

Releasing Potential

7 Kingscroft Court, Ridgway, Havant, Hampshire PO9 1LS

Inspection dates

15–17 May 2018

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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and staff work together very well to give pupils a more optimistic future. Pupils, who have often been unsuccessful in other settings, appreciate another chance to belong and succeed.
- The curriculum is very well designed. It gives pupils opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and understanding that will be helpful in the world of work.
- Different curriculum pathways, and the focus on outdoor learning, allow pupils to access school in a way that is consistent with their needs. For example, this could be through individual mentoring or group activities off site.
- Safeguarding is effective. There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Adults know pupils and the risks and dangers they face outside of school very well.
- Successful strategies are in place to improve attendance and behaviour over time. Pupils value the rewards and recognition they receive.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- All pupils are offered a place at college or in employment when they leave the school.
- Provision in the sixth form for emotionally vulnerable students is good.
- Teaching is good and fosters positive relationships and behaviour in classrooms and other places of learning.
- Pupils are growing in confidence and making good progress when learning English and mathematics. Nonetheless, standards are low.
- Leaders recognise that they could strengthen some of the systems they use to show the positive impact of their work to keep pupils safe and improve teaching and learning.
- Policies to reintegrate pupils into education are generally well thought out. The approach to pupils smoking successfully encourages them to attend and socialise but does not promote healthy lifestyles.

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.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that academic teaching accelerates pupils' progress from their starting points by:
 - checking that work is always challenging
 - encouraging pupils to read more frequently, including for pleasure
 - reinforcing pupils' basic punctuation and grammar when writing
 - working towards the highest possible relevant qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Improve leadership by carefully recording the impact of actions to:
 - work with other agencies to keep pupils' safe
 - check the quality of teaching and learning
 - find out if pupils sustain their placements in college or employment when they leave the school.
- Promote healthy lifestyles by helping pupils to stop smoking.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive headteacher is driven by a strong moral purpose and the belief that 'everyone can achieve more than they think they can.' He leads a staff that believes in the unique qualities of each pupil and their 'potential to choose to change their lives'. This is a school that will not give up on even the hardest-to-reach pupils.
- Since becoming a school, staff have adapted well to increasing demands on them. They have done this because they are a strong team, with a sense of community and a determination to support the most vulnerable pupils. Staff have valued the increased professional development this year, which has led to improvements in teaching.
- The headteacher has designed a curriculum that can be adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils extremely well. There are three different pathways: 'Engage' allows pupils to follow a wider balanced curriculum in small groups; 'Activation' provides pupils with one-to-one tuition and opportunities to begin socialising with others two days a week through physical and outdoor activities; finally, 'Mentoring' provides the most vulnerable pupils with a one-to-one programme, sometimes in school but more often off site in less formal settings.
- Threading through each of the programmes is a clear focus on developing skills in English and mathematics, together with cooking, outdoor learning and work-related skills. Leaders responsible for each programme make sure that it is adapted to meet the needs of each pupil to allow them to make good progress behaviourally, socially and academically.
- The focus on outdoor learning encourages pupils to be fit and healthy. It also encourages pupils to take calculated risks and challenge themselves. Considering their starting points, pupils are well prepared for the future and life in modern Britain. However, leaders agree that more could be done to teach pupils about other cultures and religions.
- The headteacher regularly checks on the quality of teaching and that pupils' specific special educational needs are met. However, the few required improvements to teaching identified are not yet formally followed up, to check that they are now in place.
- Parents and carers who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. One said, 'Thank God for Releasing Potential', when celebrating the fact that their child had finally found a school they were happy to attend because they felt safe. Another new parent commented that her son had made 'amazing progress so far'.
- As pupils come to the end of their time at the school, they reflect on what they have achieved. One pupil, applying to stay on in the sixth form, wrote: 'I like the way things are at the moment. I am learning how to go to the gym and cook. Releasing Potential are teaching me to get out of the house. I want to stay on the same thing I'm doing now.'
- Leaders have ensured that in the first year operating as a school, all of the independent school standards have been met.
- Local authorities that place pupils at the school are very happy with the provision offered. They are particularly pleased with the outcomes achieved for pupils, given that many of them have attended multiple schools in the past or been school refusers.

Governance

- Trustees from the wider Releasing Potential charity oversee the school's safeguarding procedures, financial planning and staffing arrangements. They take a very strategic approach and help leaders to problem solve to achieve the best outcomes for pupils.
- Trustees have used their particular skills and expertise to help set up enterprises, such as a shop selling merchandise themed on the school's herd of alpacas, an outboard boat engine repair workshop and an allotment.
- To ensure that the school focused on the academic as well as social and emotional progress of pupils, trustees put in place an education standards committee. Committee members have the necessary skills to challenge leaders about the outcomes for pupils. They receive regular updates on the progress pupils are making and visit the school regularly to check this out themselves.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The culture of safeguarding and the school's work to keep pupils safe from harm is strong. This is because staff know their pupils very well and understand the risks they are prone to out of school. Staff build up a strong bond of trust with their pupils and their families, while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Staff training is up to date and relevant. All staff are vigilant for the welfare of pupils and report concerns appropriately.
- Leaders responsible for safeguarding have a very clear understanding of the risks that pupils face in their daily life. For example, leaders are mindful that some pupils are homeless and have 'sofa-surfing' arrangements in place, while other pupils are at risk of child sexual exploitation. Leaders work hard to galvanise the support of other professionals to do the best for pupils. However, there are times when school leaders feel that other agencies are not doing enough to keep the most vulnerable pupils safe. While comprehensive records of concerns about pupils are in place, leaders do not keep a clear log of when they disagree with other professionals and take action to escalate their concerns.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets statutory requirements and is published on the school website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Strong, appropriate and encouraging relationships between teachers and pupils foster a sense of trust. Teachers and their assistants work together very well to structure lessons and activity sessions carefully to maintain pupils' interest.
- Assessment information, in its widest sense, is used well to help teachers plan appropriate activities. Teachers take account of the school's curriculum expectations and their knowledge of pupils' previous learning, behaviour and anxiety triggers when they plan.
- On the whole, teachers devise activities that interest pupils and help to keep them engaged in learning. This leads to good progress from low starting points socially and academically. Teachers always have at least a plan B and a plan C ready!

- Pupils learn as much from adults during social times as they do in lessons and other activities. For example, starting the day 'socially' with tea and toast and a game of cards sets a suitably relaxed tone that gets the day off to a positive start. Cooking and eating together at lunchtimes allows teachers to model appropriate social skills, promote debate and interest about current affairs, and encourage healthy eating.
- At the end of each session, pupils are assessed against school criteria known as 'SHAPE'. This allows pupils and teachers to see clearly how well pupils are improving under the headings of 'safe', 'healthy', 'achieving', 'positive' and 'enterprising'. Achieving positive SHAPE outcomes leads to pupils receiving small rewards that they value very much.
- Teachers with specific expertise have strong subject knowledge and use this well to engage pupils in learning. The most successful teachers give pupils near constant feedback, to reassure them and help them make progress. However, on some occasions pupils are not moved on to more challenging tasks quickly, even when they are learning and behaving well.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is functional and gives pupils key skills to survive beyond school in college, employment or society in general. Leaders have provided training for all staff, whatever their area of expertise, to improve their basic skills in teaching English and mathematics.
- Teachers use every opportunity to encourage pupils to read, for example when following a recipe to cook, when following a trail using a map in outdoor education or when using a manual when repairing a bike or engine. However, staff do not do enough to encourage pupils to read more sustained texts or to read for pleasure.
- A small minority of teachers and teaching assistants still have weaker personal skills in English and mathematics. This means that they are less likely to correct pupils' mistakes with basic grammar and punctuation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are all known and respected as individuals. Staff care deeply for their pupils and do all they can to engage them in safe, healthy and interesting activity. Staff offer pupils good emotional support.
- Staff and parents have no concerns about pupils' safety in school. Indeed, that is why leaders know that it is so important that pupils attend regularly so that they are known to be safe.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They have no concerns about bullying. Some pupils routinely use bad language. However, this is not generally directed at their peers or staff. Any homophobic or racist language is normally challenged by staff.
- Impartial careers advice organised by local authorities and work-related learning opportunities, for example in the school's shop or outboard engine workshop, help prepare pupils for the world of work.
- There is a strong focus on physical activity and healthy living. Pupils on all programmes

take part in physical activity of some type, including mountain biking, sailing, ball sports or visiting the gym.

- The school's policy permits pupils to smoke during social times. This encourages pupils with some of the most challenging behaviour to attend, behave calmly and socialise. While recognising these benefits, leaders know that they could do more to help pupils to give up smoking.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils have not attended school for extended periods before joining Releasing Potential. Attendance improves when pupils join the school. Staff do all they can, including visiting homes, to encourage pupils to engage in school life more regularly. For some pupils, attendance has improved from zero to near 100%. However, for a few others, attendance remains low as leaders have not yet made the curriculum irresistible to them.
- Nearly all pupils demonstrate challenging behaviour at times. Staff manage this really well. Diversion and challenge are used effectively to reshape pupils' behaviour when necessary, without the need for physical intervention.
- Classrooms are generally calm and purposeful. The 'SHAPE' approach to managing behaviour is successful, and records show that pupils' behaviour improves over time. Social times are good-natured and allow staff to model appropriate relationships to pupils over a meal. This may be either in the communal kitchen and dining areas on the school sites or cooking sausages on a gas burner in a field off site.
- When pupils make poor behaviour choices, leaders change their programme and curriculum to address their actions. While pupils may be (temporarily) excluded from group learning or the school site, they are never excluded from Releasing Potential. At the very least, staff continue to provide and offer individual mentoring to get pupils back on track.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' personal and social development accelerates at this school because they are comfortable in their surroundings and confident to share their aspirations and worries. Pupils can see a way through life that they may not have seen before.
- Improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning help to speed up progress across a range of subject areas when they are ready to learn. The different programmes available are well tailored to the needs of individuals.
- Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in English and mathematics are improving because all teachers are making opportunities to apply them in functional and practical ways. Nonetheless, for the vast majority of pupils, standards in these key subjects are very low because they have missed so much education in the past. Therefore, the functional skills certificates that pupils gain are often at the lower levels despite the good progress they have made.
- Leaders do not check that pupils, especially the most able, are working towards the

highest appropriate qualifications. For example, with continued positive attitudes and attendance, a small number of pupils may have the potential to enter GCSE mathematics.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment. Leaders pride themselves on helping every pupil to access a place at college or in employment when they leave at the end of Year 11. Leaders try to keep in touch with former pupils, but could do more to check how successful pupils are at sustaining their next placements.
- Outcomes in technical areas such as mechanics and design technology are very strong. For example, some pupils have built their own boats and sailed them.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The majority of students in the sixth form are placed by their local authorities as they are emotionally vulnerable and would not suit a college placement. Students take part in bespoke programmes and complete two, or in some cases three, years in the sixth form.
- The sixth form is well led. Appropriate curriculum pathways are planned for each individual student. The curriculum balances the teaching of English and mathematics with outdoor learning, cooking and vocational skills and work experience. Additionally, students can sometimes follow their own interests, for example computing.
- Teaching in the sixth form is normally with individuals or small groups. Assessment information is used well to plan activities, and students work towards and achieve certificated functional skills qualifications. Students make good progress, but sometimes are possibly capable of achieving higher qualifications.
- To improve their personal development, students increasingly take responsibility for activities around the school. For example, they run a café serving the staff each Monday. They plan the menu and carry out the shopping for the weekly café and occasional residential expeditions.
- Students achieve excellent outcomes in outdoor and adventurous activities. For example, a group of students successfully took part in an overnight canoeing and camping expedition on the River Thames during the inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	144808
DfE registration number	850/6093
Inspection number	10045499

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	7
Proprietor	Releasing Potential
Chair	Paul Suter
Executive Headteacher/ CEO	Mike King
Headteacher	Lara Penfold
Annual fees (day pupils)	£23,000 to £36,500
Telephone number	02392 479762
Website	www.releasingpotentialschool.com
Email address	admin@releasingpotential.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Releasing Potential School is part of the wider Releasing Potential charity which aims to 'create a place of safety and fun for young people, allowing them to take managed risks that lead to breakthroughs in social and emotional well-being'.
- Releasing Potential is located on two sites, one in Havant and the other in Chichester. Both sites occupy former industrial premises which have been refurbished to provide

educational facilities.

- The school makes considerable use of local leisure, sporting, recreational and wildlife facilities to educate pupils off site. In addition, the school operates a shop and an outboard motor workshop to provide work-related studies. Some pupils spend time at the school's allotment or looking after the school's herd of alpacas in a field nearby.
- The school currently offers provision for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years who do not thrive in mainstream schools and who struggled to cope with the expectations of their previous schools.
- Pupils are currently placed by two local authorities, Hampshire and West Sussex. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Every pupil has an education, health and care plan because of their special educational needs. Most pupils demonstrate challenging behaviour and have spent a considerable amount of time out of school.
- Students in the sixth form are placed at Releasing Potential because they are emotionally vulnerable and would not suit mainstream post-16 education.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector visited both of the main school sites and spoke to a wide range of leaders and staff about the work of the school.
- The inspector observed pupils learning in school in small groups and individually. Some of these observations were carried out with the headteacher. He also observed a group taking part in activities out of school with the executive headteacher.
- The inspector observed social times during the school day and spoke to pupils about their experience at the school.
- Her Majesty's Inspector spoke to the chair of trustees by telephone and met with the chair of the education standards committee. He held telephone conversations with representatives of Hampshire and West Sussex local authorities.
- Four responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, alongside 10 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire.
- The inspector considered a wide range of school documentation.

Inspection team

Lee Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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