

Inspection of Releasing Potential School

7 Kingscroft Court, Ridgway, Havant PO9 1LS

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy and appreciate the time they spend at this school. They recognise that the varied curriculum, adapted to meet their individual interests and needs, helps them to grow in confidence and get back on track with learning. Over time, pupils re-engage with education, attend school more frequently and start to succeed. Pupils especially like learning that focuses on preparing them for their future lives. Nearly all achieve well enough to gain places at local colleges or in employment when they leave the school.

Most pupils learn to manage their behaviour well. Staff develop warm, professional relationships with pupils. They know pupils well and recognise when pupils need extra help to maintain good behaviour. As a result, pupils learn to stay calm more often. Strategies such as having 'tea and toast' to start the day motivate pupils. This creates a sense of belonging as pupils start to develop friendships with others.

Leaders and staff see potential in every child. They care deeply about pupils' well-being. Much has improved since the previous inspection, including that there is now an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Some aspects of leadership and governance oversight are still being ironed out after some significant changes to staff and reorganisation of a number of school structures and procedures.

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

Most pupils at Releasing Potential School have had significantly negative experiences of education in the past, many having been excluded from mainstream settings and pupil referral units. Some pupils have been out of education for many months. As pupils join, leaders and staff get to know pupils' needs and interests, so that they can provide a curriculum for pupils that will tempt pupils back into learning.

Leaders recognise that pupils who have been out of education for some time may not cope with a traditional classroom setting straightaway. These pupils start at Releasing Potential on a pathway leaders call 'alternative provision'. Activities are all provided by the school's own staff. Typically, pupils learn through off-site, outdoor activities, one to one with an adult. These might include exercise at a local leisure centre, learning archery or exploring local woodland. Throughout, adults encourage pupils to think about their future. Discussions and activities focus on building up pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Adults are also adept at ensuring that whatever the activity, there is some element to it that helps pupils to improve their core knowledge of English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Over time, this helps pupils to build their confidence and manage their behaviour so that they are soon able to learn in small groups and then progress to more classroom- and school-based learning.

Once pupils have progressed from the 'alternative provision' pathway, they are typically taught a core curriculum of food studies, English, mathematics, PSHE and outdoor education. Outdoor education activities vary depending on the season, but

include sailing, working on the land and climbing. Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has been revised so that pupils learn different subjects taught by adults with expertise in that subject. Curriculums in English and mathematics are especially well organised and lead to ambitious end-points. There is now a programme in place to identify and fill gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge. Work has progressed well to engage pupils in reading more frequently and for pleasure. However, some parts of the curriculum are not as well organised as others. Leaders are keen to make sure that the outdoor learning curriculum is better sequenced so that pupils' knowledge progresses and deepens over time.

Pupils are expected to learn more than in the past. Adults check pupils' starting points and identify gaps in learning. They use this knowledge, along with the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and what they know of pupils' interests, to ensure that learning is well matched to pupils' needs. Staff constantly check what pupils have learned and alter what they teach them next to build on and reinforce learning. Learning by stealth is a valued tool for staff. For example, they develop pupils' speaking and listening skills through what pupils think of as being just conversations about things they like doing. The accreditations that pupils can achieve have been revised and are more challenging than previously.

The curriculum across many subjects focuses strongly on pupils' personal development and helps to prepare them for adulthood. In particular, older pupils undertake work experience at one or more of the many businesses the school runs. For example, the lead inspector saw pupils setting up their own internet shop, preparing invoices at the printing shop, repairing a motor at the outboard workshop and planting spring bulbs at the farm. Through all this, pupils were learning to follow instructions, make decisions and experience success in a safe environment.

Leadership has undergone significant changes since the previous inspection. Much of the school is better organised. Senior leaders' monitoring supports staff to improve the curriculum and to organise teaching and learning so that these are well matched to pupils' needs. Support and training in managing pupils' behaviour and emotional needs are also well received by staff. Leaders are enthusiastic about their new responsibilities and are working hard to get things right. For example, EHC plans have been revised to better reflect pupils' needs as they grow up. However, some procedures and processes need further review. For example, leaders recognised that they have been slow to notice and address changes in pupils' attendance patterns and are putting in place better monitoring of attendance so that they can spot and address issues earlier. Similarly, leaders are making sure that interventions that help pupils to manage their behaviour are monitored and adjusted over time.

Trustees have successfully supported the school to improve, making sure that safeguarding is now effective and overseeing improvements to the curriculum. They have also improved their monitoring of the school site. For example, they have made sure that fire safety equipment is up to standard. However, there is more to do to ensure that oversight of the school is secure. For example, some minor site repairs that leaders thought had been addressed had not been made in a timely manner.

Thorough knowledge of the requirements of all the independent school standards has lapsed as a result of some staffing changes. For example, important errors in the administration of the admissions and attendance registers had not been found because leaders did not know and had not checked what the requirements are.

Governance is undergoing change. There is a very new local governing board. Although its members are enthusiastic and have provided some initial useful feedback on what they have seen when visiting the school, at the time of the inspection they had not been in place long enough to make any significant impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

However, minor improvements are required because the proprietor body has not ensured that some recruitment checks are routinely carried out and recorded in line with statutory guidance. This includes prohibition from teaching checks and separate barred list checks for staff who are on site while the school awaits information from the Disclosure and Barring Service. The original date of some checks is not recorded on the single central record of pre-appointment checks.

In addition, although leaders refer concerns to relevant external agencies in a timely manner, the school's procedures for following up when other agencies are not quick enough to respond are not defined clearly enough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Those responsible for governance lack the knowledge needed to hold leaders to account effectively. The new governance structure is not currently sufficiently well organised or understood. This means that some aspects of provision are not understood well enough, and some of the requirements of the independent school standards have not been overseen well enough. Trustees should ensure that governance oversight supports and challenges leaders to continually improve and that all the independent school standards are met consistently.
- The proprietor body has not ensured that relevant staff understand and complete some required recruitment checks. In addition, some records, including the single central record, admissions register and attendance register, are not kept in line with statutory requirements. The proprietor should ensure that relevant staff receive training so that they understand the requirements. This would ensure that the right checks are made on new staff and that information relating to pupils' admission and attendance is kept up to date and in line with statutory guidance.
- Some aspects of the curriculum do not build up pupils' learning over time as well as others and do not support pupils to progress towards clear and ambitious end-points. The school needs to make sure that all parts of the curriculum allow pupils to deepen their learning and achieve as highly as possible.

- Some procedures relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance lack clarity. This means that it sometimes takes too long for leaders to spot and respond appropriately to patterns in pupils' behaviour or attendance. The school should set clearer procedures to help leaders know when to act and what to do when pupils' behaviour or attendance are concerning them.

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School details

Unique reference number	144808
DfE registration number	850/6093
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10303418
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Releasing Potential
Chair	Paul Suter
Headteacher	Janet Cornall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,630
Telephone number	023 9247 9762
Website	www.releasingpotential.com/school
Email address	admin@releasingpotential.com
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 October 2022

Information about this school

- Releasing Potential School forms part of the Releasing Potential charity.
- The school is located on two sites, one in Havant and the other in Chichester. Both sites occupy former industrial premises that have been refurbished to provide educational facilities:
 - Unit 7, Kingscroft Court, Ridgeway, Havant PO9 1LS
 - 4 St James' Works, St Pancras, Chichester PO19 7NN.
- The school makes use of local leisure and wildlife facilities to educate pupils. This includes owning and operating a number of premises, including some farmland, a sailing centre, a coffee hut and an outboard motor workshop:
 - Willow Farm, Hook Lane, Aldingbourne, Chichester PO20 3TL
 - RP Sailing Centre, Northney Marina, Northney Road, Hayling Island PO11 0NH
 - Blue Brew, Chalcroft Lane, Bognor Regis PO21 5TS
 - Emsworth Outboards, Emsworth Yacht Harbour, Thorney Road, Emsworth, Hampshire PO10 8BP.
- All pupils have an EHC plan for social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils are placed in the school by either Hampshire or West Sussex local authority. Pupils have typically previously found it difficult to maintain a place in mainstream settings or pupil referral units.
- The school offers provision for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years. Currently, all pupils are boys. Those who are in Year 12 or Year 13 follow the same curriculum as younger pupils. They are typically placed in the school because they are emotionally vulnerable and mainstream post-16 education would not suit them.
- The school makes use of two providers of unregistered alternative provision.
- Governance is provided by trustees of the Releasing Potential charity. In addition, the school has very recently set up a local governing board.

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.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was brought forward following an additional inspection. At that inspection, the independent school standards that were checked were met.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer, the headteacher and other senior leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector met with the board of trustees and the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered pupils' learning across the curriculum, including the school's personal development, outdoor learning and alternative provision programmes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the school's recruitment procedures, including checking the single central record and discussing records of concerns. Inspectors also took account of the views of leaders, pupils and staff and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Further inspection activities included scrutinising a range of policies, including those relating to the health and safety of the sites the school uses. The lead inspector saw pupils learning in both main school sites plus the outboard motor workshop, the farm and a local playground.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Clive Close

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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

- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 18(2)(b) no such person carries out work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction.
- 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(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
 - 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction;
 - 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff ("S"), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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