

Inspection of North Hill House

Fromefield, Frome, Somerset BA11 2HB

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

The quality of education pupils receive is not good enough. The members of the newly established leadership team have started to tackle the weaknesses in the curriculum. However, too much is in the very early stages and is yet to have the necessary impact. Consequently, pupils' curriculum experiences are not considered or designed well enough. Learning is disjointed and does not build successfully on what pupils already know.

Staff and pupils behave respectfully towards each other. The relationships between them are secure and trusted. Pupils say that they feel safe. Many can identify staff with whom they feel comfortable to share their worries or concerns. Parents and carers express confidence in the changes that the school has undergone recently, notably the communication that they receive about their child's education.

Staff want the best for pupils so that they are prepared for their next steps. However, persistent changes in staff have resulted in many not having the expertise necessary to meet pupils' academic needs and to support pupils to overcome barriers to learning.

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

The school's ambition for pupils is not realised. Recent plans for improving provision are yet to be communicated or are too early in their implementation to make a noticeable difference. High staff turnover and a required focus on meeting previously unmet standards have had a significant impact on what the school has been able to introduce.

The school's curriculum and checks on provision are in the very early stages of development. The curriculum, particularly for younger pupils, lacks coherence and structure. The school has a clear vision for what it wants pupils to learn and how to help them, but this has not been established. The school's checks on pupils' learning are limited and in its infancy. Consequently, the school does not know how effective its work is.

Staff have secure subject knowledge in the curriculum subjects they teach and in the subjects they lead on. However, the school does not understand what makes an effective curriculum in order to increase what pupils learn and remember from key stage 1 through to key stage 4 and beyond. The school is unclear about how pupils build towards more complex learning. A clear sequence of learning has not been designed to help pupils build knowledge over time. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they should.

The use of assessment is not effective. The school's effective processes for identifying each pupil's academic, social and emotional needs are not sustained or built on after they start at the school. Staff do not make use of the most accurate information about the pupils they teach on an ongoing basis. Consequently, staff do

not ensure that pupils receive the required support when demands are made of them or when they face a challenging situation. At times, there is too much reliance on adults, which limits steps towards increasing pupils' independence.

The school has started to prioritise reading. Leaders understand the need for pupils to read often and enjoy a wide range of reading material. Strategies to promote this have been recently introduced. A new phonics programme has been adopted for those pupils at the earliest stages of reading. However, staff do not yet have the expertise needed to ensure that the curriculum for reading is delivered so that pupils become increasingly fluent and confident readers.

The school recognises the importance of preparing pupils for life beyond North Hill House. Pupils experience opportunities to increase their awareness of the world around them. The school links with the local community well. Pupils have timetabled sessions to practise life skills and nurture their interests. The school has recently introduced an approach which encourages pupils to express their opinions on different viewpoints and situations. This is beginning to increase pupils' ability to advocate for themselves.

The school supports pupils to work towards their aspirations. Staff plan an individualised approach. This is supported by useful independent careers advice. The therapy team works alongside teaching staff effectively. This strengthens expertise to support pupils to develop strategies to help them manage daily life. As a result, pupils develop the skills they will need to move on to the next stage in their education.

The school has focused its attention on addressing previously unmet standards relating to safeguarding and behaviour. As a result, these standards are now met. Leaders have ensured that staff have the training they need to increase their knowledge of how to keep pupils safe. Staff have proven their determined commitment to improve the offer for pupils in the work completed up to this point.

The proprietor has not ensured that the independent school standards are fully met. However, its scrutiny of the school's plans and vision and its support and challenge for the new leadership team indicate a level of confidence in the current leadership to make the necessary improvements so that pupils receive a good quality of education. The proprietor has 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)

- The proprietor has not ensured that a suitable quality of education is in place for all pupils. Therefore, some of the independent school standards are unmet. The proprietor should ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.
- The school's vision and model for the curriculum has not been implemented. The curriculum is not coherent or well sequenced. As a result, some pupils are not receiving an adequate education. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, must ensure that there is a well-constructed curriculum in all subjects and all key stages so that pupils receive a good quality of education.
- The school has not ensured that staff have a precise knowledge of how to successfully meet the needs of pupils. Despite the school identifying these needs accurately when pupils start at the school, too much of this information is not embedded in day-to-day practice. As a result, strategies to support pupils are not effective. The school must ensure that staff know the precise and most accurate information to support pupils in their learning and when meeting their social and emotional needs.
- The phonics programme in place is not established. Staff do not have the expertise to deliver the programme effectively. The school must ensure that reading is prioritised and that staff deliver an effective phonics programme so that pupils overcome previously negative experiences to become more fluent and confident readers.

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	131975
DfE registration number	933/6200
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10299185
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Aspris Children's Services Ltd
Chair	John Anderson
Headteacher	Michael Pearce
Annual fees (day pupils)	£93,637 to £120,150
Telephone number	01373 466222
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk
Email address	northhillhouseschool@aspriscs.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	27 to 29 September 2022

Information about this school

- Since the last standard inspection in September 2022, the school received a progress monitoring inspection. During this inspection, inspectors identified unmet standards in Part 3, 6 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- The current school leadership team, including the headteacher, started in post following the progress monitoring visit in June 2023.
- Since the progress monitoring inspection in June 2023, the school has ceased its boarding provision. This is no longer an independent residential special school.
- The school provides for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), predominantly autism.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider.

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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the designated safeguarding leader, the assistant headteachers, the therapy lead and head of sixth form. In addition, inspectors met with the operations director (also the chair of governors) and the chair of the proprietor body. The lead inspector discussed the school with representatives from two local authorities.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading, mathematics, science and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. In addition, inspectors looked at curriculum documents and spoke to teachers about some other subjects. Inspectors sampled individual pupils to gather evidence about the quality of education.
- Members of staff were present when inspectors spoke with most pupils. Staff supported pupils to engage with inspectors and provide their views on what it is like to be a pupil at the school.

- 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 in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum, SEND, safeguarding and behaviour.
- Inspectors checked the safety and suitability of the premises. They considered risk assessments and the policies in place to promote the well-being of pupils.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

- During the inspection we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous progress monitoring inspection on 15 June 2023.
- The school now meets the unmet standards in Part 3 and 6 of the independent standards. The school's systems and processes for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns are implemented consistently. Leaders have ensured that staff's safeguarding training is up to date. Safeguarding records are complete. Staff are aware of the necessary information to safeguard pupils.
- Leaders have an accurate oversight of behaviour incidents. These are analysed to gather information about when staff restrain pupils. All staff have completed up-to-date restraint training. The outcomes from safeguarding investigations are communicated to the local authority designated officer in a timely manner.
- Pupils' personalised plans and risk assessments provide staff with clear guidance and support for pupils. Leaders monitor the quality and effectiveness of pupils' individual risk assessments. The proprietor body has ensured there is a suitable written risk assessment policy in place. Leaders ensure there are appropriate personalised risk assessments for pupils in school. These are regularly updated by leaders.
- An up-to-date written safeguarding and child protection policy is available on the school website. There is a risk assessment policy in place. The school has effective oversight of the school's systems and processes to safeguard pupils.
- Staff know how to report a complaint and are informed when they are resolved. The school ensures staff take the necessary learning from incidents, concerns and complaints.
- Behaviour reports and record-keeping are precise and there is evidence of conversations with the pupil involved.

- The school does not meet Part 8 of the independent school standards because further unmet standards were identified during the standard inspection. Consequently, the proprietor has not ensured that those responsible for leadership and management have fulfilled their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Angela Folland

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;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 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;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught; and
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

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)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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