

Doucecroft School

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

Inspection dates

5 November 2019

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h)

- This standard was not met at the previous inspection, because the quality of teaching was too inconsistent, especially in foundation subjects. Teachers' subject knowledge was sometimes weak and planning for learning was too variable. The school's key stage 2 curriculum and the 'transition hub' provision that supports key stage 4 and 5 pupils were not meeting pupils' needs. Additionally, leaders' monitoring did not focus sharply enough on the difference that staff were making to the progress and development of pupils.
- Leaders undertook to:
 - implement a review of the curriculum across all key stages, including the use of 'choice time', to ensure that it is having a positive and effective impact on pupils' development and learning
 - undertake a routine programme of learning walks and subsequent training for teachers
 - implement monitoring and training for learning support staff, including the implementation of a commercial package of staff training
 - develop opportunities to share resources, good practice and planning between staff, including those working with pupils in the residential provision
 - appoint subject leaders and subject specialist expertise in key stages 4 and 5 to support planning and increase the curriculum and qualification offer open to pupils.
- Leaders have undertaken a root and branch review of their curriculum. Their new approach is helping staff to plan the small steps in pupils' learning more effectively. Staff are not yet familiar with these new approaches, and the benefits are not yet apparent.
- The new assessment systems, intended to evidence pupils' incremental gains more easily, are at a very early stage of implementation.
- All pupils will have a 'My Doucecroft' individual learning plan to make sure the targets in their education, health, and care (EHC) plans are monitored more closely. Leaders have sensibly prioritised pupils' learning plans according to the timing of their annual reviews. This is a work-in-progress and means that pupils' targets from their EHC plans are not

yet fully incorporated into pupils' plans or teachers' planning.

- The new thematic approach to learning is clearly evident. Primary school pupils talked knowingly about James I and the Gunpowder Plot. The increase number of themed days gives pupils the opportunity to mix with other year groups more easily and increases their motivation.
- Pupils now follow a more structured timetable with a better balance of academic study and pastoral care. Staff now have greater opportunities to discuss approaches, share effective strategies and collaborate on planning. Pupils benefit from carefully chosen activities that make sure time in lessons is used purposefully.
- The headteacher has challenged staff's ingrained orthodoxies on best practice for supporting pupils with complex needs. Staff training from clinical teams is helping staff build their awareness of pupils' diagnoses and needs. As one staff member said, 'Things are improving. Our roles are clearer and there is a greater awareness of what we need to do and why.'
- Since the previous inspection, staff have brought about significant improvements to the quality of education that pupils experience. The school meets far more of the requirements in the paragraphs for this standard. However, the standard remains not met because some requirements are not met.
- Leaders have not ensured that this independent school standard is met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- At the inspection in February 2019, these standards were met.
- The school's safeguarding procedures are still effective. The safeguarding policy is available on the school's website and reflects the latest statutory guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE).
- Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. They are well trained, and the culture of safeguarding is given a high profile.
- These independent school standards continue to be met.

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

Paragraph 16, 16(a), 16(b)

- At the time of the previous inspection, these standards were not met because:
 - leaders were failing to seek timely, well-coordinated support for a significant minority of pupils who have the most complex needs
 - leaders did not know how well they are meeting the needs of the pupils who have been repeatedly physically restrained
 - risk assessments were not kept updated, and did not reflect 'serious incidents' or the most up-to-date information about pupils or incidents in the school
 - staff did not all understand autism spectrum disorder and were not adhering to the

school's own protocols in the completion of behaviour and welfare records, thus hampering leaders' ability to identify where pupils needed further help and support.

- In the school's revised action plan, the proprietor undertook to:
 - co-produce a new behaviour policy and protocol with staff at the school
 - embed the use of this behaviour system through training, monitoring, learning walks and staff meetings
 - improve induction training for staff, most notably in their understanding about autism
 - appoint a governor to liaise with the school council to gain pupils' views routinely
 - review policies on risk assessment and physical intervention, with a view to routinely reviewing and reducing the use of physical intervention, and ensuring its appropriateness of use
 - ensuring that risk assessments use up-to-date information about pupils, and support staff to effectively manage pupils' needs and behaviours
 - use behaviour records and risk assessments more effectively to secure specialist support for pupils with the most complex needs when they need it.
- The approach to managing pupils' behaviour is more effective. There is an increased focus on rewards, and celebrating success at assemblies that builds pupils' resilience and confidence.
- The role of the behaviour support team has been redefined and is now used more judiciously. Better training has given staff a greater understanding of attachment, trauma and anxiety theories. Staff have higher expectations. Pupils have less 'free time'. There are fewer incidents and pupils' behaviour is managed well.
- The headteacher has modelled her expectations regarding the use of restrictive physical intervention, and this has resulted in a dramatic reduction in its use. Staff are now better equipped with the skills and strategies to support pupils with complex needs. Pupils have benefited from greater access to therapeutic work.
- Pupils now have dynamic risk assessments that mitigate the risks to their safety. These include trigger points and signs of distress, proactive strategies to keep students calm, reactive strategies and risk assessments, including medical conditions, control measures and actions to take to mitigate risk. These are updated according to any changing circumstances or concerns noted by staff.
- Leaders have ensured that these independent school standards are now met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3)

Paragraph 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(i)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)

Paragraph 20(6), 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c)

Paragraph 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(5), 21(5)(a),

21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a), 21(7)(b)

- At the inspection in February 2019, these standards were met.
- All of the necessary checks on staff are completed appropriately. A few small administrative errors were found on the school's register of pre-employment checks. These were rectified prior to the end of the inspection.
- These independent school standards continue to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 25

Paragraph 28, 28(1)(c)

- These standards were not met at the time of the previous inspection because:
 - drinking water was not labelled appropriately
 - showers were not maintained well enough.
- In the school's action plan, the proprietorial body proposed to:
 - undertake a review of resources and the school environment
 - create an action plan for works based on the review of the environment
 - review safeguarding and health and safety systems.
- All the previous mixer taps have been replaced with single taps, from which pupils can access drinking water. These are now labelled accordingly.
- The shower rooms have been tidied up and one shower has been replaced. These are now fit for purpose.
- Leaders have ensured that these independent school standards are now met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(1)(h), 32(1)(i), 32(3), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(e), 32(3)(f)

- This standard is was not met at the standard inspection in February 2019 because leaders did not provide some of the required information to parents and others, most notably:
 - annual accounting for pupils funded by the local authority
 - information required for the purpose of annual review
 - particulars on the provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language
 - information regarding the school's academic performance in the preceding school year
 - details of the complaints registered under formal procedure during the preceding school year.
- In the school's action plan, leaders undertook to:
 - establish a system with Autism Anglia to account for, and review, annual expenditure for individual pupils who are funded by the local authority

- recruit a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to oversee the precise provision for pupils, including the commissioning of additional specialist expertise, such as therapy, and any additional provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (this links also to Part 3)
- ensure that the school’s academic performance and numbers of complaints are recorded on the school’s website on an annual basis.
- The recently appointed SENCo is rationalising the processes for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Each pupil will have a ‘My Doucecroft’ plan that coordinates information and helps staff to support pupils to meet the targets in their EHC plans more readily. The school provides all of the necessary information to support pupils at their annual reviews.
- The headteacher has worked closely with governors to ensure that annual expenditure for individual pupils is broken down and available to the local authority who fund the placement.
- Pupils’ academic performance from the previous year and the number of complaints are available to parents via the school’s website.
- The school’s ‘English as a second language’ policy is available to parents via the school’s website and lists how staff will identify, assess, and support pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Pupils whose first language is not English will be immersed in the activities appropriate to their learning and will work with their peers to encourage acquisition of language, as and when appropriate.
- Leaders have ensured that this independent school standard is now met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

National minimum standards for residential special schools

Paragraph 33, 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 33(d), 33(e), 33(f), 33(g), 33(h), 33(i), 33(i)(i), 33(i)(ii), 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii), 33(k)

National minimum standard for residential special schools 18.2

- At the inspection in February 2019, this independent school standard was met.
- The inspector liaised with the social care regulatory inspector who conducted the previous social care inspection because standard 18.2 of the national minimum standards for residential special schools had not been met. The inspector checked the way complaints are handled on this visit.
- The school’s policy is available on the website, has clear timescales and includes informal and formal processes for dealing with complaints.
- When complainants are not satisfied, arrangements are in place to set up an appropriate panel for a hearing where complainants can be accompanied.
- The school maintains all records confidentially and provides a written record of all formal complaints, including any actions arising.
- This independent school standard remains met. The evidence collected on this inspection supports the national minimum standard also being met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools
National minimum standards for residential special schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

National minimum standard for residential special schools 20.1

- At the time of the previous inspection, this independent school standard was not met because:
 - leaders did not have the capacity to undertake essential strategic work
 - leaders were not maintaining the independent school standards
 - leaders' evaluation of the school lacked rigour and was overgenerous in its view about the quality of provision
 - leaders did not support pupils well enough to voice their opinions and views about their experiences and aspirations.
- The action plan was accepted by the DfE with modifications. The revised action plan has taken account of the required modifications.
- In the school's revised action plan, the proprietor undertook to:
 - appoint a new headteacher via external recruitment
 - review roles and responsibilities within the school, including the appointment of middle leaders
 - audit staff skills and knowledge to support training and development
 - train the leadership team on responsibilities within the independent school standards
 - visit other successful schools to review provision and gain expertise
 - provide greater rigour to leaders' self-evaluation processes, linking them explicitly to leaders' performance management
 - review and implement careers information, advice and guidance processes, and develop advocacy on offer to pupils
 - recruit a clinical psychologist to further develop identification of pupils' needs and the support provided.
- The new headteacher, appointed shortly after the previous inspection, has worked tirelessly to drive the school forward. The progress made in that limited time has been stark and there have been significant and widespread changes. The headteacher has an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and knows that some standards will take longer to meet than others. Importantly, improvements are built on long-term and sustainable solutions that address the underlying weaknesses. Currently, these improvements are not yet showing the impact needed on pupils' progress.
- Senior leaders have greater clarity about their roles and responsibilities. The headteacher has restructured the leadership team, and senior leaders now oversee a key stage alongside their other specific roles of teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment.
- Middle leadership is still developing in some areas. There are a team of subject leaders for mathematics, science, art, outdoor learning, and forest school. Most of the leaders were appointed in June 2019 and while some are very experienced, others are not.

- The new careers coordinator ensures there is a greater focus on information, advice and guidance that helps prepare pupils better for when they leave the school. Pupils have benefited from a careers fair, more relevant work experience placements, and increased opportunities for pupils to have responsibility posts. These developments help pupils build confidence, responsibility, communication and social skills.
- Pupils work closely with therapists, particularly for speech and language, to ensure their views are heard. Leaders are still trying to identify suitable independent advocates to help pupils voice their opinions even more.
- The headteacher has overseen these improvements while raising staff morale and keeping everyone involved. As one member of staff said, 'This is a school that is going places because everyone is pulling in the same direction.'
- Governors have an accurate view of the effectiveness of the school. They have worked closely with the headteacher to effect improvement. They have plans in place to further develop their monitoring systems by linking governors to specific areas of responsibility.
- The inspector scrutinised the governors' records of monitoring by independent visitors, against standard 20.1 of the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The evidence collected on this inspection supports this national minimum standard being met.
- Although improvements against some of the requirements in the paragraphs for this independent schools standard were seen, the independent school standard remains not met.
- 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, as set out in the annex of this report. 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.

School details

Unique reference number	115426
DfE registration number	881/6032
Inspection number	10123401

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	48
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	12
Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Chair	Andrew Beevers
Headteacher	Louise Parkinson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,714 to £79,902
Telephone number	01206 771 234
Website	www.doucecroft.org.uk
Email address	lparkinson@autism-anglia.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	12–14 February 2019

Information about this school

- This is a residential special school where some pupils are boarders or access temporary respite at the residential provision.
- The most recent inspection of the residential provision was in May 2019. At that time, the overall experience of children and young people was judged as good. There were two national minimum standards for residential special schools that were not met, and one recommendation made. The report for the inspection of the residential provision can be found on Ofsted's website.

- A new headteacher was appointed in March 2019, after the previous standard inspection. There have been changes to the senior leadership team and there are a number of new middle leaders now in post.
- The school provides full-time education to pupils with SEND. Each pupil has an EHC plan. All pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- Some pupils in the school's 'transition hub' in key stages 4 and 5 access work experience and alternative provision. This includes Chelmsford and Otley Colleges, Mercury Theatre in Colchester, the Arts Café in Colchester and Rally Sports.
- All school placements are funded by local authorities and admission is through local authority referral. Currently, most pupils who attend the school are funded by Essex and Suffolk local authorities.
- Pupils typically enter the school with achievement significantly below the national average or after periods of turbulence in their previous schooling.
- The school does not receive additional funding for disadvantaged pupils.
- Although the school is registered to have children from the age of three years old, it has not had anyone in the Nursery or Reception provision for a number of years.

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.
- At the standard inspection in February 2019, the school was judged as inadequate and seven of the independent school standards were not met. Following the inspection, the DfE required the proprietor to provide an action plan. The DfE accepted the school's first action plan with modifications, in June 2019.
- This is the school's first progress monitoring inspection since the standard inspection in February 2019. The DfE commissioned Ofsted to conduct this progress monitoring inspection at no notice.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff and four members of the local governing body, two of whom are also trustees.
- The inspector visited classes to observe pupils in their learning and to look at the work in their books. The inspector scrutinised documents, including the school's safeguarding policy, the single central register of employment checks, and information linked to pupils' progress.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's records linked to behaviour, complaints and risk assessments.
- The inspector liaised with the social care regulatory inspector who carried out the previous inspection of the residential provision. The inspector looked at information linked to the two national minimum standards judged not met at that visit.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

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

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school—
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) 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—
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour among pupils by ensuring that:
 - 9(a) a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, among other matters, sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour;
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that:
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that:
 - 28(1)(c) cold water supplies that are suitable for drinking are clearly marked as such.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that:
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate;
 - 32(1)(h) where a pupil wholly or partly funded by a local authority (except where funding is solely for free of charge early years provision in accordance with the duty contained in section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006) is registered at the school, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil is provided to the local authority and, on request, to the Secretary of State;
 - 32(1)(i) where a pupil with an EHC plan wholly or partly funded by a local authority or other body through public funds is registered at the school, such information as may reasonably be required for the purpose of the annual review of the EHC plan is provided to the responsible local authority.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is:
 - 32(3)(b) particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with EHC plans and pupils for whom English is an additional language;
 - 32(3)(e) particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations;
 - 32(3)(f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;

- 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
- 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
- 3(f) utilises effective classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
- 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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