

Inspection of The Damara School

30 Bridge Street, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 3AG

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 November 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to Damara. They thrive here and want to attend school, often after lengthy periods of disruption to their previous education. Pupils feel safe. They build confidence and self-esteem because they trust the adults who work with them. Respectful and caring relationships are at the heart of pupils' success. They get on well with each other and learn how to manage their own behaviour and anxieties exceptionally well. Pupils say that bullying does not happen. They know it would be stopped quickly if it did.

Every school experience is a planned learning opportunity. Everyone is included. Pupils practise their spellings and times tables together in sociable break and lunchtime activities. They enjoy learning important life skills, such as how to cook and manage a budget. Visits, for example, to museums and the zoo, help to remind pupils of the things they are learning in school.

Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors, even though some find it hard to meet new people. They know there is always an adult they can go to if they are worried. Pupils like talking about the stories they are reading and how the school has helped them to enjoy learning again.

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

The trust and school leaders are ambitious for every pupil in the school. They have designed a broad and aspirational curriculum that captures pupils' interest and readiness to learn. High expectations and purposeful routines are reflected in all aspects of daily life in Damara. Pupils quickly begin to respect the clear boundaries that leaders set. As a result, they achieve well, often from very low starting points.

Reading is a high priority. Pupils in the early stages of learning to read practise the sounds that letters make regularly. The books they use are well matched to the sounds that they are learning and so they gain confidence in reading and spelling new words. Older pupils are encouraged to read often, at home as well as in school. They are introduced to a wide range of high-quality texts. While all pupils are supported to improve their reading, interventions for older pupils who need to catch up are not always as precisely targeted as they could be. This means that a few pupils do not read and spell as accurately as they need to.

Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn, in what order and when they want them to learn it. Across most subjects, the curriculum highlights the small steps needed to personalise learning from pupils' different starting points. Occasionally, the important content that leaders want pupils to know is not broken down in precise enough detail in a few subjects. When this happens, pupils do not learn as much as they could.

Pupils improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning hugely over their time in the school. The crystal-clear boundaries, high expectations and trusting relationships

result in calm and purposeful classrooms. No learning time is wasted. Break times are sociable events where pupils and staff eat, play and learn together. Adults take time to get to know pupils well. They are well trained, so they understand how to help pupils manage anxieties that might lead to challenging behaviour. Pupils use their 'anxiety maps' very effectively to develop strategies to regulate their own behaviour.

Pupils' personal development is a 'golden thread' woven right through the curriculum. Adults are strong role models. A wide range of exciting experiences underpin pupils' growing confidence and independence. Pupils of all ages enjoy learning about the world of work and the opportunities to be 'Young Entrepreneurs'. Older pupils speak confidently about how they would be expected to behave at work. The principles of tolerance and respect are exceptionally well promoted.

Leaders ensure that all the independent school standards are met. Their ambition for Damara pupils is mirrored across the whole-school team. They check that staff have a manageable workload and that their well-being is secure. Trustees and trust members are skilled and experienced. They are effective in holding school leaders to account for the quality of provision.

Premises are bright and carefully maintained. All the necessary health and safety checks are completed. Risk assessments are detailed and reviewed regularly. Pupils are well supervised. Admissions and attendance registers meet requirements. Information for parents and commissioning agencies is available through the school's website, including procedures for handling complaints.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that the strong culture of safeguarding they promote is well embedded. Regular, effective training means that staff know what to do if a pupil is at risk of harm. Staff are mindful of supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health, alongside any wider safeguarding needs. They work closely with parents and professionals so that individuals and families get the help needed. Pupils are taught how to make safe choices, including when playing games online.

The school's single central record of pre-employment checks on new staff meets requirements. Safeguarding records are detailed and closely monitored.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some inconsistencies in phonics teaching mean that a few older pupils do not improve their reading and writing fluency as much as they could. Leaders should ensure that any further training needed is implemented quickly so that all pupils achieve consistently and well.
- In a few aspects of the foundation curriculum, plans are not always explicitly clear about the specific knowledge that pupils need to practise and apply. This means that teachers occasionally focus on assessing the completion of tasks, rather than checking that the precise detail of important content has been remembered. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans are consistently clear and that assessment routinely focuses on the important knowledge that pupils need to secure in their long-term memory.

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	148395
DfE registration number	926/6032
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10243312
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	The Lotus Academy Trust
Chair	Cathleen Catt
Headteacher	Sandra Govender
Annual fees (day pupils)	£51,000 to £60,000
Telephone number	01842 773 670
Website	www.lotustrust.org.uk
Email address	admin@lotustrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Lotus Academy Trust is the school's proprietorial body.
- The school is currently registered to admit up to nine pupils aged between five and 16 years.
- There are no pupils currently in the secondary stage of education.
- All those attending are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan, often associated with autism spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Many pupils have had significant periods of disruption to their formal education prior to joining the school.
- This is the first full standard inspection of the school since it opened in April 2021.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

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 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders and a wider group of staff, including two early career teachers.
- The lead inspector spoke with trustees and trust members, including the trustee with oversight of safeguarding. She also spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority and some parents.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils around the school and during break times. Pupils also joined meetings with inspectors to speak about their school experiences.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, including reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils, and looked at pupils' work.
- The documentation checked included school improvement plans, the single central record of pre-employment checks on new staff, a range of school policies, health and safety, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance records.

- Inspectors checked compliance with all the independent school standards, including against the standards relating to school premises.
- Inspectors considered 10 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and nine free-text comments from parents. Inspectors also took account of 10 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire for school staff and nine responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for pupils.

The school’s application to make a material change to the maximum number of pupils

- The school currently offers places for up to nine pupils aged between five and 16 years.
- The proprietor made a material change request to the Department for Education (DfE) to increase the school’s registration to admit up to 18 pupils. This was considered as part of the full standard inspection.
- During the inspection, the proprietor amended the material change request with the DfE to admit 14 pupils rather than the 18 pupils originally asked for.
- The inspection outcome is that required independent school standards are likely to be met if the proposed material change is implemented.

Pupils

	School’s current position	School’s proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	9	14
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	9	14
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	14	14
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	14	14

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	4	4
Number of part-time teaching staff	1	1
Number of staff in the welfare provision	3	5

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Kristian Hewitt

His Majesty's Inspector

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