

Inspection of ADO River Valley

19A Poets Corner Centre, Keats Road, Welling DA16 3NB

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The first thing that pupils see when they come to school each day are 'Tick' and 'Tock', the school goats. The goats, alongside a wide range of animals, including rabbits, horses, chickens and degus, are all part of daily life at the school. Pupils work with the animals as part of the school's approach to therapeutic care and delivery of the curriculum. For example, pupils gain qualifications in land-based studies and animal care.

Pupils often come to this school after a long time of being out of education. One pupil summed up one of the successes of the school when they said, 'It has opened me up to learning again.' Pupils enjoy their time at school and know that adults are there for them. Pupils' attendance significantly improves.

Pupils respond to the school's high expectations. They go on to achieve well, including in literacy and numeracy. All the gains that pupils make mean they are confident that they can be successful.

The school helps to break down pupils' barriers to learning. Pupils learn how to manage their emotions and to adapt their behaviour. They become more resilient learners, developing much more positive attitudes to learning.

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

The school specialises in offering 'career pathways' such as animal and equine studies. These pathways are supported by other subjects, including literacy, numeracy, adventure sports and science. Staff make full use of the school's resources to help engage pupils in their learning. These resources include base camps and tree-climbing.

Staff get to know pupils well, carefully considering each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan and their initial assessments when they start at the school. All this information is used to decide on the appropriate courses and therapy support that best meets the individual pupil's needs. Over time, pupils achieve a mixture of qualifications in literacy and numeracy, unit awards, such as in archery, and their 'career pathway' subjects, for example in animal care.

Leaders consider what they want pupils to know and remember when deciding what to teach. Staff select activities well and give pupils lots of opportunities to practise using their knowledge and skills. For example, in animal care, pupils learn how to spot signs that different animals may be showing signs of ill-health. Pupils learn vocabulary such as 'lethargic' and 'posture'. However, sometimes, either at subject or topic level, leaders have not precisely identified what pupils must learn. When this happens, staff do not emphasise or help embed the most important knowledge in pupils' long-term memory.

Parents and carers are full of praise for the school's work. One summed it up perfectly, commenting, 'Without this provision, I do not think that our child would have been able to return to education.' External agencies who work with the school speak very highly of how well staff work to keep pupils safe.

Pupils are effectively supported with their functional English and mathematics. However, senior leaders know that there are still a few areas of their work that are not helping pupils to maximise their full potential in reading and writing. For example, a few pupils need more targeted support to close gaps in their phonics knowledge.

At the heart of the school's work is its approach to therapeutic care. Pupils benefit from a range of therapies, including equine (horse) assisted and art. These help pupils to work on targets in their EHC plans, such as those relating to self-care and communication. The collective impact of this work can be seen in pupils' improved resilience and self-esteem.

Leaders are embedding some recent changes to the behaviour policy. Most adults apply the policy consistently. When disruption happens, adults help pupils to self-regulate and to keep things calm.

The school celebrates world and local events through its 'calendar of culture'. Pupils also hear from guest speakers, who sit with pupils around the campfire to discuss 'differences' such as religion and sexual orientation. Pupils are taught topics such as consent and online safety. They benefit from residential visits and other trips where they make decisions on budgets, go shopping and interact with the community. Overall, pupils are being well prepared for when the time comes to leave school.

Teamwork flows through this school. Staff feel well supported and really enjoy their work. They are well supported in knowing how to best manage pupils' needs.

The management committee has undergone some recent change, such as the appointment of the new chair. Collectively, the chair of the proprietor body and the committee know the school well. However, they acknowledge that more robust challenge, particularly around the quality of education is needed. Plans are already in place to bring this about.

The school meets the requirements of the independent school standards. Leaders have also ensured that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects or topics, leaders have not precisely identified the most important component knowledge that they want pupils to know and remember. As a result, sometimes key knowledge is not being embedded in pupils' long-term memory. Leaders should make sure that the key knowledge that pupils should know and remember is identified and assessed as they move through the curriculum.
- A few of the school's strategies for supporting weaker readers and writers are not as effective as they could be, for example in fully developing pupils' reading fluency. Leaders should review their strategies. They should ensure that all staff have the expertise to provide well-planned activities that help pupils maximise their potential in reading and writing across the curriculum.

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	149157
DfE registration number	303/6004
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10286486
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	ADO Services CIC
Chair	Victoria McHolland-Pilcher
Headteacher	Katie Palmer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,000 to £68,400
Telephone number	020 8850 6778
Website	www.adorivervalley.co.uk
Email address	education@adorivervalley.co.uk

Information about this school

- ADO River Valley is a small independent special school. It caters for pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils also have other diagnoses, such as autism. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Pupils are placed at the school by a range of local authorities.
- The school was registered by the Department for Education on 13 September 2022. This is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school specialises in outdoor education. It is based on a large site. There is a wide range of outdoor facilities, including a horse arena, animal enclosures, base camps and an outdoor gym. There are also two classrooms for indoor learning.
- ADO Therapy, a separate company, has its outdoor education and healthcare provision adjacent to the school. ADO therapy shares access to the animals with the school. However, this is risk assessed and carefully managed by leaders. Users of ADO Therapy do not have access to the animals at the same time as pupils.
- The school does not currently 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's educational provision.

- 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 did not make a separate judgement on the sixth form. This is because there were too few pupils on roll and to avoid identifying individuals at the time of the inspection. However, inspectors included sixth-form provision when evaluating evidence for the other judgement areas.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior staff. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the proprietor body and members of the management committee, including the chair.
- The lead inspector also spoke with staff from different local authorities to discuss safeguarding, communication and the quality of education provided to pupils.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, animal care, personal, social, health and economic education and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons and spoke to teachers, supporting adults and pupils about their learning. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in a range of other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first. Inspectors met with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and behaviour. They reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, risk assessments and case studies.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence to evaluate compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered replies to Ofsted Parent View and the online surveys for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Sam Hainey, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nick Hitchen

Ofsted Inspector

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