

Alchemy School

72 Station Road, Teynham, Kent ME9 9SN

Inspection date

17 February 2021

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- Leaders attach great importance to supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development during their time at school. Despite many pupils attending for relatively short periods of time, they access different elements of the school's personal, social and health education curriculum, as well as aspects such as citizenship and relationships and sex education as part of their bespoke programmes.
- Most of the learning and personal support offered by the school are delivered in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. This means that staff are able to target individuals' specific needs and personalise this area of provision as required. This includes addressing the daily concerns and real-life aspects of supporting pupils to understand their role in the local community and wider society.
- Respect for, and tolerance of others, including staff and peers, underpin much of the work of the school. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. Staff understand the importance of broadening pupils' experience of equality and diversity. Again, this is often carried out as bespoke and targeted pieces of work.
- Discrimination is not tolerated. Diversity is celebrated. Leaders were able to share a range of examples of recent and ongoing work to support pupils to understand the concept of fundamental British values and the importance of these in modern Britain.
- School leaders have ensured that all relevant standards in Part 2 are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b), 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The school's safeguarding policy is compliant with current guidelines and is available on request (the school does not have a website). The safeguarding of pupils and staff

is given the highest priority by leaders. Training at an appropriate level is in place and in date for all staff, including designated safeguarding leads. Leaders particularly understand the potential dangers their pupils face in their day-to-day lives outside school. They make it their business to maintain close contact with other local and national agencies to ensure that pupils attending the school are safe.

- Records of concern and documentation regarding referrals to outside agencies or recording physical interventions are maintained well. Leaders are proactive and try to anticipate problems before they occur. They know pupils well. They also understand the importance of providing staff with written guidance, risk assessments and policies that are useful working documents, rather than just statements of intent.

Paragraph 9–10

- The school has a range of resources and documentation that support the behaviour of pupils. These include a behaviour and a 'countering bullying' policy, as well as guidance about the use of mobile phones and substance misuse for instance. Expectations of pupils' behaviour are high, although school leaders readily admit that 'pupils sometimes struggle with this'.
- Leaders could explain clearly procedures for encouraging pupils to behave well. These include named 'safe' people and strategies put in place to support individual pupils. Staff undergo additional training in de-escalation and to help them manage behaviour. Most of the training is delivered by independent external behaviour management specialists.

Paragraph 11–16(b)

- The school has a range of policies to promote the health and safety of pupils, staff and visitors to the school. The head of school's co-director is currently specifically responsible for this, although much of the work in this area is carried out by external consultants or specialist companies.
- The school has a written fire safety policy. A fire risk assessment completed by an independent specialist company is in place. Servicing of equipment and alarms is also carried out by external specialists. The alarm system was being refurbished at the time of this inspection during the half-term break.
- A first-aid policy is in place. Key staff have been trained to deliver first aid. Admissions and attendance registers are also in place. Systems and protocols for staff to record and monitor attendance and engagement with outreach programmes have been established. A lone-worker policy, staff mobile phone protocols, and guidance for whistle-blowing and staff grievances and harassment are all in place and add to the sense that the proprietor takes its responsibilities under Part 3 seriously.
- A written risk assessment policy is available. It underpins the concept of risk assessments and reducing risk to pupils and staff alike. Each pupil has an individual risk assessment that is reviewed at least three times a year and more frequently if required.
- School leaders have ensured that all relevant standards in Part 3 are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved.

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

Paragraph 18(2)–18(3), 19(2)–19(3), 20(6)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(7)(b)

- Leaders understand the checks that need to be made to ensure that staff, supply staff, proprietors and other adults in the school are suitable to work with pupils. Key leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training. The school also uses the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) update scheme.
- The single central register of checks on adults is compliant with current guidelines. Leaders have recently updated this as part of their move to new electronic systems to streamline records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, as well as aspects of safeguarding.
- School leaders have ensured that all relevant standards in Part 4 are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1)–24(1)(b)

- The school is accommodated on the ground and first floors of what was previously a doctors' surgery. Appropriate toilet and washing facilities are available for pupils and for staff. A shower and suitable changing accommodation are available if required on the first floor.
- A medical room is available for medical examination and treatment of pupils if required.

Paragraph 25–29(1)(b)

- The premises are maintained to a suitable standard. At the time of this material change inspection, an external contractor was carrying out general maintenance on the school's alarm system.
- Internal and external lighting, acoustics and sound insulation are suitable for the purpose intended. Drinking water is accessible and readily available to pupils. Washing facilities are appropriate, with an adequate supply of hot and cold water.
- A small rear garden, which also contains an intervention room, and a paved area in front of the school are available for use by pupils. The school utilises an adjacent park and other local facilities such as swimming pools, sports centres and football pitches for physical education and recreational purposes.
- The accommodation available on the school site is supplemented by a range of other off-site venues where pupils access pastoral support and bespoke curriculums provided by the school. Sometimes, this includes staff visiting pupils in their own homes because of the nature of pupils' complex needs. As part of this inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector visited one external setting used by the school as part of its outreach programme for part-time pupils. The visit showed the accommodation to be appropriate for its intended use.
- School leaders have ensured that all relevant standards in Part 5 are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- School leaders have thought carefully about this material change application. There is growing demand locally for places within the school. Most of this is driven by Kent and Medway local authorities. Demand is particularly high for the short-term, part-time programmes that the school provides. Leaders have considered the impact that additional pupils will have on the quality of provision, as well as how the additional pupils, most with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), will affect the school's current pupils.
- Although the application is to increase the registration from 30 to 50 pupils, there is no intention to accommodate this number at one time within the current school accommodation. The application, if granted, will allow leaders the flexibility to expand their part-time programme, much of which is delivered off site, while still being able to accommodate full-time pupils within the school.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the consequences of over-reaching the capacity of the school. Her Majesty's Inspector weighed this aspect carefully in coming to the decision that the proprietor and school leaders have the capacity to expand the school's roll while continuing to meet the independent school standards and promoting the well-being of current and future pupils.
- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that all relevant independent school standards considered as part of this inspection, including those in Part 8, are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	146736
DfE registration number	886/6153
Inspection number	10167438

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	L&P Educational Services Ltd
Headteacher	Mrs Lisa Bowles (Head of School)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,080
Telephone number	01795 521941
Website	None
Email address	lisascottbowles@alchemyschools.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	9–11 July 2019

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	11–19	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	Up to 30	Up to 50	Up to 50

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Not applicable
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	15	Up to 50

Number of part-time pupils	12	Up to 50
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	27	Up to 50
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	15	Up to 50
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	15	Up to 50

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	15	20
Number of part-time teaching staff	8	15

Information about this school

- Alchemy School occupies a former doctors' surgery in a residential area of the village of Teynham, Kent.
- The school caters for pupils in need of alternative educational programmes. Most are pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The majority of pupils attending have education, health and care plans. Many have not attended school for extended periods prior to joining Alchemy.
- The school offers provision for full- and part-time pupils. Leaders pride themselves on making their offer truly bespoke for each pupil. Some outreach is also provided. Part-time pupils typically undertake short programmes that last for six or 12 weeks.
- The school's proprietor is L&P Educational Services Limited, which comprises the head of school and one other director. The school is led by a small leadership team and supported by an advisory council.

- The school's first standard inspection took place in July 2019, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all the independent school standards were found to be met.
- The school does not have a website, and nor does it use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic of 2021.
- The inspection was commissioned because the school has applied to make a material change to its registration, namely to increase the number of pupils from up to 30 to up to 50. This is the first material change inspection in respect to this particular change.
- The inspector met with the head of school (who also represented the proprietor), the deputy headteacher and the head of school's personal assistant.
- The inspector toured the school's premises and accommodation, including classrooms and communal areas. He also visited one of the off-site locations used by the school to deliver short- and long-term programmes to pupils.
- The inspector checked a range of policies and documents. He also reviewed records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff, including the school's single central register.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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