

Inspection of Sheridan House School

Thetford Road, Northwold, Thetford, Norfolk IP26 5LQ

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Insufficient evidence

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Despite the well-meaning efforts of staff, too many pupils are not supported to learn effectively, regulate their behaviour or be better ready to be independent young adults.

Pupils' learning in several areas of the curriculum is disjointed. They are not well supported to learn effectively. This includes in essential subjects such as personal, social and health education (PSHE) and science. Pupils are receiving a better thought-out curriculum in English and mathematics.

In too many lessons, pupils become agitated, restless, disengaged and defiant. A significant minority of pupils exhibit more volatile and aggressive behaviours with staff and each other. Many staff do not know how to help pupils to improve their conduct.

Some pupils are positive about school. However, some say that they feel unsafe because poor behaviour and bullying are not dealt with well. Some pupils have an underdeveloped understanding of how their ongoing behaviour could be viewed as bullying.

Pupils do access a range of visits and activities. They enjoy these opportunities. A small proportion of older pupils access alternative provision on a part-time basis. They are well supported by staff. Pupils told inspectors that they want more information about future careers, education and training opportunities before they reach Year 11.

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

There has been significant change and turbulence in governance, leadership and staffing arrangements since the previous inspection. There remain a significant number of staffing vacancies. Leaders are trying to cover these roles themselves, as well as firefighting day-to-day issues. They are not bringing about sustained, strategic improvements.

The proprietor body has implemented new online monitoring systems to quality assure leaders' work. Leaders and staff are not well trained to use these systems effectively. Governors and the proprietor body have not checked on the accuracy of the information that leaders provide to them. The proprietor body does not know enough about the day-to-day issues in the school and how these impact negatively on pupils' behaviour, safety and the quality of provision.

There are significant gaps in the basic curriculum that leaders provide to pupils. In several subjects, there is an absence of planning, assessment, resources, staff training and leadership monitoring. There is not a curriculum or provision for pupils aged 16 and over, despite the school having a registration agreement to educate

pupils up to the age of 19. The school does not offer education to pupils after Year 11.

Leaders' curriculum planning in English and mathematics is of a better quality. However, staff training, leaders' monitoring and assessment are still in their early stages of development. The programme to support pupils who are in the early stages of learning how to read is new.

The weaknesses in the curriculum extend to the school's PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education curriculums. Teachers are not routinely following the curriculum planning where it does exist. Leaders do not know whether pupils are getting access to their full curriculum entitlement. This planning and delivery do not meet all statutory requirements.

There are extremely high levels of disruption to lessons, including swearing, racist or derogatory language, and sometimes dangerous behaviours exhibited by pupils towards one another and towards staff. Staff are not well trained to manage this. Where staff struggle to manage behaviour, they often resort to allowing pupils numerous additional breaks during their lessons, contrary to the planned activities. Leaders do not know enough about how much educational time pupils are accessing or losing.

Pupils' attendance is low. The new leader for attendance has recently started working closely with Norfolk County Council and has secure plans in place to address pupils' low attendance. This work is still in its early stages. There are initial signs of improvement for some individual pupils.

Several pupils, a significant number of staff and some parents and carers raise concerns about the quality of provision, namely behaviour, bullying and safety. Several staff are concerned about workload and a lack of training to manage pupils' needs and behaviours. Subject leaders report a lack of time and support from senior leaders to plan their curriculum and/or to review how well pupils are faring in their subjects.

Despite serious weaknesses in the school's provision, some pupils do access better quality learning. These pupils have very positive relationships with staff. A number of staff, pupils and parents were complimentary about the staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Pupils' behaviour on site is too often unsafe, poorly managed and ineffectively reported on. There is a lack of risk assessment or risk management process following the most serious incidents. Leaders are not aware of the range of issues occurring. They are not taking all reasonable action to safeguard pupils on site.

Leaders do not always act in line with statutory guidance to make timely and appropriate referrals to external agencies. There is not a well-recorded rationale as to why this is the case.

There are sometimes significant gaps in record-keeping for individual pupils about their experiences over time, including where there is engagement with external agencies. Leaders have not used the information provided by previous schools to ensure that they are fully aware of the vulnerabilities of pupils in their care.

Appropriate checks are carried out on staff before they are employed to work with pupils. However, the proprietor body has not supported leaders well to ensure that the maintenance of the record of these checks is appropriate and up to date.

Leaders are not ensuring that all aspects of the school site are maintained reasonably for the safety of pupils. For example, although rectified during the inspection, significant numbers of toilet doors did not have working locks on them. Leaders had not identified this prior to the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- There is a lack of rigour in safeguarding systems. Leaders do not always ensure timely or appropriate support for pupils, including referrals to external agencies. Case records are not well kept and there are gaps in these records. Leaders do not consider risk management processes well enough after serious incidents. The proprietor body needs to ensure that processes and systems for monitoring, recording and reporting on safeguarding incidents are clear and consistent and are implemented effectively. It should ensure that leaders have sufficient capacity to manage this workload and subsequent risk management.
- Curriculum planning across several subjects is underdeveloped. There is also a lack of assessment, staff training and leadership monitoring. Pupils are accessing disjointed learning activities that are not supporting them to catch up. The proprietor body, governors and leaders need to ensure that all subjects in the curriculum are well planned, delivered and monitored. This should also support pupils who need precise help to catch up in their early reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders have not established a clear policy and process to monitor and manage behaviour incidents. As a result, poor behaviour that escalates into more serious incidents is far too commonplace, with little sign of abatement or meaningful action to address the issues. Leaders need to ensure that there are systems to train in, report on and review pupils' behaviour, so that all incidents are recorded and acted on appropriately.
- Pupils' wider personal development needs are not being well supported. The PSHE and RSE curriculums are underdeveloped. Many pupils do not understand the importance of core values, such as respect and the value of tolerance and care. Some pupils do not feel that they get enough support to guide them about

future careers. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum and individual support for pupils provide them with timely and effective support to be better ready to be active and positive citizens in British society.

- The proprietor body does not have sufficient and accurate insight into the day-to-day experience of pupils. It needs to ensure that processes provide it with sufficiently accurate information about the provision for pupils, so that it can act to address weaknesses effectively and efficiently. This should include information related to curriculum, safeguarding, behaviour and site maintenance.

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	121246
DfE registration number	926/6133
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10247797
Type of school	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aspris Children's Services Ltd
Chair	John Anderson
Headteacher	Kieran Sharp
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,000 to £77,000
Telephone number	01366 726040
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk/find-a-location/sheridan-school-thetford/
Email address	sheridanhousemailbox@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	29 to 31 January 2019

Information about this school

- The school is part of Aspris Children's Services Ltd (formerly known as Priory Education and Children's Services Ltd).
- The headteacher joined the school in November 2020. Since the previous inspection, there has been a new senior leadership team appointed, most of whose members were already working at the school but who are now in promoted positions.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils have a range of needs, but most notably autism spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no students who were accessing the school's sixth-form provision. There were no students of sixth-form age on the school roll.
- The school uses two registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.

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 had 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.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in early reading, PSHE, science and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to adults teaching and/or supporting pupils, and where possible, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning. The inspector also considered aspects of other subjects on the school's curriculum.
- Inspectors considered the views of five parents and carers expressed through Ofsted's online survey of parents, Ofsted Parent View. This includes the comments received via a free-text facility. The inspectors also reviewed 34 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and nine responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. Inspectors spoke to pupils on site.
- Inspectors held telephone discussions with the chair of governors, who is also the operations director for Aspris Children's Services Ltd. The lead inspector also held

telephone meetings with the chair of the proprietor body and with the headteacher. The headteacher was not on site during the inspection.

- Inspectors held meetings with an array of senior leaders. Inspectors also spoke to a local authority commissioning officer for Norfolk.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation provided by school leaders, including minutes of trustees' and governors' meetings, and documentation related to safeguarding.
- Inspectors also undertook tours of the site and reviewed information related to the independent school standards for aspects of the school's work, such as health and safety.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted 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)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which–
 - 2(2)(d)(i) reflects the school’s aim and ethos; and
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that–
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(a) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with primary education at the school is provided with relationships education,
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,

- 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
- 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
- 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.
- 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(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 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;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.
- 4 The standard in this paragraph is met where the proprietor ensures that a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place.

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

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
 - 5(b)(i) enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;

- 5(b)(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
- 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;
- 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
- 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England;
- 5(c) precludes the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school; and
- 5(d) takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils–
 - 5(d)(i) while they are in attendance at the school,
 - 5(d)(ii) while they are taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised by or on behalf of the school, or
 - 5(d)(iii) in the promotion at the school, including through the distribution of promotional material, of extra-curricular activities taking place at the school or elsewhere.

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(a) a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour;
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.

- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.
- 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 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

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.

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