

# Inspection of E-Spired Centre of Excellence

The Raleigh Centre, Ampthill Road, Bedford MK42 9HE

---

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 March 2022 and 7 June 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Inadequate**

---

The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**No**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Too many pupils do not attend school regularly. This affects their learning and their achievement. Pupils who join the school in key stage 4 are positive about the support they receive to help them complete their qualifications. Pupils in Year 9 do not experience the same quality of education. This is because there is not a coherently planned curriculum in place to support all pupils to achieve well.

Pupils say that they do not feel safe in school. Many pupils feel that their voice is not heard. Pupils say that fights are common. Staff are not always available or do not manage these situations well.

Pupils behave well in lessons when they can see the purpose of what they are learning. Pupils behave less well in lessons that do not engage their interests or which pupils do not consider to be relevant to them. Pupils learn to develop self-confidence through the school's Young Leaders programme. They learn strategies to overcome personal challenges.

Parents' and carers' views of the school are mixed. Some parents appreciate how staff get to know pupils and help them participate positively in their education. However, some parents are concerned that the quality of education their child receives does not meet their needs well enough.

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

Leaders have not put in place a well-planned, coherent curriculum for all pupils. Teachers use the schemes of work that are produced by the examination boards to plan lessons for pupils in Years 10 and 11. However, leaders have not identified the knowledge pupils need to secure across all subjects when they join the school in Year 9. Teachers depend on their own subject knowledge and experience to find out from pupils what is already known and understood. This makes it harder for teachers to plan lessons that help pupils to acquire the knowledge needed to be well prepared for the next stage of their education. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress and achievement in several subjects, including English.

A significant proportion of pupils have education, health and care (EHC) plans. Each pupil has an individual learning plan. However, leaders do not clearly identify what should be in place to support pupils to overcome their individual barriers to progress, achievement and well-being. Leaders recognise that there is work to do to improve the school's approach to accurately identify, assess and meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders do not ensure that the school's risk assessment policy is implemented consistently. Individual pupils' risk assessments are not kept up to date. Leaders do not routinely review pupils' attendance. Leaders have not identified the pattern or reason for a decline in the attendance of a significant number of pupils over time.

Staff do not manage pupils' behaviour well. Staff do not have the knowledge to prevent dangerous situations from happening because they are not trained well enough. As a consequence, staff use methods, including physical restraint, inappropriately. Leaders have identified a location within the school to be used as a calm space for pupils. This is not an appropriate location, nor is it used appropriately. This puts staff and pupils at risk.

The number of fixed-term exclusions is increasing. Leaders' records show that exclusions are not used appropriately or in line with the school's policy as a last resort. Leaders are not transparent with how they decide on what is an exclusion and what is not. Some pupils believe that they are not allowed in school but are not registered as being excluded. Leaders are not promoting a positive culture of attendance and behaviour to ensure that all pupils attend school and receive their educational entitlement.

Pupils who attend school regularly access a well-considered programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils explore issues of diversity and tolerance. They develop their understanding of finance and the skills they need to support independent living. Pupils benefit from the therapeutic support provided. Leaders have implemented an appropriate programme of sex and relationships education that reflects statutory guidance. However, leaders have not consulted with parents as they are required to do.

The proprietor and governors have not ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders have not ensured that staff receive the appropriate training to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Pupils talk about many examples of adults intervening inappropriately. Physical restraint is used too often. Records of physical intervention are inadequate and do not reflect the situation within the school that pupils describe. De-escalation strategies are not used effectively to prevent the need for physical interventions and exclusions. Pupils do not feel safe when they are in school. Leaders are not maintaining a positive culture of safeguarding.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Leaders have not planned a coherent curriculum for pupils in key stage 3. This means that pupils in Year 9 do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum clearly sets out what pupils should know and understand. Leaders should ensure that teachers can confidently assess pupils'

learning needs and plan sequences of lessons that prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

- Leaders do not plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Targets for pupils with EHC plans are not broken down into more focused, achievable steps. Staff, pupils and parents are not able to identify which provision will best support pupils in overcoming their barriers to learning. Leaders should ensure that pupils' individual learning plans clearly identify the targets and provision that will help pupils achieve well in all aspects of their education and wider development.
- Leaders are not doing enough to tackle issues of poor or declining attendance. This is having a negative impact on pupils' progress and attainment. Leaders should ensure that pupils attend school regularly so that pupils develop the knowledge and attitudes they need to be successful.
- The school's risk assessments do not consistently identify risks related to specific activities. Risk assessments for individual pupils are not kept up to date. Leaders should ensure that the school's risk assessment policy is implemented consistently and effectively so that all members of staff can take appropriate action to mitigate risk for pupils.
- Staff do not manage pupils' behaviour effectively and can make situations worse. Because of this, pupils do not feel safe in school. Leaders should review their practice in managing pupils' behaviour. They must provide appropriate training so that staff are confident in de-escalation strategies to reduce the need for physical restraint and intervention. Where physical intervention is absolutely necessary, leaders must ensure that this is only carried out as a last resort by suitably qualified staff. They must check and monitor the use of all physical intervention in school.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144807
<b>DfE registration number</b>	822/6007
<b>Local authority</b>	Bedford
<b>Inspection number</b>	10216027
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent School
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	20
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mark Hudson
<b>Chair</b>	Jacqueline Brown
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mark Hudson
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£26,500 to £29,500
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 363400
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.espired.org">www.espired.org</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@espired.org">info@espired.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 to 26 April 2018

## Information about this school

- The school opened as an independent school for up to 20 pupils in September 2017, following its registration with the Department for Education (DfE) as an independent day school in August 2017.
- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, and those who have histories of poor attendance. More than 50% of pupils with SEND have an EHC plan. Some pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- There are currently 15 full-time pupils on roll. These pupils are in Years 9, 10 and 11. Places at the school are commissioned by five separate local authorities.
- Prior to its registration, the school had been operating as an alternative provider, since October 2016, with 18 part-time pupils who attended for two days a week in partnership with local schools.
- The proprietor is the sole proprietor and the headteacher. The proprietor is not involved in any other proprietorship of independent schools.
- The school is owned by the E-Spired Community Interest Company. There is a sole proprietor and a board of directors. Three directors of the company work full time in the school.
- A governing body was appointed in the school in January 2017.
- The proprietor uses supply staff when necessary. The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- At the school's standard inspection in April 2018, all the independent school standards were met. The standard inspection was conducted at the school's registered site: Unit C, Bedford Business Centre, Mile Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9TW. The overall effectiveness was good.
- Ofsted conducted a material change inspection in September 2018. This was commissioned by the DfE. The proprietor proposed to relocate to a new school site: The Nursery Building, Raleigh Centre, Bedford MK42 9HE. The proprietor wanted to extend the age range from 16 to 18 years and to increase pupil numbers from 20 to 70. At this inspection, the inspector judged that the school was unlikely to meet 12 of the independent school standards if the DfE approved the material change.
- On 9 January 2019, after the first material change inspection, without the approval of the DfE, the proprietor relocated the school to the proposed new school site: The Nursery Building, Raleigh Centre, Bedford MK42 9HE. The proprietor initially accommodated 17 pupils aged 14 to 18 years. The proprietor planned to use the original premises – Unit C, Bedford Business Centre, Mile Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9TW – for a maximum of 20 post-16 students and the new site for a maximum of 20 pupils aged 14 to 16 years.
- A second material change inspection was conducted on 5 April 2019. It was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the DfE to reconsider the proprietor's application for a material change to relocate to a new school site: The Nursery Building, Raleigh Centre, Bedford MK42 9HE. The proprietor applied to extend the

age range from 16 to 18 years and to increase pupil numbers. It was judged that three of the independent school standards were unlikely to be met if the DfE approved the changes.

- Since the second material change inspection, the proprietor has confirmed with the DfE that the registered address will be the same as the current registration agreement.
- The DfE issued a statutory notice on the 21 May 2019. The proprietor was required to provide an action plan to highlight how leaders would address the unmet standards. The action plan was received in June 2019. It was evaluated by Ofsted as acceptable in July 2019. It was approved by the DfE in August 2019.
- A progress monitoring inspection was conducted in November 2019. It was conducted at the school's registered site: Unit C, Bedford Business Centre, Mile Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9TW and at the school's additional site: The Nursery Building, Raleigh Centre, Bedford MK42 9HE. One of the three unmet standards at the previous inspection remained unmet, and an additional four standards were not met.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of 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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Following the on-site inspection, Ofsted received information during the quality assurance process which suggested further evidence was required. The lead inspector returned to the school on 7 June 2022 to gather the additional evidence required.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, who is also the principal, the assistant principal, and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of governors on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, art and design, and business studies. Inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at subject plans where they were available, visited lessons with leaders, spoke with pupils and looked at the work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors looked at the policies and procedures that are in place to safeguard pupils. They reviewed documentation relating to safeguarding, including the single central record of pre-employment checks, risk assessments, records of

training and the systems used to report safeguarding concerns and how these are followed up. Inspectors also reviewed records of behaviour incidents, including bullying, and records of pupils' attendance. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff and considered feedback from parents with respect to safeguarding.

- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with representatives from Bedford Borough SEND and inclusion teams.
- Inspectors made a tour of the site, reviewed the information available on the school's website and considered a range of documentation to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered the feedback from four parents that was submitted to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, which also included four free-text comments. There were no responses to the pupil or staff surveys.
- The lead inspector returned to the school to gather additional evidence in relation to safeguarding and the welfare of pupils. During this visit, the lead inspector spoke with pupils, reviewed relevant documentation and spoke with representatives from two local authorities, including local authority designated officers.

### **Inspection team**

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kim Pigram

Her Majesty's Inspector



## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school failed 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)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;

2(2)(g) where the school has pupils above compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their needs;

2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.

2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–

2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).

3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–

3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;

3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;

3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;

3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;

3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;

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**

7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—

7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and

7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that—

9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.

14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.

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 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; and

34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

34(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(c) “well-being” means well-being within the meaning of section 10(2) of the Children Act 2004.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022