

Woodpecker Court Youth Activities Ltd

Woodpecker Court, Wigmore Lane, Eythorne CT15 4BF

Inspection dates

22 June 2021

Overall outcome

The school is unlikely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h)–2(2)(i), 3–4

- The proposed school's curriculum policy sets out its stated intention of providing an accessible education for pupils, including vulnerable learners, who have previously struggled to learn in a mainstream setting. It is intended that pupils attending the school will have an education, health and care (EHC) plan for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.
- It is intended that pupils will spend around half of their time learning an academic curriculum and the other half will be spent on vocational learning, largely outdoors. The subjects that pupils will study are English, mathematics, science, catering, digital skills, physical education (PE), humanities and personal, social and health education (PSHE). They will also learn animal care and take a life skills course. However, the curriculum policy and associated plans have not been updated to fully reflect leaders' intentions on meeting the needs of pupils who will attend the setting full time.
- Leaders intend to assess pupils' academic starting points on entry. This is primarily in reading, spelling and mathematics. The curriculum that pupils follow will be formed around pupils' starting points. Pupils will take a range of academic qualifications. These are likely to be a mixture of functional skills, vocational qualifications at level 1 and level 2, and GCSE qualifications. However, the curriculum and assessment policies do not reflect leaders' intentions that pupils should make progress in the academic curriculum.
- Leaders recognise that pupils who attend the school may struggle with reading. They therefore intend to prioritise pupils' reading. They intend to check how well pupils can read when they join the school and put in place a programme of support to address any gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge. They have set up a library which contains books aimed at older pupils who are learning to read.
- Leaders understand the importance of preparing pupils for their next stages. The vocational curriculum is intended to support pupils who may wish to follow careers,

for example, in catering and animal care. In addition, an independent careers adviser will offer advice and guidance. Students will have 'internal work placements' while the COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions remain in place. After that, it is intended that pupils will undertake some work experience and attend a careers fair.

- Outdoor learning will be prioritised in this proposed school. Leaders strongly believe that through learning outdoors, teachers will be able to meet the SEMH needs of pupils, improving their self-motivation and the ability to think and learn for themselves. They have proven experience of this through their post-16 provision and through their work with pupils aged between 14 and 16 who attend on a part-time basis. Mealtimes are especially prized as an opportunity to discuss topical issues that support pupils' understanding of life in British society.
- Leaders are clear about the ethos and values that lie at the heart of this school. As part of this, they will ensure that discrimination is not tolerated and will promote equalities through the PSHE curriculum as well as through the school's wider work.
- Leaders have plans in place to ensure that teachers are effective in helping pupils to make progress. They will monitor teachers' work and provide a range of training to allow teachers to constantly improve their practice in meeting pupils' academic and emotional needs.
- The school is unlikely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards due to weaknesses in the curriculum policy and associated plans.

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

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- PSHE is to be a core part of the school's curriculum. Leaders are especially aware of the additional risks that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) face in keeping safe and in understanding the world. Healthy, respectful relationships and what constitutes sexual harassment are included in the curriculum that pupils will learn. In addition, there will be daily discussions around topical issues aimed at helping to keep pupils safe. For example, during the inspection, the headteacher was planning to talk to pupils about self-produced sexual imagery.
- Leaders intend for pupils to develop independence, responsibility and cooperation through the way that communal outdoor spaces are used, shared and managed. For example, through the collaborative preparation of food at mealtimes.
- There are to be daily opportunities for pupils to articulate their feelings. This is a key part of the school's intended curriculum and one of the key ways in which staff will support pupils' special educational needs.
- The curriculum is to include opportunities for pupils to learn about life in modern Britain. For example, in life skills lessons and through a public services course, pupils will learn about British institutions. Leaders will use topical events, such as the death of Prince Phillip, to 'pause to consider what makes us British'. There is to be a democratically elected student council. Pupils will learn about the celebrations and festivals of a range of religions through the PSHE curriculum.

- Pupils will actively contribute to the life of the school and the local community through an enterprise curriculum. For example, they will make crafts to be sold to the local community through 'honesty boxes' outside the school.
- This aspect of the independent school standards is likely to be strong. The school is likely to meet all of the standards in this part.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7-7(b)

- Safeguarding is likely to be strong. Leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, are knowledgeable and well trained in safeguarding. Staff training is regular and in line with statutory guidance. The safeguarding policy has been written in line with the relevant government guidance and legislation. It sets out clearly the risks pupils may face and the procedures that staff should follow if they are worried about a pupil or if a pupil makes a disclosure. The advisory board includes members experienced in safeguarding in a school. They will monitor the effectiveness of the safeguarding policy and practice.
- Leaders have thought carefully about the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND and understand the local contextual risks pupils face in the community, including from county lines and sexual exploitation. Leaders understand the importance of liaising with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that pupils get the help they need. How to keep safe is a key part of the curriculum that pupils will learn.
- Risk assessments are in place to ensure that pupils are safe throughout the time they are on site. This includes considering the risks that the outdoor environment poses, as well as the risks associated with having pupils under 16 participating in activities alongside young people aged between 16 and 25. For example, there are different coloured uniforms to help identify visually where there are different age groups working together, and a high staff-to-pupil ratio in place to minimise risk.
- Leaders have been trained in safer recruitment and were able to explain how they use this training when recruiting staff.

Paragraph 9-10

- Leaders are experienced in managing pupils' behaviour. Their approach involves identifying and understanding the underlying causes of challenging behaviour and providing individualised help and guidance. There is to be regular assessment and target setting based on pupils' behaviour. Maintaining positive behaviour is seen as the basis for a stable learning environment. These aspects are reflected in the behaviour policy well. However, the policy does not explain how sanctions such as exclusion will be used.
- Leaders are clear that bullying is unacceptable. They recognise that pupils who will attend the school may have been bullied and may also have been involved in bullying. Leaders described a clear approach to preventing bullying, for example through the promotion of the communal environment where pupils have to cooperate with each other as they learn. Leaders train staff in how to identify bullying and address it if it happens.

Paragraphs 11-16(b)

- Health and safety records show that all the required health and safety checks are carried out at appropriate intervals. This includes checks on the site, its buildings, lighting, heating and water. Fire safety risk assessment and appropriate certification are in place.
- There is a risk assessment policy in place which sets out the school's approach to identifying and managing risks well. Leaders identify a large range of risks that pupils face daily on site, for example from the fire pit, log stacks and working farm. Risk assessments are in place to minimise these risks.
- Additional risk assessments will be in place for each pupil. These will identify any specific risks linked to their SEMH needs and any associated medical or behaviour needs.
- The proposed staffing arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils will be supervised at all times around the site. There will be a high staff-to-pupil ratio.
- The admission and attendance registers are in place using an electronic recording system. Leaders understand the importance of not taking pupils off roll until it is confirmed that they are on roll at another school or have permission from the local authority to remove a name from their register.
- The school is unlikely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards due to shortcomings in the behaviour policy.

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

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

- Leaders are aware of the required checks that need to be made on adults working in the school. This includes staff, volunteers, leaders, directors and members of the advisory board. Additionally, leaders intend to complete Disclosure and Barring Service checks on any adults who attend the post-16 provision that operates on the site.
- There is a single central register (SCR) in place, showing that the required employment checks have been made for all current staff. The SCR and associated staff files are kept neatly and securely.
- The school is likely to meet the standards in this part.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1)–23(1)(c), 24(1)–24(1)(b), 25–29(1)(b)

- The school is situated in 14 acres of woodland and farmland. In the woodland, there is a large, open outdoor classroom with a fire pit. Pupils will use this area for a variety of purposes, including learning and at mealtimes. It is intended that pupils will spend around half of their time each week learning outdoors. There are five wooden cabins suitable for use as classrooms.

- The site has its own secure access and is very well maintained. There is suitable internal and external lighting, and acoustics are appropriate. The classrooms are heated by wood-burning stoves.
- There are separate toilets and washing facilities for staff and pupils. There is a disabled facility that houses a shower and a toilet. The washing facilities have hot water but no cold water.
- Hot and cold water around the site are maintained at suitable temperatures and labelled appropriately. Drinking water is labelled.
- There is plenty of space for pupils to play and exercise. The headteacher proposes to use a sports facility next to the woodland for PE.
- The medical space does not meet the requirements of the standards because it does not contain a bed or washing facility.
- Leaders have not ensured that all of the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)–32(1)(j), 32(2)–32(4)(c)

- The school website contains the required information and policies that must be made available to parents. This includes the contact details of the school and proprietor body.
- Leaders understand the requirement to publish other information as it becomes available, including inspection reports and an annual written report for parents. They understand the requirement to provide specified information to local authorities, including that relating to any pupil who is looked after by a local authority and any pupil who has an EHC plan.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33(a)–33(k)

- The complaints policy sets out clear timescales for the management of a complaint. It provides for complaints to be dealt with on an informal basis initially, before being escalated to a formal process. There is provision for a panel hearing.
- However, the policy is not compliant with government legislation. It does not provide for a member of the panel to be independent of the management and running of the school. It does not allow for the complainant to be present at the panel hearing, or for the complainant to be accompanied. It does not allow for any findings or recommendations to be made available to the complainant or the person being complained about. It does not provide for the appropriate written records to be kept of complaints made under the formal procedure so that they are available for inspection by the secretary of state or their representative.
- The complaints policy does not allow for complaints to be made against a member of staff. Leaders said that this is because there is a separate policy for such complaints,

but recognised that this is overly complicated and may lead to a parent believing they were not able to complain about staff.

- The policy is available on the school's website. Leaders intend to rewrite the policy according to current legislation.
- The standard in this part is not likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The headteacher, known as the principal, has extensive experience in promoting pupils' welfare, health and safety. He has a background in youth work and behaviour management in schools, and runs a current outdoor learning provision aimed at supporting the SEMH needs of those who attend. Other leaders are qualified teachers and one has been a successful headteacher of a pupil referral unit. This leader is also a qualified special educational needs coordinator. Together, they are experienced and knowledgeable about providing education and leading educational provision.
- The proprietor body has made sure that there are suitably qualified teaching staff to teach the range of subjects that pupils will learn. Most teachers have subject specialisms or experience in the subjects they will teach. Leaders have also employed a curriculum adviser to further support the teaching of mathematics in the school.
- The proprietor body has set up an advisory board to provide governance to the school. Members have a range of useful skills to allow them to support and challenge the school's leaders. This includes a headteacher, curriculum specialist and solicitor. It is intended that the advisory board will transition into a local governing body when the school opens.
- Leaders demonstrated that they take safeguarding very seriously. There is a suitably qualified and knowledgeable designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs.
- Leaders have thought about how the curriculum will be structured for pupils aged 14 to 16 who attend the site as their sole school on a full-time basis. However, they have not updated some of their plans and policies to reflect their thinking. This includes curriculum, assessment and behaviour policies.
- Leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are likely to be met. Therefore, the standard in this part is not likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- There is an accessibility plan which sets out that leaders intend to meet the needs of pupils who are disabled so that they can participate in the curriculum and access the physical environment. However, the plan is not specific about how this will happen.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements, as set out in the annex of this report.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	148597
DfE registration number	886/6163
Inspection number	10196817

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	14–25 special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Woodpecker Court Youth Activities Ltd
Chair	Jeremy Speakman
Headteacher	Dominic Meehan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,000 – £44,000
Telephone number	01304830958
Website	www.woodpeckercourt.co.uk
Email address	office@woodpeckercourt.com
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	14–16	14–16
Number of pupils on the school roll	0	10	10

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	10
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	10
Of which, number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	10
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	10

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	0	2
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0

Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is located in 14 acres of rural land. There are a number of purpose-built wooden cabins and a large communal area, all situated in woodland. It is intended that pupils spend half of their time learning inside and half outside. An adjoining farm is also part of the school. Members of the public have access to the farm. Pupils can only access the farm with staff supervision.
- The provider currently operates as an alternative provider of education for eight pupils aged between 14 and 16 who attend the site for up to two days a week. The provider proposes that up to 10 pupils aged between 14 and 16 will attend the proposed school on a full-time basis of at least 25 hours per week. The school intends to provide education for pupils with SEMH needs. Some pupils may also have autism spectrum disorder. All pupils will have an EHC plan.
- The provider is also registered under Section 41 of the Children and Families Act 2014 as a special post-16 institution, to provide education for up to 45 learners with SEND aged between 16 and 25. The registration details for this provision are 886/7916. The provider intends that classes will include a mixture of pupils under the age of 16 and learners from the post-16 provision.
- The setting was previously inspected as a possible unregistered school. A compliance visit took place in April 2021 which judged that they were not operating as a school.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the inspection was conducted remotely in order to limit inspector travel during the COVID-19 outbreak. A full range of evidence was gathered to check whether the school is likely to meet the independent school standards.
- The team inspector visited the premises to gather evidence about the suitability and safety of the school site. She also checked the SCR and some behaviour records.
- The lead inspector then conducted the rest of the inspection remotely. She scrutinised a range of school documentation, and held meetings with the principal, other school leaders and two members of the school's advisory committee. The inspector also reviewed the school's website.
- The purpose of this inspection was to check whether the school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, if the DfE decides to register it. It was the school's first pre-registration inspection since the school decided it wishes to take pupils of compulsory school age.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Macdonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress;
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 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 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(a) a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour;
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including-
 - 24(1)(a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short-term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.
- 24(2) The accommodation provided under sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purposes set out in sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b).

- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 28(1)(b) toilets and urinals have an adequate supply of cold water and washing facilities have an adequate supply of hot and cold water.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which-
 - 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
 - 33(h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
 - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is-
 - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
 - 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and-
 - 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
 - 33(k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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.

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