school meets 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 now meets the following independent school standards**

- 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 Residential Special Schools or the National Minimum Standards for Accommodation of Students under Eighteen by Further Education Colleges (paragraph 8, 8(a), 8(b)).
- The proprietor must promote good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that:
  - a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out all the sanctions used by the school in the event of pupil misbehaviour
  - the policy is implemented effectively
  - a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour (paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c)).
- 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
  - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
  - actively promote the well-being of pupils. (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)).

## School details

Unique reference number	115426
DfE registration number	881/6032
Inspection number	10048977

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 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	44
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	13
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Chair	Alan Bicknell
Headteacher	Alison Smart
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,714 to £79,902
Telephone number	01206 771234
Website	<a href="http://www.autism-anglia.org.uk/doucecroft-school">www.autism-anglia.org.uk/doucecroft-school</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk">jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	7–9 February 2017

## Information about this school

- Doucecroft is an independent 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 44 pupils on roll, including 13 students in the sixth form.
- Three 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.
- 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 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.
- The first monitoring inspection took place in October 2017. At that time, two of the independent school standards were not met.
- Following the first progress monitoring inspection, the school submitted an action plan to the DfE to address areas for improvement identified in the inspection. This was evaluated by Ofsted in January 2018. The action plan was judged as not acceptable.
- This is the second progress monitoring inspection since the standard inspection in February 2017. This second monitoring inspection was conducted without notice.
- A revised action plan, dated February 2018, was checked during this second monitoring inspection.
- 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 met with the headteacher, senior staff, teachers, teaching assistants, a representative of the trust, the chair of the governing body and governors. The meetings focused particularly on unmet standards in connection with pupils' welfare and safety, and the quality of the school's leadership and management.
- The inspector spoke to a group of pupils about their welfare and well-being.
- The inspector visited classes in key stages 2, 3 and 4 with the headteacher.
- The inspector checked whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils met the relevant independent school standards. Policies and processes were evaluated. The school's website was checked for compliance with statutory information that should be available online.

## Inspection team

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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