

E-Spired Centre of Excellence

The Raleigh Centre, Ampthill Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9HE

Inspection date

2 February 2023

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1) to 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(g) to 2(2)(h)

- At the time of the previous standard inspection in March 2022, the school's curriculum was weak. Leaders had not planned a coherent curriculum for pupils in key stage 3. Leaders had not planned effectively to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Targets for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans were not broken down into more focused, achievable steps. Staff did not identify which provision would best support pupils in overcoming their barriers to learning.
- The weaknesses found at the last standard inspection remain. Leaders have been slow to amend the curriculum. They have not undertaken the actions outlined in their action plan.
- The curriculum policy is a generic policy that does not match the curriculum planning and delivery at the school. It does not consider the needs of all pupils, including those with an EHC plan. It contains little that will help teachers or parents and carers to understand how these pupils and those who speak English as an additional language will be helped to learn. The policy does not state the number of hours of learning that pupils undertake.
- Curriculum planning for Year 9 pupils in art and English is partially complete.
- The few remaining pupils at the school are not attending regularly. When they do attend, pupils study mainly the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Their experience of other subjects is limited. Pupils complete a series of disconnected worksheets that do not build their knowledge, skills or understanding.
- Support for pupils with SEND remains weak. Staff have not received the proposed training, as outlined in the school's action plan, to ensure that they meet the needs of pupils. Curriculum planning does not pay enough attention to the needs of these pupils.
- The requirements of these independent school standards are not met.

Paragraph 2A(1), 2A(1)(f)

- In the previous standard inspection, leaders had not fulfilled the statutory requirements to consult with parents and carers on the school's relationships and sex education policy and programme.
- At the time of the progress monitoring inspection, leaders were in the process of consulting parents and carers and had not yet fulfilled this requirement.

Paragraph 3 to 3(e), 3(g)

- Inspectors noted in the last standard inspection that teachers depended on their own subject knowledge and experience to find out what pupils knew and understood. There were issues with accurately identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. This remains the case.
- Most staff have left the employment of the school. There remains an acting headteacher, who does not have an education background, and an art teacher. A part-time special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has just started in post. Leaders are relying on the services of a volunteer to deliver mathematics and science tuition, as and when possible. This means that pupils typically are taught by non-specialists who do not have the subject knowledge to ascertain pupils' starting points or where there may be gaps in their knowledge. There is little assessment taking place.
- Leaders have started knowledge folders to help them see what pupils are learning over time as well as the standard of work pupils complete. Work completed by pupils in the autumn term is brief, bitty and of poor quality.
- There have been no actions undertaken to improve provision for SEND. However, leaders have recently appointed a part-time SENCo.
- Overall, the standards in this part remain unmet.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7 to 7(b), 9, 9(b)

- At the time of the standard inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding were not effective. Leaders had not ensured that staff received appropriate training to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Adults intervened inappropriately. Physical restraint was used too often. Pupils did not feel safe.
- Safeguarding remains ineffective at the school.
- Leaders reviewed the safeguarding policy and have made sure it references government guidance. It is published on the school's website. However, leaders have not ensured that it reflects the context of the school. They have not considered altering arrangements despite knowing pupils did not feel safe at school.
- There is one member of staff who is trained to be the designated safeguarding leader. Therefore, there is no coverage should this member be off-site or absent from role.
- Pupils have limited access to a member of staff who is impartial from historic issues with safeguarding at the school.
- Staff have received training on positive handling and physical restraint. They now understand how to record instances of this. However, they have not sought to relocate the calming, sensory space. This remains in an inappropriate location.

- The few pupils who remain on roll attend school intermittently. This academic year there has been no behaviour incident recorded. The new member of staff has not received training on the behaviour management policy or how to record behaviour incidents.
- The requirements of these independent school standards are not met.

Paragraph 14, 15

- Due to few pupils being on roll, the deployment of staff is appropriate for when they attend school.
- At the last standard inspection, leaders maintained the attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. This is no longer the case. Leaders have recorded attendance inaccurately for this academic year.
- While paragraph 14 is now met, paragraph 15 is not.

Paragraph 16 to 16(b)

- Staff inconsistently implemented the school's risk assessment policy when inspectors last visited the school. Inspectors noted that risk assessments for individual pupils were not kept up to date. Risk assessments did not consistently identify risks related to specific activities.
- For pupils with EHC plans who received an annual review, arrangements included a review of the risk assessment for the individual. Since the last standard inspection, there has been no risk assessment undertaken as a result of a pupil's behaviour or an issue with the safety of a pupil.
- Leaders have reviewed and adjusted the template they use for risk assessments to help staff record and monitor consistently.
- The school no longer has maintenance staff to undertake daily checks to help eliminate safety risks. The checks on the school building and its equipment now occur on an ad hoc basis and this is undertaken by volunteers. This leaves pupils at risk when they are on site.
- Leaders have not ensured that these independent school standards are met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraph 18 to 21 (8)

- These standards were met in the June 2022 inspection.
- At this progress monitoring inspection, these standards continue to be met.
- All the required checks on the suitability of new staff are carried out according to their roles in the school. Safer recruitment training for leaders with responsibilities for interviewing candidates is up to date.
- The school has used supply staff and volunteers. They have undertaken the necessary checks prior to the personnel starting work.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards continue to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- At the time of the inspection in March and June 2022, the proprietor had not ensured that the leadership and management of the school had the capacity to ensure that the independent school standards were met securely and consistently. This is still the case.
- Over time, provision has worsened. Issues noted at the last standard inspection remain. Leaders have not delivered the action plan that was deemed to be acceptable with modifications by Ofsted in November 2023. Financial instability and a lack of staff are limiting improvement. Leaders are struggling to provide any worthwhile education.
- Governors have not held leaders to account. Several governors have left the governing body. Remaining governors have not monitored the delivery of the action plan. They have not ensured that the school fulfils its statutory duties. There is a lack of understanding of their role and responsibilities. Many independent school standards remain unmet.
- The standards in this part remain unmet.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.

School details

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|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 144807 |
| DfE registration number | 822/6007 |
| Inspection number | 10271571 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Other independent school |
| School status | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 14 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Proprietor | Mark Hudson |
| Chair | Jacqueline Brown |
| Headteacher | Mark Hudson |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £26,500 to £29,500 |
| Telephone number | 01234 357777 |
| Website | www.espired.org |
| Email address | joylette@espired.org |
| Date of previous standard inspection | 22 March to 7 June 2022 |

Information about this school

- The school opened as an independent school for up to 20 pupils in September 2017, following its registration with the Department for Education (DfE) as an independent day school in August 2017.
- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, and those who have histories of poor attendance. Places are commissioned by two local authorities.
- Prior to its registration, the school had been operating as an alternative provider.
- The school is owned by the E-Spired Community Interest Company. There is a sole proprietor and a board of directors. Two directors of the company work full-time in the school.
- The headteacher is currently on long-term leave of absence.

- A governing body was appointed in the school in January 2017.
- The proprietor uses supply staff and volunteers when necessary. The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school's inspection history:
 - In April 2018, Ofsted conducted the school's first standard inspection. The school was judged to be good. All the independent standards were met.
 - In September 2018, Ofsted conducted a material change inspection. This was commissioned by the DfE. The proprietor proposed to relocate and extend the age range from 16 to 18 years. The proprietor also wanted to increase pupil numbers from 20 to 70. At this inspection, the inspector judged that the school was unlikely to meet 12 of the independent school standards if the DfE approved the material change.
 - On 9 January 2019, without the approval of the DfE, the proprietor relocated the school to a new site: The Nursery Building, Raleigh Centre, Bedford MK42 9HE.
 - In April 2019, a second material change inspection was conducted by Ofsted. The proprietor applied for reconsideration of relocation to a new site and the extension of age range and increase in pupil numbers. At this inspection, it was judged that three of the independent school standards were unlikely to be met if the DfE approved the changes.
 - The DfE issued a statutory notice on the 21 May 2019. The proprietor was required to provide an action plan to highlight how leaders would address the unmet standards. The action plan was received in June 2019. It was evaluated by Ofsted as acceptable in July 2019. It was approved by the DfE in August 2019.
 - In November 2019, Ofsted conducted a progress monitoring inspection. One of the three unmet standards at the previous inspection remained unmet, and an additional four standards were not met.
 - In March 2022, Ofsted conducted the school's second standard inspection. Following the on-site inspection, Ofsted received information during the quality assurance process which suggested further evidence was required. The lead inspector returned to the school on 7 June 2022 to gather additional evidence. The school was judged to be inadequate and arrangements for safeguarding ineffective. Many of the independent standards were not met.
 - The DfE issued a statutory notice on the 22 August 2022. The proprietor was required to provide an action plan to highlight how leaders would address the unmet standards. The action plan was evaluated by Ofsted as acceptable subject to modifications in November 2023.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the school's first additional inspection to monitor progress since it was judged to be inadequate in June 2022.
- To check compliance with the independent school standards, the inspector met with the acting headteacher, and the newly appointed SENCo. She spoke to a governor by telephone. The inspector also spoke with representatives from Hackney local authority, Buckinghamshire virtual school, foster carers and key workers. The inspector looked at a range of documents, scrutinised the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks, checked records of child protection concerns, and considered the school's website. The inspector spoke with the local authority designated officer regarding safeguarding procedures. The inspector toured the school premises.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

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; and
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).
- 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; 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

- 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(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 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 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.

Standards that were met at the previous inspection, but are now judged to not be met at this inspection

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].

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