

Inspection of North Hill House

Fromefield, Frome, Somerset BA11 2HB

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 September 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

All pupils who attend North Hill House have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many pupils have missed a lot of school at previous settings or have negative experiences of school in the past. Here, pupils find their way quickly and attend well. Many cite the remarkable difference that this school is making to them personally. The longer pupils are at this school, the better they do academically.

Pupils recognise that the school is improving a lot. However, despite the considerable enhancements to the content of the curriculum, there remain weaknesses in how well some subject curriculums are being implemented. The quality of education pupils receive is too inconsistent across the curriculum.

Pupils receive effective pastoral support, including those who attend 'the hive'. They appreciate that staff listen to them and explain things clearly. Pupils have a strong voice here. There are systems in place to enable them to raise concerns about bullying. When it happens, adults sort it out.

Pupils' individual talents are nurtured. Many pupils enjoy the lunchtime clubs such as science and chess. Pupils enjoy getting out in the community and building up their independence and life skills. A highlight for many is exhibiting their artwork locally.

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

The proprietor and leaders have made strong headway in addressing the significant weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The school is a vibrant and inviting place to learn. The buildings are kept in good order. There are now schemes of work in place for every subject curriculum. There is a positive and nurturing staff team who are committed to continually improving the school. Staff and pupils understand and apply leaders' expectations of developing self-motivation and self-worth well. As a result, pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons have improved markedly. Staff's consistent approach day-on-day helps pupils to maintain this. Pupils' suspensions have also decreased significantly.

Leaders make sure that pupils benefit from a bespoke transition into school life. This enables pupils' confidence to build incrementally. After their arrival, within a short space of time, most pupils go on to study a full range of subjects. In addition, the specialist well-crafted curriculum, which entwines academic lessons and therapies in 'the hive', enables those pupils with the most complex needs to experience success in lessons with their peers.

Leaders are building momentum in establishing an ambitious curriculum throughout the school. For example, many older pupils receive a well-sequenced curriculum that builds their knowledge step by step. As a result, pupils achieve well in GCSEs or vocational courses. This sets them up well for college or employment.

However, leaders have been slow to address some remaining weaknesses in the curriculum. The school's approach to teaching reading does not support struggling readers well enough. Unhelpfully, some pupils experience mixed approaches to the teaching of reading. This hinders pupils' ability to read fluently. Leaders do not provide staff with the breadth of subject-specific training they need. Some staff have gaps in their subject knowledge, including in phonics and mathematics.

Staff use pupils' targets from their education, health and care (EHC) plans when designing their individual curriculums. Nevertheless, in some subjects and phases, pupils' academic targets are not broken down well enough or teaching resources are not adapted astutely. In these cases, some teaching does not identify exactly what pupils need to learn next. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they could.

Pupils receive impartial careers guidance. Leaders ensure that pupils take up work placements. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme includes everything it should. It ensures that pupils learn a lot about finances, keeping mentally fit and healthy, building effective relationships and independent living. There is a sharp focus on teaching about equalities. The school meets the requirements for relationship, sex and health education as set out by the Department for Education (DfE). The school fulfils all of the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The proprietor has put clear systems and processes in place to hold leaders to account. However, recent changes to governance and the impact of COVID-19 have limited the amount of work to check on the quality of education pupils receive. Therefore, some operational systems and record-keeping processes that the proprietor expects to be in place are less well implemented than intended. As a result, the school does not fully satisfy all the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Consequently, although significant improvements have been made since the previous inspection, the proprietor has not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met in full.

Most staff value the support they receive from leaders. Their workload is considered. Staff communicate with families well. Many parents report strong partnership working with school staff. These parents are exceptionally positive. However, some would like more information about the progress their child is making.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor ensures that staff receive up-to-date safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding leads meet regularly to review current caseloads and check the effectiveness of their work to keep pupils safe. They work closely with external agencies to minimise pupils' risk of harm. The required pre-employment checks for prospective staff are completed accurately. However, in a few areas of the school's

work, record-keeping could be sharper, but this does not undermine the effective safeguarding culture in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have not ensured that all staff receive the depth of subject-specific training they need to deliver the curriculum in the subjects they teach consistently well. Staff have gaps in their knowledge. This creates relative weaknesses in the implementation of some curriculums, including in reading and mathematics. This holds some pupils back. The proprietor must ensure that all leaders and teachers have secure knowledge and skills to carry out their teaching roles consistently well.
- Some teaching is not adapted well enough to meet pupils' individual needs. Some pupils do not gain the most important knowledge they need next in sequences of work. For some pupils, their academic EHC plan targets are not consistently used well. Essential learning gets missed out. Leaders need to ensure that staff address pupils' EHC plan targets and provide the precise curriculum pupils need to learn well across a full range of subjects.
- The proprietor and leaders do not have enough oversight of the operations of the school, including the quality of education pupils receive. Some pupils do not learn enough in some subjects. Some whole-school record-keeping systems are not well organised. Leaders need to ensure and assure themselves that all the operational systems that they expect to be in place are, and that the curriculum is implemented consistently well in every subject.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	131975
DfE registration number	933/6200
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10239789
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aspris Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Nancy O'Regan
Headteacher	James Lynch
Annual fees (day pupils)	£67,000 to £87,000
Telephone number	01373 466222
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk
Email address	northhillhouseschool@aspriscs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 to 5 March 2020

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection was in March 2020. At this time, the school was judged to be inadequate.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- North Hill House is owned by Aspris Children's Services Ltd.
- The school opened in 1999 and is registered for 66 pupils with autism spectrum disorder and associated conditions.
- There are significantly more boys than girls at the school.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- There are no pupils attending the sixth form.

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 does not meet all of 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 leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, school leaders, the special educational needs coordinators and other staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, art and PSHE education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work. Inspectors also reviewed other curriculum areas, such as science.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation and discussed safeguarding with leaders and other staff.
- In making their judgements, inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Parent View. They also looked at the responses to the pupil and staff surveys. An inspector spoke with parents and carers during the inspection to gather their views.
- An inspector also held a telephone call with two commissioning local authorities.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

During this inspection we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous standard inspection from 3 to 5 March 2020.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school does not meet all of the previously failed standards**
- The proprietor has ensured that there is a curriculum policy and there are schemes of work in place. These take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils. Teaching has improved. This enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and increase their understanding and develop skills in the subjects taught. Arrangements are suitable to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school, in line with current legislation. However, because of gaps in the school's record keeping processes, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools are not fully met. Although most of the standards that were previously unmet are now being met, the proprietor and leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are now met.

The school now meets the following standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 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;
- 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(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;

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.

The school does not meet the following standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 8 Where section 87(1) of the 1989 Act [11] applies in relation to a school the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 8(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school; and
 - 8(b) such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools or, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools or the National Minimum Standards for Accommodation of Students under Eighteen by Further Education Colleges.

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.

Information about the progress monitoring inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE in order to check the standards that were not met at the previous inspection in March 2020. This was the first progress monitoring inspection the school has received.
- After the school's previous standard inspection, it was required by the DfE to produce an action plan. This was evaluated by Ofsted in January 2022 and found to be not acceptable.

Inspection team

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His Majesty's Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

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