

Inspection of The Shires

Shires Lane, Stretton, Rutland LE15 7GT

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 February 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are greeted like old friends as they arrive at school each morning. This warm welcome gets the school day off to a great start. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. They anticipate when pupils may struggle. They make every effort to ensure that any such incidents are avoided. Nevertheless, pupils learn to be resilient when the day does not go to plan. They play board games where they might miss a turn or lose. This helps them to understand that life can be unpredictable and how to cope with an unexpected turn of events.

The school uses a wide range of strategies to make sure that the voice of every pupil is heard. Pupils are happy. When they are asked if they enjoy coming to school, the answer is a resounding 'Yes!' They rarely miss a day of school. It is their safe haven.

Staff are alert to changes in pupils' behaviour. They know that if a pupil struggles to behave well it is an indication that the pupil may have a problem. When this happens, staff sensitively and calmly help pupils to manage their feelings. Despite the personal challenges that pupils face, their behaviour and attitudes to learning are remarkable.

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

The school is ambitious for its pupils. Staff do not underestimate what pupils are capable of and agree that 'the sky is the limit' for pupils' futures. Wherever possible, pupils, including sixth-form students, work towards qualifications. The school uses pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan targets to break pupils' learning into small and achievable steps of progress. These personal targets are regularly reviewed and new targets are set to build on pupils' prior achievements. As a result, pupils experience success and achieve well from their starting points.

The school has crafted the curriculum with care to meet pupils' additional needs and allow them to learn across a range of subjects. The school uses information from pupils' EHC plans to ensure that pupils study the appropriate pathway, so that they learn and achieve well.

Each area of the curriculum is overseen by a curriculum leader. Many are new to their roles. They are keen to develop their subjects. However, they do not have a complete oversight of the areas for which they are responsible. They are still in the process of identifying what is working well and what needs to improve.

All staff provide high levels of care for pupils. They make sure that pupils have the emotional support they need at every point in the school day. Some support staff are less skilled in supporting pupils as they learn.

Communication is at the heart of the curriculum. Non-verbal pupils use a wide range of strategies to interact with others. Staff use these techniques with skill. Pupils

learn to recognise their feelings. They refer to colours to explain how they are feeling. For example, yellow means worried or excited. Pupils learn the best ways to manage their emotions when they are not feeling calm or happy.

Reading is prioritised. Pupils enjoy books. When one pupil was asked what the best thing about school was, he went to find his favourite book. He took great delight in being read to and joined in with repeated phrases used in 'The Gingerbread Man' with enthusiasm. Pupils on the 'semi formal' pathway have daily phonics lessons. They use their phonics knowledge to decode words. Many become increasingly confident readers. Sometimes, staff do not have the expertise they need to teach reading well. They make mistakes when delivering phonics lessons and do not give pupils the right support that would help them to become even better readers.

The bedrock of the school's work is developing pupils' independence and preparing them for adulthood. The school provides a vast offer of purposeful experiences and opportunities. The examples are endless. Pupils visit the library and local market. They have 'bake offs' to raise money for charity and make healthy pizzas. Sixth-form students run a sandwich shop in school to help them understand the world of work. All pupils learn about careers from real-life experiences such as a visit from a local police officer, helping out at a local farm and virtual visits to the dentist. Pupils learn about the importance of healthy relationships based on respect. They learn about the changes their bodies are going through as teenagers. The school's personal development offer is second to none.

The proprietor shares the school's aspirations for pupils. The decisions they take have the best interests of the pupils and staff front and centre. Governors also play a key role in reviewing the work of the school. They seek external quality assurance to validate the school's work. They ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are consistently met. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act. The proprietor has ensured that all policies are in place and acted on effectively. Risk assessments are used well, for example, to reduce the risk posed to pupils, including when undertaking off-site activities. The school site is appropriate to pupils' needs and their learning.

The school ensures that it communicates well with parents and carers about the progress their children are making. Weekly newsletters showcase pupils' learning and activities. Parents are positive about the work of the school. One parent said, 'the school's relationship with parents is excellent'. Other parents' comments recognise and praise the school's care for their children.

Staff describe the school as a happy learning community. They are unanimously proud to work at The Shires. They appreciate the support they receive and say that their professional and personal needs are considered.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Staff are not sufficiently expert in the teaching of reading. Some errors are made as phonics lessons are delivered and staff do not always provide pupils with effective guidance as they read. The school must ensure all staff have the knowledge and expertise they need to support pupils to read with increasing fluency and confidence.
- Some curriculum leaders are new to their roles. While they have ideas regarding further subject development, they do not yet have all the information they need to precisely identify the work that needs to be done. The school must ensure that curriculum leaders acquire a complete understanding of their subjects so that they can fully evaluate the impact of the curriculum and provide expert support and guidance for their colleagues.
- While all staff provide high levels of care for pupils, a few support staff do not have the skills they need to help pupils to learn the intended curriculum. Pupils are not always provided with effective help and guidance in their learning by every member of staff. The school should ensure that all support staff know how best to provide support to enable pupils to achieve as well as they can.

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	131018
DfE registration number	857/6004
Local authority	Rutland Council
Inspection number	10299176
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Jamie Hill
Annual fees (day pupils)	£76,500
Telephone number	01780 411944
Website	www.strettonshires.co.uk
Email address	info@theshires.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 July 2019

Information about this school

- The Shires is an independent school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 19 years. The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including complex needs and autism. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The curriculum is provided through two pathways; the 'informal' and 'semi-formal' pathways. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, including: 'my communication'; 'my independence'; 'the world about me'; and 'my love of reading'.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in July 2019 when the school was judged to be good.
- A material change inspection took place in February 2023 in response to the school's application to increase the maximum number of pupils it is permitted to have on roll.
- Since the previous standard inspection in July 2019, a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator have been appointed.
- The school does not make use of 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 education 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 the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and held a remote meeting with the chief operating officer of the proprietorial body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, preparing for adulthood (including mathematics), personal, social and health education and the sensory and physical curriculum. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 observed pupils' behaviour around the school throughout the day, including their arrival at school, lunchtime and in lessons.
- The lead inspector had a tour of the premises to check for compliance with part 5 of the standards. A number of documents were also reviewed, including policies relating to admissions, behaviour, curriculum, complaints, health and safety, and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for school staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Caroline Poole, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Deirdre Duignan

Ofsted Inspector

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