

Inspection of Witham Prospect School

Old Harbour Farm, Newark Road, Norton Disney, Lincolnshire LN6 9JR

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 February 2023

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

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils are excited about coming to school each day. They attend very well and arrive promptly. They are pleased to see staff and are keen to greet their friends. Consistent routines reassure pupils. They know what to expect and feel safe.

Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. Staff know each pupil's likes and dislikes. They encourage pupils to make their own decisions and do things independently. Pupils use suitable communication tools to express what they want or say how they feel. Staff frequently praise pupils for listening well and making good choices.

Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong. Bullying is rarely a concern. Pupils say staff sort out any worries promptly. Staff quickly spot when a pupil is unsettled. They help pupils manage their emotions and feelings. Pupils appreciate the rewards they get for behaving appropriately. They enjoy celebrating everyone's positive behaviour, for example by arranging a Valentine's Day party.

A wide range of experiences enrich the curriculum. Pupils benefit from equine and rebound therapy, and weekly swimming sessions. They enjoy walking in local woodlands and visiting Lincoln Cathedral, and love looking after the school's farm animals. However, in some subjects, the curriculum is not thought out well enough or implemented consistently.

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

The curriculum is focused strongly on preparing pupils to live independent lives. It supports pupils' academic, vocational, therapeutic and personal development needs. Pupils get qualifications and accreditations in a range of suitable courses. They gain the knowledge and skills they need for future career pathways. Many pupils secure appropriate education, training or work placements when they leave the school.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' speech, language and communication skills. Staff use different media and resources to help pupils interact. Some pupils echo staff when they use spoken language. Leaders have recently prioritised improving pupils' reading. All pupils enjoy a daily story time. They like choosing their own books. However, the teaching of phonics lacks rigour. Many staff are not knowledgeable enough about phonics. They do not pronounce sounds correctly and give pupils work that is too hard for them. Pupils do not get enough chances to revisit the letters and sounds they have learned to secure their knowledge.

The quality of the curriculum varies. In some subjects, leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn and when. The vocational programmes all follow a logical sequence. In horticulture, pupils learn how to grow and look after plants, starting from seeds. In meal preparation and cookery, pupils find out how to use different ingredients to make a healthy meal. In each

programme, there are opportunities for pupils to revisit their learning and build on their prior knowledge. In other subjects, the order of the curriculum is less well organised. In mathematics, pupils do not always learn new content in a sensible order. Even when they do, the purpose of what pupils are learning is not always clear.

Leaders provide staff with detailed information about pupils' individual needs. They set pupils targets to achieve based on their education, health and care (EHC) plans. However, staff do not always use this information well enough. Some staff do not choose appropriate ways to teach pupils new subject content. The resources they use are not always suitable. Some pupils do the same work as their peers, despite having different needs. Staff do not always break the learning down into small-enough chunks. Pupils sometimes find the work too demanding and need a lot of help. When pupils make mistakes, staff do not think carefully enough about the steps pupils need to take to secure their knowledge. Too often, staff's checks of pupils' work focus only on how pupils learn, rather than on what pupils know.

Leaders' aim is that pupils will make a full and active contribution to society. They teach pupils important life skills such as the value of money, reading timetables and catching a train. Staff encourage pupils to make their own choices, for example about what they wear. Pupils learn how to empathise with others. They understand that everyone makes mistakes. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to be active and to eat healthily. Bespoke programmes teach pupils about healthy relationships. Pupils learn about each other's heritage. However, their understanding of different faiths is not as strong. Pupils benefit from valuable work experience at a local plant nursery and at the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln. Leaders work closely with parents and carers, and external professionals to ensure that pupils transition successfully to suitable placements when they leave school.

Staff enjoy working at the school. However, recent staffing changes have affected staff workload and limited opportunities for staff to improve their practice. There are plans to provide staff with curriculum and reading training soon.

Parents are very positive about the school. They typically describe their children's experiences of the school as being 'life changing'. One comment which reflected the views of others was, 'I am excited about what potential the future can hold for my child.'

The proprietor board is well informed about all aspects of the school. Regular health and safety checks help maintain the premises to a good standard. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. However, directors have not ensured that all the independent school standards (the standards) are met. Some aspects of the quality of education are inconsistent. Directors have not identified and rectified administrative errors on the school's attendance register or on the single central record.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding vigilance and nurture in the school. Leaders know the pupils well and understand their particular vulnerabilities. Pupils' individual risk assessments are very thorough.

Leaders share information with staff about the welfare of pupils in their care. Staff are alert to any signs that a pupil is at risk of harm. They report any concerns promptly. Pupils' safeguarding records are detailed.

Leaders provide pupils with focused support when necessary. They seek help from a range of external agencies when pupils need extra help.

The school has published an appropriate safeguarding policy on its website.

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

- The curriculum is not planned as thoroughly in a few subjects as it is in others. In these few subjects, the curriculum does not always follow a logical order. It is not always clear precisely what pupils should learn. Pupils do not learn in these subjects as well as they should. Leaders need to ensure that each subject is planned thoroughly so that staff know exactly what pupils need to learn and when.
- Staff do not always make appropriate pedagogical choices when deciding how to deliver the curriculum. Teaching resources do not always suit the intended learning outcome. Pupils struggle to complete the planned activities without significant support. They do not secure the subject knowledge as well as they should. Leaders need to ensure that staff have opportunities to improve their subject pedagogy and practice. Leaders need to make sure that the curriculum in each subject is implemented effectively.
- Staff regularly check pupils' work to see what they know. However, staff are often unclear about exactly what pupils have learned and what pupils have found more difficult. The targets they set pupils are often too general. These targets do not identify exactly what pupils need to learn next. Leaders must make sure that staff precisely identify the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn to help them move to the next stage.
- Some staff do not have the necessary knowledge and expertise to teach reading to pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. These pupils do not get the help they need to learn their letters and sounds accurately. They cannot use this knowledge effectively to read simple words and sentences. Leaders must ensure that there is a coherent and consistent approach to the teaching of early reading, including the teaching of phonics.

- The proprietor board has not ensured that all the standards are met. It has not checked carefully enough that the curriculum is of a consistently good quality. The board has not fulfilled its legal responsibility to maintain an accurate register of pupils' attendance. It has not made sure that information about safer recruitment checks for supply staff is recorded accurately on the school's single central record. The proprietor board must ensure that it has a robust oversight of all the standards, so that these standards are met consistently and securely over time.

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

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| Unique reference number | 146971 |
| DfE registration number | 925/6011 |
| Local authority | Lincolnshire |
| Inspection number | 10271671 |
| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent residential special school |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 15 |
| Proprietor | Longboat Special Education Ltd. |
| Chair | Jeffrey Kinder |
| Headteacher | Karen Smith |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £119,840 to £164,860 |
| Telephone number | 01522 789067 |
| Website | www.withamprospect.co.uk |
| Email address | info@withamprospect.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 25 to 27 February 2020 |

Information about this school

- Witham Prospect School is an independent special school.
- The school provides education for pupils aged between 11 and 19 years. The number of pupils on the school's roll has more than doubled since the school's previous inspection.
- All pupils have a diagnosis of severe learning difficulties, complex communication needs and associated challenging behaviour. Many of the pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Pupils are placed at the school from seven different local authorities.
- Students who are above the compulsory age for education pursue a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, including preparing them for adulthood.

- The school uses two off-site providers for pupils to receive some of their education. The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- The headteacher took up the roll in September 2021. She is also the designated safeguarding leader.
- A number of staff have left and several have joined the school since the previous inspection.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place from 25 to 27 February 2020.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher. The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietor board and the director of care. Inspectors also spoke with other directors.
- The lead inspector met with safeguarding leaders to examine safeguarding records, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in four subjects: numeracy and mathematics; communication and literacy; vocational studies; and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors visited lessons, met with teachers of the subject to discuss the curriculum, looked at evidence of pupils' work and spoke with pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during social times and spoke with pupils about their experiences.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans, a variety of policies, information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, examples of pupils' EHC plans and individual risk assessments for pupils.
- Inspectors took into account responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also noted responses to the staff survey.

- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed facilities at the school's site.

Inspection team

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Shaheen Hussain

His 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.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range; and
 - 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

- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].

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.
- 21(5) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is, in relation to supply staff–
 - 21(5)(a) whether written notification has been received from the employment business that–
 - 21(5)(a)(i) checks corresponding to those referred to in sub-paragraph (3)(a)(i) to (iv), (vi) and (vii) have been made to the extent relevant to any such person.

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; and

- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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