

# Inspection of Progress Schools - Northamptonshire

8 Notre Dame Mew, Northampton NN1 2BG

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Inspection dates: 12 to 14 March 2024

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

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?**

Before coming to this school, pupils have often had a poor experience of education previously. Staff work hard to overcome the obstacles that put pupils off attending school or wanting to learn. The school's efforts have a positive impact. Over time, many pupils come to school more frequently and engage more readily with their studies. However, the attendance of some pupils remains too low.

Pupils appreciate how staff focus on getting to know them as individuals and building a rapport. Strong and trusting relationships develop. Pupils know that staff will help them to manage their emotions when they become unsettled. This consistent support means that pupils feel safe, cared for and valued. As one pupil typically explained, 'Staff are always trying to help us. They don't give up.'

The curriculum provides pupils with the foundations they need for their next steps. They take part in programmes of study that relate to their talents and interests. Pupils grow in confidence and develop aspirations for the future. However, the curriculum pupils study does not always cater for their specific needs. Support for pupils who struggle with their reading is only just being organised. Despite these weaknesses, most pupils secure a suitable education or training placement when they leave school.

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

The school has continued its work to improve the curriculum. Priority is given to pupils securing qualifications in mathematics, English and science, as well as work to support pupils' personal development. The recent addition of the Arts Award has enhanced the curriculum offer. However, opportunities for pupils to gain credit for the work they complete in subjects such as humanities and enterprise are limited.

In each subject, careful thought has been given to the facts and vocabulary that pupils need to know. However, the more complex subject-specific knowledge that helps to deepen pupils' understanding is not always identified. Planned learning usually follows a logical order. However, the sequence of learning in some subjects is more disjointed, and this is further exacerbated when pupils are absent. Gaps created in pupils' knowledge as a result are not always plugged.

When pupils join the school, teachers check their numeracy and literacy skills, including their ability to read. They use this information to identify which of the school's three curriculum 'steps' pupils should follow. However, in some subjects, pupils do not study a curriculum that is best suited to their age or ability.

The school makes sure that each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified correctly. Targets on pupils' individual education plan focus on the things the pupils need to work on most. The targets also consider information on pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans when appropriate. However, while

help with pupils' social and emotional needs is usually effective, support with their academic learning is more varied.

Teachers make good use of their detailed subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum. Staff work alongside pupils to provide them with close support and encouragement. They address pupils' misconceptions quickly before moving the learning on. However, teachers do not always adapt how they teach the curriculum well enough to take pupils' particular needs into account. When this is the case, pupils struggle to remember what they have learned.

Those pupils who require it do not get the help they need to read accurately or fluently. Plans to teach these pupils phonics are yet to be realised. The school has started to raise the profile of reading more widely. A new English curriculum gives pupils opportunities to experience a range of high-quality texts. However, time set aside for pupils to read independently is not used well.

Pupils understand how they are expected to behave. They gain positive points when their behaviour reflects the school's values. Staff manage any disruptions calmly and effectively. Many pupils improve their behaviour over time. This allows some pupils to return to a mainstream educational setting.

Effective use of part-time programmes helps to increase pupils' engagement with education. However, some pupils still struggle to attend school often. The school makes daily contact with pupils who are absent to check that they are safe and well.

The provision for personal development has been strengthened. 'My' units teach pupils about relationships and how to look after their well-being. Pupils know how to stay safe, both online and in the local community. They understand what it means to be a good citizen and why respect and tolerance matter. They recall recent visits to nearby places of worship to learn about different faiths. Pupils contribute positively to the lives of others through a local charity for the homeless. Individual advice and guidance help pupils plan their next steps into education or training.

Staff are positive about working at the school. They appreciate opportunities to take part in weekly training and drop-in sessions to help them improve their practice. They value the support they receive from leaders and from the proprietor so that they can be successful in their roles.

The school has been through a period of change. Leaders and the proprietor are realistic about what is working well and what still needs to get better. Actions to address weaknesses in the curriculum are having a positive impact. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that the quality of education is secure. The proprietor supports leaders well and holds them closely to account. They share leaders' vision and ambition for the school and the pupils it serves. However, the proprietor has not ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards (the standards) relating to the curriculum and risk assessments.

The policy relating to risk assessments is not implemented effectively. Methods used to assess risks are inconsistent. Pupils' individual risk assessments are not always reviewed or updated in a timely manner. However, these weaknesses in the procedures used to assess and evaluate risk do not undermine the school's culture of safeguarding.

The school's policies are up to date and reflect the latest statutory guidance. The safeguarding policy and the relationships and sex education policy are available on the school's website.

The site is well maintained and provides a suitable environment for learning. 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 some subjects, pupils do not study a curriculum that is appropriate to their individual needs, or that takes into account their age and/or abilities. When this is the case, these pupils can struggle to access the learning without significant support. They cannot recall key knowledge. The school must ensure that, across all subjects, the curriculum pupils access is appropriate to their needs and their stage of learning, and enables them to achieve well
- The curriculum outlines the substantive knowledge that pupils need to know in each subject. However, the disciplinary knowledge that pupils need to learn is not always identified. As a result, pupils struggle to make connections between different topics within subjects, while their understanding of the subject can lack depth. The school needs to make sure that the curriculum in each subject pays sufficient attention to the disciplinary knowledge so that pupils develop a secure understanding across all the subjects that they study.
- The school does not have a consistent approach to teaching pupils how to read. Pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read have gaps in their knowledge of phonics. They do not become accurate and fluent readers quickly enough because they do not always receive the support they need. The school must ensure that pupils who struggle to read get the help they need to develop their reading skills so that they can access the curriculum independently.
- The range of accreditations and qualifications that pupils can achieve is quite limited. This has the potential to limit their next-steps aspirations. The school should ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to gain suitable external recognition for their studies across the full range of subjects that they study.
- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. They miss out on learning important curriculum content, as well as on wider curriculum experiences. The

school should ensure that these pupils receive the support they need to enable them to improve their attendance.

- The school's risk assessment policy is not implemented effectively. Strategies used to assess risks vary. It is not clear who is responsible for each risk assessment or how these assessments are shared with appropriate staff. When a pupil's circumstances change, their risk assessment is not always revisited to ensure that it remains suitable. The lack of a consistent approach to assessing risk reduces opportunities for staff to identify appropriate mitigations. The school must ensure that it has robust procedures in place to evaluate and review risks.
- The proprietor has not ensured that all the standards are met. Some aspects of the curriculum are not of a consistently good quality or implemented effectively. The school's approach to assessing risk is inconsistent. The proprietor 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 (DfE) has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135754
<b>DfE registration number</b>	941/6070
<b>Local authority</b>	West Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10299206
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent Special School
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	31
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Progress Schools Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Charlotte Barton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jade Gibson (Head of school)
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£14,000 to £32,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01604 970320
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.progress-schools.co.uk">www.progress-schools.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@progress-schools.co.uk">info@progress-schools.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	12 to 14 July 2022

## Information about this school

- Progress Schools - Northamptonshire is registered to provide full-time education for up to 50 pupils aged 13 to 16 years. There are currently 31 pupils on the school's roll. Some of these pupils are dual registered with another provision.
- The school provides education to pupils with behavioural, social, emotional and mental health needs. Many of these pupils have been excluded from their previous provision. The school also makes provision for pupils with SEND, several of whom have EHC plans.
- The school uses the services of one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in July 2022. Progress monitoring inspections of the school took place on 14 March 2023 and on 18 October 2023.
- The head of school took up the post temporarily in September 2023. Her position was made permanent in January 2024.
- In September 2023, the proprietor set up an advisory board of external professionals to support the work of Progress Schools Limited.

## 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 COVID-19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the head of school and other school staff. They also spoke with members of the company's central team, including the director of schools and the coordinator for the provision for pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietor board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, 'my world' (humanities), and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). 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 also visited English lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work in science.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during social times and spoke with pupils about their experiences.
- An inspector spoke with a representative of a school which uses the services of Progress School - Northamptonshire for dual-registered pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including: the school's improvement plan, a variety of policies, information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, examples of pupils' EHC plans and a range of different risk assessments.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, parents 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 took into account responses to Ofsted Parent View. They also noted responses to the staff and the pupil surveys.
- To check the school's compliance with the standards, inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed facilities at the school's site.

### **The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards**

During the inspection, we checked whether the school now meets standards that were judged to have failed at its previous monitoring inspection, which took place on 18 October 2023.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school continues not to meet the previously failed standards.**
- At the previous monitoring inspection, inspectors found that, while the curriculum had been developed in some subject areas, it was not clear exactly what pupils should know and remember and in what order. Assessment was not used well enough to identify and resolve gaps in pupils' knowledge or to plan future learning. The planned curriculum did not take into account pupils' different needs, including for pupils with EHC plans. Staff did not know how best to support pupils with their learning. This led to the implementation of the curriculum being inconsistent. In addition, the curriculum to support pupils in the early stages of learning to read was still being developed.
- The school has continued to improve the curriculum, particularly in mathematics, English and science. However, the knowledge that pupils need to learn in other subjects is still not identified precisely enough. The sequence of learning they follow in some subjects is not always secure. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are not always identified or addressed. While work has taken place to strengthen the guidance provided in pupils' independent education plans, staff do not use this information well enough to ensure that the curriculum meets each pupils' needs. Pupils who struggle to read accurately are still not getting enough support. The previously unmet requirements for this standard remain unmet.
- At the previous monitoring inspection, inspectors found that, because of the curriculum weaknesses identified, pupils were not prepared well enough for their next steps and future opportunities and experiences.



- Improvements made to the curriculum, particularly in mathematics, English, science and PSHE, as well as a widening of the curriculum offer, mean that pupils are better prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society. The previously unmet requirement of this standard is now met.
- At the previous monitoring inspection, while the curriculum for PSHE had been developed, staff were not implementing it consistently well. Pupils could not remember what they had learned in lessons relating to their personal development. Their recall of different faiths and beliefs was weak. They did not appreciate how they could make a positive difference to society. They were not prepared well enough for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' experiences of the personal development programme have improved. They can recall important information about topics they have studied that help to keep them safe. They know why they should show respect and tolerance towards people who have backgrounds different to their own. They value opportunities to visit local places of worship to learn about different faiths and cultures. They understand how their actions can contribute positively to the local community. The previously unmet requirements of this standard are now met.
- At the previous monitoring inspection, inspectors found that there were still weaknesses in the risk assessment process. Risks were not always appropriately assessed, and control measures were sometimes unsuitable. Timeframes for when risk assessments were updated were unclear.
- Weaknesses in the procedures used to assess and mitigate risks remain. The evaluation of risks is not consistent. Pupils' individual risk assessments are not always up to date. There is a lack of clarity about who oversees each risk assessment to ensure that they are implemented effectively. The previously unmet requirements for the standard relating to risk assessments remain unmet.
- At the previous monitoring inspection, the inspectors found that the proprietor and leaders had not demonstrated good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles, so that all the standards were securely and consistently met.
- The proprietor and leaders have not ensured that some of the known weaknesses in relation to the quality of education and issues relating to risk assessments have been resolved. The proprietor and leaders have made sufficient improvements to the curriculum to ensure that pupils' well-being is now promoted. However, the remaining previously unmet requirements of this standard remain unmet.

### **Information about the progress monitoring inspection**

- The DfE commissioned a progress monitoring inspection to take place at the same time as the standard inspection.
- The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the requirements of the standards that were judged to be unmet at the progress monitoring inspection of the school that took place on 9 January 2024. These unmet standards related to: the quality of education; pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the welfare, health and safety of pupils; and leadership and management.

- The DfE required the school to submit an action plan. Ofsted evaluated this plan on 9 January 2024 and deemed it to be not acceptable.
- The DfE rejected the action plan on 22 January 2024.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietor board, school leaders and leaders who work for the company's central team.
- Inspectors considered documentation related to: the quality of education, personal development, risk assessments, and leadership and management.

### **Inspection team**

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mark Anderson

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; 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.
- 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; and
  - 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.

#### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

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

## **The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards**

### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
  - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.

### **Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
  - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
  - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
    - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely; and
    - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures.

### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1)(c) actively promotes the well-being of pupils.

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