

Yew Tree Farm School

Swanton Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8AT

Inspection date

10 April 2024

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h) to 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2), 3 to 4.

- Leaders have written a suitable curriculum policy. Pupils will study a broad range of subjects based on the requirements of the independent school standards (the standards). Leaders plan to combine academic learning and outdoor farming activities in a way that helps pupils to re-engage with education and prepares them well for the next stage of their education.
- Leaders intend for pupils to study a broad and ambitious curriculum. There are suitable schemes of work in subjects such as English, mathematics, science, design and technology, physical education, art and farming. They specify precisely what leaders plan for pupils to learn and the order in which this knowledge will be taught in key stage 1 and key stage 2. Leaders' plans show consideration of the specific adaptations that may be needed to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Some pupils may have been absent from formal schooling for a time before they arrive. Leaders understand the importance of promptly identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge. Each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan will provide the starting point for teaching. These, combined with discussions with parents and assessments completed when pupils join the school, will be used to target specific areas of need.
- The curriculum in all subjects is designed to be flexible, with content and delivery adapted according to pupils' individual social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Leaders have the knowledge and expertise required to enable them to do this successfully.
- Leaders have also thought carefully about how pupils will be supported to learn with confidence and increased independence. Most of the learning activities will take place in the extensive outdoor areas, such as the allotment, the Copse, three animal enclosures and the woodland area. Pupils will have access to a diverse range of suitable reading materials on different themes and topics.

- Leaders have a suitable assessment policy in place. Formal assessments will complement teachers' ongoing reviews of pupils' learning. This information is likely to contribute to pupils' statutory annual EHC plan reviews. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who is also the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has been appointed. Together with the proprietor (who is also the headteacher), she has set out how the school will communicate important information about pupils' attainment and progress with parents. They also intend to develop links with similar schools to share good practice and support the quality assurance of teaching and learning.
- Fundamental British values are promoted through the curriculum. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education will be taught through timetabled lessons. Leaders have made sure that the PSHE curriculum provides pupils with knowledge that will be useful to them when they leave the school, such as learning about healthy lifestyles and positive relationships. The intended curriculum covers a wide range of topics that pay due regard to the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- The PSHE curriculum will provide pupils with relationships, sex and health education. The proposed school's policy complies with the relevant statutory guidance and is available on the website. Leaders have considered how they will consult with parents about the policy.
- Thought has been given to an induction process that will help staff to promote the school's ethos successfully through their work. Additional specialist staffing will be supplemented by therapists brought in as they are needed.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school is granted permission to open.

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

Paragraph 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- Leaders and staff intend promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through both the taught curriculum and by establishing an inclusive and nurturing ethos at the school. Kindness, understanding, perseverance, high expectations and growth will underpin all aspects of the day-to-day life of the school. The proprietor intends that all staff employed at the school will support pupils to always understand and subscribe to these values in their work and conduct.
- Leaders are aware that being able to form and manage relationships with other pupils and adults is an area that pupils will need significant support with. They intend to emphasise celebrating pupils' successes and building their self-esteem and confidence.
- A range of extra-curricular activities is planned in order to promote pupils' understanding of what it means to live in modern Britain. This will include visits to theatres, museums and art galleries, for instance, which will often be linked to their work across the wider curriculum. The school's policies and curriculum plans refer to all of the protected characteristics.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school is granted permission to open.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 9 to 16(b), 34(1)(c)

- The school's written safeguarding policy complies with the latest statutory guidance and is published on the school's website. It provides a comprehensive range of information, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Links with related policies provide additional information about specific aspects of safeguarding, such as child-on-child abuse and 'Prevent' duties.
- The DSL and the headteacher are experienced in ensuring the safety of pupils with SEND. As a result, leaders have the safeguarding knowledge that they need to keep pupils safe from harm. The DSL has completed all required safeguarding training and is knowledgeable about safeguarding matters.
- Staff will complete safeguarding training regularly. This training will be supplemented with weekly staff briefings which will be used to share important information, including revisiting key aspects of the safeguarding policy. All safeguarding concerns will be expected to be recorded on a centralised electronic system in a timely manner. Leaders intend to complete regular checks on staff's safeguarding knowledge.
- The school site is securely fenced and well maintained. Leaders have formulated a suitable risk assessment to manage the start and end of the school day safely.
- The proposed school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies have been tailored to suit the needs of pupils at the school. They take account of current guidance. Positive handling will be used as a last resort and only where a pupil's behaviour creates a risk for pupils or staff or the risk of serious damage to property. There is already a system in place to record incidents of poor behaviour and leaders' responses to them. This is likely to contribute effectively to the implementation of the school's policy.
- The school's health and safety and risk assessments policies are suitable. They comply with relevant statutory requirements and provide a secure framework for staff and pupils. Routines for checking the site and relevant equipment are already established, with appropriate records kept. Health and safety training that is specific to working on a farm is included in staff induction procedures. Risk assessments that are specific to working with the animals on the school site are fit for purpose.
- The proprietor has ensured the completion of a range of external health and safety checks and surveys to ensure site safety, including water tests and fire safety reviews. Fire risk assessments have been carried out using external expertise to check that arrangements are suitable for the school's context. Fire equipment is checked routinely, with appropriate records kept. Fire evacuation procedures will take account of which parts of the site pose the greatest potential risk and the challenges of people being spread across the extensive space.
- A suitable first-aid policy is in place. There are first-aid kits, which are stored appropriately. Leaders intend that first-aid kits are easily available during all outdoor activities. Leaders intend that all staff have first-aid training. The school's medical room has been identified and is suitably furnished.
- The proprietor has planned to ensure that staff-to-pupil ratios are suitable at all times. Leaders have considered how pupils will be supervised when working beyond the boundary of the main activity areas, while still on the farm site. The school site is

securely fenced which, along with the hedgerows, is well maintained. Leaders have formulated a sensible plan to safely manage pupils' arrival and departure each day.

- The proprietor's plans for admission and attendance registers are appropriate. The proprietor intends to use an electronic system to record and monitor attendance trends and patterns.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school is granted permission to open.

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

Paragraph 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(6)

- The headteacher, who is also the school's sole proprietor, has carried out appropriate checks to ensure that all staff who are employed at the school are suitable to work with children. The proposed school has an appropriate single central record in place, where relevant information about these checks is recorded.
- The members of the executive board have had relevant checks made on their suitability. These have indicated that they are not disqualified from working with the proposed school.
- The DSL has completed suitable training in safer recruitment procedures. Other leaders will also have safer recruitment training to ensure that the required checks on staff and other adults at the school are carried out appropriately.
- The proprietor does not intend to employ agency or supply staff at the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all the standards in this part are likely to be met if the school is given permission to open.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The proposed school is located on a five-acre farm which currently operates as an unregistered alternative provision. It has its own secure entrance, office space and adequate toilet facilities. The two indoor learning spaces in the canopy areas are light and airy and pleasant areas in which pupils may socialise. However, due to the acoustics and sound insulation, they are not suitable places for learning.
- During the pre-registration inspection, an appropriate learning space was identified. This accommodation is of sound standard and is fitted with suitable furniture for the proposed age range and needs of the pupils. Acoustic and indoor lighting conditions in this area are suitable for the nature of the activities that will take place. However, the space is not large enough to accommodate up to 12 pupils as originally requested. Therefore, during the pre-registration inspection, the proprietor accepted the recommendation to admit up to six pupils aged seven to 11.
- The school has separate toilet facilities for pupils and staff. These can be locked from the inside to provide privacy. Handwashing facilities include access to hot and cold running water. Drinking water is clearly labelled, and hot water is set at a safe temperature. Pupils will have access to drinking water during the school day.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a suitably equipped medical room with a toilet and washing facilities nearby.

- There is a large outdoor area for pupils to use during social times and for physical education. Leaders intend for pupils to access some aspects of the physical education curriculum at the local leisure centre.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school is granted permission to open.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32 to 32(2)(b)(i), 32(2)(c) to 32(4)(c)

- Leaders are aware of the documentation, information and policies that they must make available to parents, inspectors and local authorities on request. The proprietor has used the standards, specialist external expertise and other guidance published online to ensure that nothing is missed. All documents will be made available for parents on request from the school, as well as being available on the school's website.
- Leaders have prepared suitable templates for reporting to parents on how well their children are attaining and progressing. They are also aware of their duty to provide funding authorities with annual statements of income and expenditure for pupils with an EHC plan and their duty to provide reasonably required information for annual reviews.
- The proposed school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards if granted permission to open.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33 to 33(k)

- The school's complaints policy meets the requirements of this part of the standards. It makes suitable provision for concerns to be raised at an informal stage and sets clear timescales for each stage of the complaints process.
- Pupils will be admitted to the school via a referral from their local authority. The proprietor therefore anticipates working openly with the relevant local authority in the event of a complaint being received.
- The school is likely to meet the requirements in this part of the standards if it is granted permission to open.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor and the DSL are directly involved in the day-to-day running of the existing unregistered alternative provision at the farm. They have a clear understanding of the setting for which they are responsible. Leaders have useful and transferrable experience and skills to support their leadership of the proposed school.
- Leaders have knowledge and experience of working in special education. They are convincing in how they intend to realise the imperative to improve pupils' life chances and life experiences through the school's work.
- Leaders have sensibly reached out to other schools with a similar context and intake. They intend this to provide them with opportunities to learn from existing good practice and to explore options for future moderation of their own work.

- The executive board is likely to provide a useful layer of scrutiny, especially while the proprietor also fulfils the role of headteacher. It intends to provide a helpful external perspective to leaders about the quality of their work.
- The proprietor has put appropriate strategies and policies in place to secure pupils' welfare and safety.
- It is likely that the requirements of this standard will be met, should permission be given for the school to open.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have produced and published an equality and inclusion policy on their website. It meets requirements, giving due regard to the Equality Act 2010, and emphasising the school's intended nurturing culture. It demonstrates leaders' understanding of their duties in this area of their work.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	150379
DfE registration number	886/6183
Inspection number	10322483

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent Special school
School status	Independent day school
Proprietor	Yew Tree Farm School C.I.C
Chair	Edwina Grix
Headteacher	Edwina Grix
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000 to £70,000
Telephone number	01622 233 711
Website	www.yewtreefarmschool.co.uk
Email address	office@yewtreefarmschool.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	7 to 11	7 to 11
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	12	6

Reason for inspector's recommendations

- There is insufficient suitable indoor space conducive to learning to accommodate the number of pupils proposed by the proprietor given the likely nature of the premises.

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	12
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	12
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	12
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	12

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	1
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	2

Information about this proposed school

- Yew Tree Farm School intends to cater for up to six pupils between the ages of seven and 11.
- The proposed school will be located within five acres of farmland. The accommodation will consist of a suitably furnished weather and soundproof indoor activity area and two large outdoor canopies. The site also includes a large allotment area, an outdoor cooking space, several animal paddocks, a woodland area, several large play areas and extensive fields. The proposed school hosts several different species of animals, including horses, rabbits, pigs, chickens, goats, guinea pigs and sheep.
- The intended school will cater for pupils with autism and those with SEMH needs. Most pupils are likely to have been away from formal education for a sustained period and have significant anxiety.
- All pupils will have an EHC plan and their places will be funded by a local authority.
- The proposed school will not have any particular religious character.

- It is not intended that the school will use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the school's first pre-registration inspection. The purpose of this inspection was to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Schools must comply with the independent school standards to be registered. This is the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection.
- Prior to the site visit, the inspector reviewed a number of documents provided to the DfE as part of the school's application for registration.
- The inspector toured the school's premises and grounds with the proprietor and the SENCo. She held discussions with both leaders and reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the single central record, policies and curriculum and assessment information. The inspector also met online with the chair of the executive board.

Inspection team

Shazia Akram, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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