

Acorn Cottage The Lodge

Inspection date

7 October 2021

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- These standards were met at the standard inspection in June 2019 and remained met at the monitoring inspection in December 2019.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils continue to be effective. Staff are vigilant and suitably trained. Records of safeguarding incidents and pupils' attendance are appropriately recorded, including through the electronic system which has replaced the previously handwritten registers.
- The required policies are available on the Care First Ltd website, or to parents on request from school leaders.
- Leaders have ensured that these independent school standards are met

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

- At the standard inspection in June 2019, these independent school standards were not met. The school's risk assessment procedures were not applied well enough. Leaders did not check regularly whether risk assessments were appropriate or effective.
- At the first progress monitoring inspection in December 2019, these standards remained un-met. Leaders were unable to show how the welfare of pupils was safeguarded and promoted by identifying hazards and minimising the risks they presented.
- A suitable risk assessment policy for the school is now in place. This is underpinned by a detailed environmental risk assessment that is specific to the school site.
- Wider risk assessments cover in-school and learning away from school premises. Leaders have improved their oversight of these procedures, including through the appointment to the new role of head of quality assurance. This leader reports directly to the proprietor and governors.
- Personalised risk assessments for individual pupils take account of initial assessments, different learning contexts and the specific arrangements required to manage behaviour. These are used effectively alongside positive handling plans. Any additional actions

needed to support pupils' learning and welfare are added to risk assessments as part of routine reviews.

- The proprietor, leaders and governors understand and fulfil their responsibility to keep pupils safe.
- Leaders have ensured that these independent school standards are met

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

Paragraphs 18(1), 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), 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), 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), 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)

- These standards were met at both the June 2019 inspection and at the first progress monitoring inspection in December of the same year.
- At this progress monitoring inspection, these standards continue to be met.
- The single central record of pre-employment checks is well maintained. All the required checks on the suitability of new staff are carried out according to their roles in the school. Staff training is up to date, including safer recruitment training for leaders with responsibilities for interviewing candidates for vacant posts.
- The school does not use supply staff. Leaders are aware of the procedures to follow if they did.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards continue to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii)

- This standard was not met at the school's standard inspection in June 2019. It remained un-met at the first progress monitoring inspection in December 2019. At the time, the procedures to follow up on complaints had not been carried out systematically to ensure that all complaints were resolved.
- Leaders have revised the procedures for managing complaints. Procedures for making a complaint are set out clearly in the complaints policy. The policy includes appropriate time scales for a response to the concern raised.
- Complaints records are detailed and transparent. Information tracks effectively through from the initial complaint to the final resolution. The complainant signs the letter to indicate whether they are satisfied with the actions taken. It is only at this stage that complaints are closed.
- All complaints received are routinely copied to directors. The information relating to complaints is a regular agenda item at directors' meetings.
- Leaders have ensured that this standard is now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- At the time of the standard inspection, the proprietor was not ensuring that leaders and managers were fulfilling their roles in meeting the independent school standards.
- Although gains were made in improving the quality of education and in the provision of information, the standards linked to pupils' welfare, health and safety, and to the manner in which complaints are handled, remained un-met.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have acted to ensure that the welfare, health and safety standards are now met. The manner in which complaints are handled has been strengthened. The associated complaint resolution records are clear and in line with procedures set out in the school's complaints policy.
- There have been significant changes over time in school leadership. A new head of education has recently been appointed. This is the fourth school leadership change since the previous inspection.
- The new role of head of quality assurance has been created. This leader has only just taken up the post. Revised arrangements for the monitoring and review of provision are at an early stage of implementation. The head of education and head of quality assurance are still securing their understanding of the independent school standards.
- The school's development plan is in its infancy and incomplete. It is not precise enough in matching planned developments to the independent school standards. As a result, it is not effective in supporting the monitoring and review systems in place, including in reporting to the proprietor and governors whether standards continue to be met.
- Leaders' ongoing capacity to maintain the independent school standards consistently is not evident. Consequently, this standard remains un-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. 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	130854
DfE registration number	935/6084
Inspection number	10209011

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 school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	2
Proprietor	Care Focus Ltd
Chair	Timothy Leigh
Headteacher	Karen Randall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,424
Telephone number	01473657030
Website	www.carefocus.co.uk
Email address	admin@carefocus.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	25 to 27 June 2019

Information about this school

- Acorn Cottage is a small, independent special school operated by Care Focus Ltd. Working together with two appointed directors, two proprietors are responsible for the governance of the school.
- The school opened in 2005. It is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) to admit up to eight girls. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. Currently, one pupil has an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities. Most pupils have significant gaps in their education when they arrive.

- The recently appointed head of education is also the head of education at another school owned by the proprietor.
- The school does not use supply staff.
- Inspection history:
 - The school's first standard inspection was in April 2006.
 - Ofsted conducted a standard inspection in February 2009. The quality of education was judged good. One independent school standard was not met linked to part 5, premises of and accommodation at schools.
 - Ofsted conducted a standard inspection in June 2012. The quality of education was judged good. All the independent school standards were met.
 - Ofsted conducted a standard inspection in July 2017. This was judged as requires improvement. All the independent school standards were met.
 - At the school's most recent standard inspection in June 2019, it was judged to require improvement. Not all the independent school standards were met.
 - Following the June 2019 inspection, the school submitted an action plan to the DfE in September 2019. This was judged to be unacceptable.
 - A progress monitoring inspection was carried out in December 2019. Some un-met standards noted at the time of the previous inspection in June 2019, relating to the quality of education provided, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and the provision of information, were met. The school did not meet three of the independent school standards.
 - Following the first progress monitoring inspection in December 2019, the school submitted another action plan to the DfE in March 2020. This was judged unacceptable.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- This was the second progress monitoring inspection since the standard inspection in June 2019.
- Inspectors visited the Acorn Cottage site. The other site, The Lodge, was temporarily closed at the time of the inspection.
- Inspectors met with the head of education and other school staff, both in meetings and informally around the school. The lead inspector visited lessons and spoke with pupils about their work.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's single central record of pre-employment checks on staff, as well as school policies, including the safeguarding and risk assessment policies. They also checked a range of documentation, including risk assessments, the school development plan, child protection records, complaints information, behaviour logs and the attendance register.
- Inspectors met with proprietors and directors at the Care Focus Ltd offices in Stowmarket, Suffolk.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop

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 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 requirements of the independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 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 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(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 as to whether they are upheld).

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