

Inspection of Banks House School

55a Norwich Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR5 0EQ

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils have experienced significant interruptions to their education before joining the school. Pupils are well cared for by expert staff at Banks House. Pupils learn to develop constructive relationships and get along well with those around them. Pupils settle into school well because they are taught to understand day-to-day routines.

Pupils respond well to skilled adults' firm, sensitive encouragement. Adults are attentive to each pupil's needs. Staff are quick to step in and support pupils to manage their behaviour and emotions. Staff know the signs that show a pupil may be becoming anxious or unsettled and provide timely and effective support.

Pupils communicate that they are safe, including from bullying. Staff go to considerable lengths to make sure that this is the case. Pupils show trust in the adults that work with them.

While the quality of education is not yet good, pupils learn a recently altered and improving broad curriculum. Pupils show interest and enjoyment in what they study. They gain important knowledge of life skills and the local community through an increasing variety of sensory and outdoor activities. This prepares pupils to take important small steps towards becoming more independent in their lives.

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

The proprietor body and school leaders share a commitment to enable pupils to become independent members of society. This underpins leaders' curriculum decision-making. They are making sizable changes to the curriculum, with a particular focus on communication and mathematics. Leaders' work to put this right is in its early stages. There have also been recent staff changes. So, leaders' high ambitions are not being fully realised. Teachers do not yet have the subject knowledge needed to deliver the curriculum as effectively as leaders expect. That said, where the curriculum is better established, teachers deliver it well.

Leaders rightly place great weight on pupils' acquisition of communication and reading skills. Pupils enjoy listening to stories. Teachers like reading to them, including books from the school's 'favourite five' list. This year, the headteacher has introduced a new phonics scheme. She has raised expectations of the number of letters and sounds pupils can learn. Armed with information from recent training, teachers are applying their knowledge to teach this scheme. However, at times, phonics provision lacks precision. Pupils are not always given the most appropriate activities to enable them to show what they can do. This slows their progression through the curriculum.

Leaders are also redesigning the curriculum in many other areas such as 'topic' (geography, history, mathematics and science). They are taking into account pupils' needs in doing so. Leaders have considered the order in which pupils will learn

important facts and words. Teachers are embracing these changes. Yet, they are still gaining detailed knowledge of the new curriculum in these subjects. Leaders have designed a training programme to help teachers develop their subject knowledge and to apply it well to meet pupils' specific needs.

Where the curriculum is better established, teachers break learning down into small chunks. Teachers model the processes they want pupils to learn. Teachers check the extent of pupils' recall of the information and adapt teaching where necessary. These processes are exemplified particularly well in the personal, social and health education and outdoor education programmes.

Reflective of the school's ethos 'my life, my choice, my lifelong learning', leaders provide well for pupils' personal development. Pupils develop confidence around others through well-chosen visits such as those to local places of worship, a lifeboat station and a café. Pupils are encouraged to make independent choices, including those about their diet and other aspects of their life and learning. Leaders provide pupils with an effective careers programme. Pupils learn about the world of work through activities based on their interests.

All pupils at Banks House have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders work with a range of external professionals to ensure that pupils' social, emotional and health needs are met. Leaders and staff keep a watchful eye out for signs of pupils' emerging needs. Where they identify such needs, leaders put in place appropriate provision such as sensory support. This responsive approach is helping pupils better regulate their behaviours.

The proprietor body has invested heavily in staffing and resources to ensure pupils are safe, cared for and receive a broad education. The school advisory board (SAB) offers support and challenge to school leaders. The proprietor body and SAB have not had a sufficiently strong grasp of the independent school standards. They have not guaranteed that leaders make sure these standards are being met, especially in relation to the quality of education provided. The proprietor body has taken, and continues to take, decisive steps to address this. The new chair of the SAB offers expert challenge and support for the headteacher. With the proprietor body's support, these leaders have identified the correct priorities for improvement. Leaders have yet to evaluate fully the impact of the changes they made.

Members of the dedicated staff team are proud to work at Banks House. They consider their well-being to be well provided for.

The proprietor ensures that the school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff place the highest priority on ensuring pupils are safe. Leaders make sure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders regularly

check and refresh staff's understanding of the most recent safeguarding guidance. Staff know the tell-tale signs that indicate a pupil may be anxious or at risk.

Staff report any concerns in line with school processes. Leaders take the right action to ensure that pupils remain safe.

Leaders have put in place a suitable curriculum to teach pupils about the risks that they face, including when online. Leaders have also put in place systems so that pupils can routinely indicate their sense of well-being, happiness and safety.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor body has not guaranteed that leaders ensure the school meets all the independent school standards. It is developing its detailed understanding of these standards. The proprietor body should make sure it is well placed to ensure that leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, demonstrate skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are consistently met.
- Leaders have made necessary, significant changes to the curriculum. These alterations are recent and ongoing. Leaders need to take stock of the impact of these changes to date. Leaders then need to accelerate their work to ensure that teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of each subject, including phonics and early reading. Leaders should support teachers to teach the curriculum in line with leaders' high expectations so that pupils make good progress.

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	148346
DfE registration number	926/6030
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10212837
Type of school	Independent school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	3
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cascade (Banks House) Ltd.
Chair	Rachel Quick
Headteacher	Dawn Wale
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,000
Telephone number	01603 441497
Website	None
Email address	dawn.wale@cascade-care.com

Information about this school

- The school was first registered on 23 February 2021. This is the first standard inspection of the school.
- The school caters for up to six pupils aged 13 to 19 years of age. Pupils are referred by local authorities. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have experienced significant disruption to their schooling.
- The school does not use supply staff or alternative provision.
- The new headteacher took up her post at the school in September 2022.
- The school advisory board is the name for the body that carries out the functions of local governance of the school.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and several teachers and care staff.
- The lead inspector spoke via telephone with the chair of the SAB.
- Inspectors also met with a representative from the proprietor body. The lead inspector spoke via telephone with the chief executive officer of the proprietor body.
- The lead inspector spoke via telephone to a representative from the virtual school from Norfolk local authority. The lead inspector also spoke with another representative from the same local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, personal development and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with subject leaders and teachers, looked at curriculum documentation, visited lessons and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at safeguarding and spoke with staff, a representative from the proprietor body, the chair of the SAB and representatives

from Norfolk local authority. Inspectors also looked at the school's system for gathering pupils' views of their sense of well-being.

- Inspectors toured the premises to review the suitability of the accommodation.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in the one response to Ofsted Parent View free text and the seven responses to the staff survey. The lead inspector spoke via telephone with one parent.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachael Judd

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 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(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught.

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.

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