

Huckleberry Therapeutic School

Manor Farm, Manor Road, Wantage OX12 8HJ

Inspection date

23 June 2021

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 1 and 2

- Pupils attending Huckleberry will have diagnosed special educational needs and/or disabilities. They will have an education, health and care plan that identifies social, emotional and mental health as a primary need. Many pupils will be at risk of, or have been subject to, permanent exclusion from another school.
- The headteacher is driven by a strong sense of moral purpose around providing for pupils' specific needs. She has a clear end goal in mind, intending the school to prepare pupils for moving onto a mainstream or specialist secondary school at the end of Year 6. The planned curriculum, combining academic and therapeutic input, looks likely to help pupils in achieving this goal.
- Pupils will study a wide range of subjects, broadly reflecting the national curriculum. Literacy and numeracy will be key elements. Leaders plan to focus this learning around three strands: well-being; communications and interaction; and cognition and learning. By doing this, they anticipate being able to integrate pupils' wider development into what they learn every day in school.
- Leaders recognise education, health and care plans as being central to identifying and meeting pupils' needs. The headteacher has well-considered plans for how these needs will be taken carefully into account when planning and adapting the curriculum for any pupil joining the school.
- Opportunities for personal, social and health education (PSHE) are built into the planned curriculum. Leaders intend prioritising this work when pupils first join the school, to help pupils settle quickly and engage with more formal learning. They describe work with families and carers as being a critical part of this process.
- The school's ethos strongly promotes the fundamental British values of tolerance and respect. This is captured in a range of school documents, including the positive behaviour policy, and in the information shared on the school website. Useful opportunities to learn about democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty are reflected in leaders' curriculum plans.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

- Pupils will be taught in small groups, each one having its own teacher and teaching assistant. The headteacher has already recruited some staff who have relevant prior expertise and experience. These staff are currently working in the proprietor body's other school. This is with the deliberate intention of helping staff to deepen their understanding of the ethos and approach intended at Huckleberry.
- The headteacher has well-considered plans for staff's training and development. She intends bringing in experts from beyond the school to help staff understand how to cater for the needs identified on pupils' education, health and care plans. All staff are to complete a range of online training as part of their induction. Collectively, these measures look likely to equip staff with the knowledge they need to support pupils successfully.
- Leaders have already identified how they will check pupils' knowledge, both on joining the school and over time. Their plans look set to give them the information they need to review and adapt their plans for pupils' learning.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards if granted permission to open.

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

Paragraph 5

- The headteacher has given careful consideration to this aspect of the proposed school's provision, seeing it as central to pupils' future success. Pupils' social development, in particular, will be prioritised from when they first join the school. Leaders describe this as being critical in enabling pupils to engage successfully with more formal learning.
- Planned schemes of work identify appropriately sequenced learning as part of the PSHE curriculum. Leaders are keen to bring expert speakers into school to help enhance this aspect of what pupils will learn. Taught sessions will be supported by assemblies based on planned themes that reflect culturally significant events. Therapeutic work will complement this formal input, responding to pupils' identified additional needs.
- Leaders know that some pupils will join the school mid-year and having missed some parts of the PSHE curriculum. They have thought about how to identify the priorities for what pupils will need to catch up. Leaders intend working closely with parents and carers to do this successfully, as part of pupils' induction into the school. They place great value on helping pupils to develop meaningful and trusting relationships, reflecting that they are likely to have found this difficult in the past.
- Leaders place suitable emphasis on reflecting diversity within the proposed school. They recognise the importance of pupils learning about cultures and faiths that are different than their own. Leaders have planned opportunities into the taught curriculum, such as learning about Windrush Day as part of pupils' work in history. They intend making good use of local amenities such as museums, community groups and religious buildings to help bring learning to life for pupils.

- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met if the school is permitted to open.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 6 and 7

- Safeguarding arrangements are detailed and appropriate. They look likely to promote a culture of vigilance and care. They are underpinned by an effective written safeguarding policy and plans for useful training for staff and those responsible for governance.
- Leaders are alert to specific risks that pupils may be particularly vulnerable to, such as around online safety and grooming. They have taken such risks into account when planning how to help keep pupils safe. This is reflected in how pupils will learn about healthy relationships and using the internet safely.
- Systems for reporting any potential concerns about pupils' well-being are suitable, with the headteacher already considering how they might develop as the school grows. Already-established links with the local authority are likely to help the headteacher in carrying out her role as designated safeguarding lead. This looks set to enable extra help to be put swiftly in place if a pupil is identified as being in need.

Paragraphs 9 and 10

- The school's promotion of positive behaviour is evident throughout its plans. This ethos is captured successfully in the school's written policy, which is based around a culture of mutual respect. Leaders base their plans on relevant research about therapeutic approaches that have been seen to be effective in the past.
- The headteacher is determined that pupils will not be excluded from school. If serious issues arise, the headteacher anticipates working with staff, the pupil and their family to establish what went wrong and identify a way forward.
- Leaders balance the promotion of positive behaviours with useful information and guidance about managing behavioural incidents successfully. Their strategy for managing physical interventions, should they be necessary, is reasonable and measured. Plans are in place for monitoring pupils' behaviour over time. This should help leaders see how successful their therapeutic work has been in improving pupils' behaviour.
- The school's anti-bullying strategy is intended to be owned by pupils and their parents. It makes clear reference to unacceptable behaviour, such as banter and sexualised bullying. A member of staff has been identified as an anti-bullying champion, in order to promote this aspect of the school's work.

Paragraphs 11, 12 and 16

- Leaders have carried out due diligence around arrangements to keep pupils safe. Policies for health and safety and risk assessment are in place and are fit for purpose. They suggest that leaders understand their legal duties around this element of their work.
- The headteacher takes ultimate responsibility for health and safety on the school site. She is supported in this work by experts employed by Calcot Services for Children. Routines for keeping a careful check on the school site are already in place and

appropriately documented. The proprietor body intends quality assuring the headteacher's health and safety work through checks on monitoring records and via visits to the school site.

- Arrangements for fire safety are suitable and thoughtful. Fire alarms and firefighting equipment is in place and in working order. Fire evacuation procedures have been planned, giving thought to personal emergency evacuation plans that some pupils are likely to need. An external company has been appointed to oversee future checks on fire arrangements, to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.
- Leaders have already completed numerous risk assessments in anticipation of the school being allowed to open. These demonstrate leaders' understanding of potential risks, linked to the school site and to pupils' needs.

Paragraph 13

- There is a suitable policy in place for managing first-aid arrangements. The headteacher intends all staff to be trained in how to administer medicines in case any pupils require this. Other first-aid training is planned as part of staff's induction.

Paragraph 14

- Plans for pupils' supervision reflect leaders' thoughtful and vigilant approach. Staffing numbers are sufficiently high, with extra capacity built in to manage emergencies and provide flexibility, for example for if some adults and pupils go off site for a planned visit. Higher-risk points in the day, such as when pupils arrive and leave via the car park, have been carefully considered.

Paragraph 15

- An admissions register is in place, ready to receive pupils' details once the school opens. It contains space to record all of the required information. Systems for registering pupils each day are well thought through. They look set to enable leaders to monitor pupils' attendance effectively over time.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

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

Paragraphs 17 to 21

- The headteacher is well tuned to the vital importance of ensuring that all adults involved in the school's work have been suitably vetted. She takes this responsibility very seriously and has undertaken useful training to ensure she understands what is required.
- Currently, a small number of staff have been appointed, some of whom are working at the proprietor body's other school. Leaders have followed rigorous recruitment processes in making these appointments. All of the required checks have been carried out, including in relation to medical fitness. These checks, along with those for the proprietor body members and chair of governors, are recorded meticulously on the school's single central register.
- Leaders do not anticipate using supply or agency staff at the school. Nevertheless, they understand the requirements around what checks should be made on any such staff and by whom.

- Some staff are employed centrally by Calcot Services for Children, for example to maintain the school grounds. While their employment checks are not the responsibility of the school, leaders have given careful thought to determining when it would be appropriate for them to be on the school's single central register.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22 to 31

- The school will be based in a converted house on a site that was formerly a farm. The building and garden are used exclusively by the school. There are other small businesses based on the same site, beyond the boundaries of the school. Leaders initially anticipated opening the building in two stages, but now plan to open it all at the same time.
- The building has been renovated to a very high standard, providing a clean, light, bright and homely environment for pupils to learn in. Three classrooms are completely finished and are furnished suitably for the age and number of pupils they are planned to accommodate. The other three were undergoing final touches to décor and furnishing at the time of the inspection.
- Classrooms are spread across two floors – three on the ground floor and three on the first floor. One of the staircases is quite steep but has adequate handrails to help older pupils to use it safely. The headteacher intends younger pupils to be based downstairs, as they are likely to find the stairs more challenging.
- Leaders have thought about other spaces to enrich the school's provision. A sensory room provides a calm, safe space for pupils to take some time away from others or to receive additional therapies. Another room has been set aside to use for adults to work in smaller groups with pupils. A kitchen area in one of the classrooms provides an appropriate space for pupils to take part in cooking activities. All of these spaces are suitably furnished and resourced.
- Toilet facilities are suitable for the number and age of pupils that the school proposes to accommodate. There is a block of toilets on the ground floor, plus other separate toilets on the first floor. All of these have facilities for washing hands, with water that does not pose a scalding risk to pupils.
- There is a medical room on the first floor that is suitable for its intended purpose. It includes a locked cabinet for secure storage of any controlled medicines and resources to tend for pupils' first aid and short-term medical needs. It includes facilities for washing hands and has access to a toilet directly across the corridor.
- Leaders intend providing pupils with breakfast and lunch, giving pupils the chance to interact while they eat together. There is a large, well-furnished kitchen in place to facilitate this, providing a safe space for adults to store, prepare and cook food.
- The school has its own private, outdoor space for pupils to use for play and as part of their learning environment. The classroom intended for use by pupils in key stage 1 has a door that leads directly to the garden via three steep steps. Handrails and a ramp are being installed to help pupils use the doorway safely. In the meantime, there

are two other doors that enable pupils to access the outside space without needing to navigate the stairs.

- The garden provides suitable space for pupils to play and to participate in physical education. It is mainly laid to lawn, in keeping with the rural environment that the school is situated in. The headteacher has plans to involve pupils in developing this outside space, such as through planting a vegetable patch. There is also some land beyond the school's perimeter that belongs to the school which leaders intend pupils using for forest-school activities.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- The proposed school's website is already in place. It provides an accessible and welcoming introduction to the school. It is easy for prospective parents and carers to navigate, including those who speak English as an additional language. It clearly captures the vision that leaders have for the school's ethos and purpose.
- The website already contains most of the information that the school is required to publish. Some aspects have not been uploaded, in order to not give the false impression that the school is already open. This information is ready for leaders to upload if the school is given permission to open.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- Leaders place great value on working closely with parents and carers to meet pupils' needs. They hope that this will minimise the likelihood that complaints will be made. Nevertheless, they understand the arrangements they are required to put in place should someone wish to make a complaint.
- The school's written policy clearly outlines arrangements for informal and formal complaints, with appropriate timescales given. Procedures for referring a formal complaint on to a review panel are less clear within the written policy but are well understood by school leaders. The headteacher is in the process of updating the written policy to ensure that this final stage of the complaints procedure is clearly outlined for parents and carers.
- Leaders have given appropriate thought to the structure of any formal complaint panel that may be necessary. They have identified suitably knowledgeable and independent people they can call on in the event of needing to convene a panel.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Leaders' focus on pupils' well-being is reflected in every aspect of their work. The headteacher's sense of moral purpose is tangible. She brings useful experience of having successfully led another similar school owned by the proprietor body.

- The headteacher has already devised how she will monitor the school's compliance with the independent school standards. She and the chair of governors are knowledgeable about what evidence they will look for. Plans are already in place for leaders to routinely check on standards in the school, bringing in relevant experts to test out their assertions.
- The chair of governors is also the managing director for Calcot Services for Children. She has a clear understanding of her role in holding the headteacher to account for standards in the proposed school. She plans to adopt monitoring routines that have proved successful in the proprietor body's other school. Over time, she intends developing the size and work of the governing body, through bringing in experts to support with elements of quality assurance.
- The co-chairs of the proprietor body are well connected to the emerging school. They understand their legal responsibilities, keeping their knowledge up to date through ongoing involvement with useful training. This places them well to support and challenge the headteacher about standards in the school. Their ongoing and structured contact with the chair of governors helps to keep them well informed.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have put an accessibility plan in place that meets requirements. It reflects their intention for the school to be an inclusive place for pupils to learn. As such, it is fit for purpose. The headteacher has already identified some aspects of provision that could be enhanced further, such as putting personal emergency evacuation plans in place and ensuring that the curriculum is fully accessible to pupils with disabilities.

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.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	148625
DfE registration number	931/6025
Inspection number	10194026

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	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Calcot Services for Children (Education) Ltd
Chair	Harvinder and Sukhbir Singh (Co-chairs)
Headteacher	Ludivine Parmentier
Annual fees (day pupils)	Up to £60,000
Telephone number	01235 639 511
Website	www.huckleberrytherapeuticschool.co.uk
Email address	huckleberrytherapeuticschool@csfc.co.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	5 to 11	5 to 11
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	42	35

Reason for inspector's recommendations

- Leaders initially requested registration for up to 42 pupils, over two phases. This number was revised during this inspection, based on the size of the classrooms. The numbers given below reflect the school's revised proposals.

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	35
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	35
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	35
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	35

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	6
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	8

Information about this proposed school

- Huckleberry Therapeutic School intends providing full-time education for pupils aged five to 16 years who have social, emotional and mental health needs. They will have been referred to the school by a local authority, who will fund their places. Pupils are likely to have had an unsuccessful experience in a mainstream setting prior to joining the school.
- The school plans to operate from a converted building on the site of a former farm. The school site consists of the school building and a large, enclosed garden. The school has its own car park adjacent to the school site.
- The proposed school does not intend having any particular religious denomination or character. Its ethos is based around providing pupils with education and therapy that will support them in moving on to an appropriate provision at the end of key stage 2.
- The proprietor body, Calcot Services for Children, also runs another similar school, as well as 12 children's homes across Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Buckinghamshire. The

managing director of Calcot Services for Children is the named chair of governors for the proposed school.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to an application to register the provision as an independent special school. This is the first application that has been made to open this proposed school. All parts of the independent school standards were considered.
- When the proprietor body submitted their application, only the first phase of the building was ready. At the time of the inspection, the second phase of the building was in the very final stages of being completed. Therefore, the inspector considered a revised application, with pupil numbers based on both phases of the building.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and the managing director of Calcot Services for Children, who is also the chair of governors. A range of relevant documentation was considered, including information provided by school leaders and available on the proposed school's website. The inspector toured the school site and spoke to the co-chairs of the proprietor body on the telephone.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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