

Inspection of The Annex School House

Ash House, Centre Road, New Ash Green, Longfield, Kent DA3 8JF

Inspection dates: 2–4 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Despite a quiet reluctance to admit it, pupils are proud of their school. One reflected, 'We don't always appreciate it as much as we should.' Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive despite the challenges some pupils pose when finding it hard to focus. Pupils appreciate that staff 'notice problems, are honest with you, patient, and respectful of what you say, including when you apologise'.

Pupils acknowledge that behaviour is not perfect here and that their personal relationships are sometimes strained. However, they also feel that problems are addressed fairly and dealt with well by staff, helping to build trust and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Teachers have high aspirations for pupils. They know pupils well. They understand the important balance between developing pupils' self-esteem and emotional well-being at the same time as challenging them to realise the potential they have to become successful learners once more.

Pupils particularly enjoy the tea and papers periods that start most days. These sessions include pupils choosing articles to read aloud to the group, followed by discussion and debate. Much learning takes place, as well as tangible advances in pupils' sense of self-esteem and understanding of the world around them.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

This is a very small school with a unique culture. The current headteacher has been associated with the provision for many years. His work for the proprietor goes well beyond that of leading and managing the school. His dedication and the impact of his leadership are clear to see in all aspects of the 'Annex'. Staff feel respected and supported. Pupils likewise feel respected and supported, because staff take their lead from the headteacher in all they do. The directors know that their planned changes around the role of the headteacher need to be managed well in coming months. This will ensure that the school continues to meet the independent school standards over time, as well as continuing to provide a good quality of education for its pupils.

At the time of this inspection there were no younger pupils attending. Pupils in key stage 3 and 4 who have been here for longer periods of time are settled and focus well on their education. New pupils find the rigours of school and the expectations of staff demanding. Although the induction process is well thought through and implemented, some pupils still struggle. Staff know this and do their best to gain pupils' trust and confidence as quickly as possible. Importantly, they do this without compromising the requirements of the school's policies for behaviour and those that promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff alike.

Pupils who attend the school have had disrupted educational experiences prior to joining. Many have been out of education for extended periods of time, leading to major gaps in their knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. The school's ethos is based squarely on addressing this, as well as supporting pupils' social and emotional needs.

Staff know the imperative is for pupils to re-engage with school and learning so that they eventually gain qualifications that will help them with their next steps in education or employment. The school's curriculum is truly bespoke. Pupils enjoy a range of curriculum subjects including geography and science. Art and music are also popular, as well as sport, including the input of a professional football coach.

Staff are constantly assessing pupils' learning. Lessons are lively, but pupils engage well most of the time. Teachers are good at questioning to confirm pupils' understanding. Pupils also ask lots of questions themselves. Although this might potentially slow the pace of learning, it is also affirmation that they are increasingly engaged in learning and want to know more.

A lot of work, especially in the early stages of a pupil joining the school, is aimed at developing their self-esteem and a sense of self-worth. Staff are skilled at this. They work hard to get the balance right between providing appropriately challenging lessons at the same time as ensuring that pupils experience a degree of success. Because of this, many pupils develop more positive attitudes to school over time and start to catch up across the curriculum.

As this is a special school for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), staff are particularly attuned to supporting pupils' needs beyond the academic. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is knowledgeable and experienced. Records are maintained well, including the school's own ongoing assessments and plans that help staff identify need and provide appropriate support for pupils in and outside of the classroom.

Pupils enjoy a range of enrichment opportunities, mainly linked to their own interests. These are often facilitated on a one-to-one basis and include activities such as ice skating, horse riding and arts- or sports-based sessions. Pupils also have access to professionals from outside of school who provide therapy, advice and guidance on a very personalised basis. Often, this is aimed at keeping pupils safe at school and in the local community. Appropriate careers advice and work experience opportunities are also built into pupils' personalised timetables. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) has a high profile, as does relationships and sex education, which is supported by focused work on consent, respect and understanding and celebrating diversity.

The proprietor has applied for a material change, which was considered during this standard inspection. This is to increase the maximum number of pupils from five to 15, as well as opening a second 'satellite' site some distance (approximately 30 miles) from the main school site. The proposed satellite site is appropriate for use as an independent school. The proprietor intends to run the satellite site in the same

way the current school is run. Therefore, all aspects of the requirements of the independent school standards are likely to be met if the proposed changes are approved. However, the proposed maximum number of 15 pupils needs to be amended down to 12 because of the size of the accommodation available. In addition, and assuming the proposal is approved, the maximum number of pupils attending each of the two school sites should be limited to a maximum of six. The current directors and headteacher understand this. However, it is important that this is well understood and accepted in the future, especially in light of the context of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture to safeguard pupils and to promote the welfare, health and safety of all at the school is strong. Routines are well established yet constantly reviewed and monitored by leaders. Staff are vigilant and well trained. They have confidence in leaders to do the right thing when there are concerns. Communication at all levels is strong. All staff are knowledgeable about the very real issues and potential dangers that pupils face both in and out of school. Work with professionals from outside of school helps ensure that pupils get the support they need and in a timely manner.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and the proprietor)

- This very small special school is about to undergo key changes in its leadership and management. This includes the appointment of a new headteacher and the restructuring of the headteacher role. Directors have started to make plans for this to happen. However, at the time of the inspection these were not complete, nor was there enough clarity or vision about the role or the responsibilities relating to the new headteacher appointment, or how this will impact on the quality of education the school provides. Leaders now need to act quickly and decisively to establish clear plans for the strategic changes to come. This will help ensure that: leadership and management of the school remains stable; the school continues to deliver a good quality of education to its pupils; that the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff continue to be protected; the independent school standards continue to be met; and that the school continues to build on its strengths going forward. This is especially important in light of the application for the material change considered as part of this inspection and how this will impact on the school should it be granted.

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School details

Unique reference number	135198
DfE registration number	886/6122
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10179625
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	J and R Care Ltd
Chair	Jane Parish
Headteacher	Brendan Aherne
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000
Telephone number	01322 618 776
Website	www.theannexschool.co.uk
Email address	brendan@jandrcareltd.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 June 2017

Information about this school

- The Annex School House is a special school that is registered for up to five boys and girls aged between eight and 16 years with social, emotional and mental health needs. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- At the time of this inspection the school was operating beyond its registration with one additional pupil being educated at the second satellite site related to the material change request which was considered as part of this standard inspection.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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.

- As part of this standard inspection, the inspector considered the proprietor's proposed material change. This would include a second site for the school, as well as an increase in the maximum number of pupils from five to 15.
- There will be no change to the type of special educational needs the school proposes to cater for as part of the material change application. This was the first material change inspection in respect of this particular change.
- The material change has already been implemented.
- As a result of the material change aspect of the inspection, the inspector recommends that the satellite site is suitable, but that maximum numbers be restricted to 12 across both sites, not 15. Furthermore, there should not be more than six pupils attending the school at either of the two separate sites.
- The inspector held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, the SENCo and other staff in the school. He met with the chair of the proprietorial body and talked to a representative of a local authority which places pupils at the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, geography and PSHE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- The inspector toured the school's premises and accommodation, including at the second satellite site which is subject to the school's proposed material change.
- The inspector checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central register. He also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff linked to the independent school standards.
- The inspector gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload. He also considered the impact the proposed material change would have on pupils currently attending the school.

- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school.

The school's proposed change to its premises and the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school meets the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change. The material change has already been implemented.**

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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