

Inspection of Yew Tree Farm School

Swanton Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8AT

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 January 2025

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's calm, friendly and positive atmosphere supports pupils' learning and personal development well. Staff greet pupils warmly at the start of the day and pupils are soon busily engaged in school life. Pupils happily participate in a range of practical activities on this working farm, such as feeding the animals and helping to put them away at the end of the day. They love being with the farm animals and look after them with kindness and affection. Staff capitalise on pupils' interest in the farm to help pupils engage with school.

Staff successfully combine high expectations with understanding and sensitivity. They provide strong role models for pupils, who like their teachers and feel secure and valued. The warmth of relationships established between staff and pupils support behaviour very well. Pupils understand what is expected of them. They behave sensibly around the farm and learn well. They enjoy using a range of facilities on the school site, including the good-quality timber classroom, which provides a bright, warm and inviting space for them to learn. Lunchtimes provide opportunities for pupils to enjoy chatting and relaxing while eating food cooked on the school's well-supervised fire pit.

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

Leaders are passionate about providing pupils with a high-quality education within a supportive and nurturing environment. The school has worked with determination and commitment to successfully establish a broad and interesting curriculum since the school opened. Strong teamwork contributes to the school's positive and upbeat atmosphere. Staff are proud to work in the school.

Pupils learn a range of subjects. The school makes learning meaningful and purposeful so that pupils are motivated to learn. While still early days, the school's curriculum is successfully re-engaging pupils with education, often after extended periods outside the school system.

The school gives reading a high priority in the curriculum. Its chosen phonics programme has been established quickly and securely since the school opened. Pupils have often missed out on learning key reading skills prior to joining the school and so can find reading difficult. Leaders have used training well to ensure that staff are knowledgeable about teaching phonics. They deliver the programme consistently and effectively with a strong focus on ensuring that pupils experience success. Pupils are gaining important reading skills as a result. The school selects books and texts to capture pupils' interest and to enrich learning in a range of topics. Pupils enjoy listening to staff reading to them and are rediscovering an interest in books.

The school uses a range of information effectively in order to assess pupils' needs when they join the school, such as discussions with parents, information from pupils' previous schools and pupils' education and health care (EHC) plans. Changes to the curriculum since September have ensured it is suitable for pupils' contexts and

starting points. Staff check pupils' understanding and monitor pupils' learning regularly over time. However, sometimes lessons are not adjusted quickly enough when it becomes clear that pupils already have a secure grasp of the content being taught.

The school's work to support pupils' personal development is an important part of the curriculum. Staff teach pupils key skills to help to prepare them for the next steps in their education when they leave the school. For example, they are supported to learn how to recognise and understand their emotions. Staff use a range of carefully selected books and texts as starting points for discussions about topical issues in the wider world. Pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities on the farm. They take care of the animals, which successfully fosters compassion, empathy and respect. Staff have established a strong community atmosphere. Pupils demonstrate a clear sense of belonging as a result. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The proprietor has established secure routines which ensure that pupils and staff are safe on this well-organised working farm. Adults follow the school's safety policies and procedures carefully and consistently. Daily events, such as cooking lunch on the fire pit and feeding the animals, are carefully managed and supervised. Pupils follow staff directions when participating in farm activities. The proprietor uses a suite of suitable risk assessments well to identify and mitigate risk.

Pupils want to be in school and attend regularly. They often behave well and are learning to ask for help when they need it. There are occasions, however, when their additional needs mean that they find it hard to regulate their emotions as well as they and their teachers would like. Staff respond calmly and sensitively when this is the case so that pupils soon settle back into school routines.

The proprietor and executive board are rightly proud of the progress made in establishing the school since its opening. They have introduced reliable systems of checks and balances to monitor the school's work and to hold leaders to account. The executive board is clear about priorities for future development in the school and in the executive board's roles and responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Ongoing assessments are not used consistently enough to inform teaching. This means that curriculum content is not always adjusted promptly enough to ensure that all pupils achieve as highly as they could. The school should develop the use of assessment so that all staff have an accurate understanding of pupils'

emerging needs and the expertise required to ensure that all pupils learn as fully 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	150379
DfE registration number	886/6183
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10361100
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Yew Tree Farm School C.I.C
Chair	Sharon McDermott
Headteacher	Edwina Grix
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000 to £73,000
Telephone number	01622 233711
Website	www.yewtreefarmschool.co.uk
Email address	office@yewtreefarmschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Yew Tree Farm School opened on 1 September 2024. It is registered to admit up to six pupils between the ages of seven and 11 with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils are likely to have been out of formal education for a sustained period and suffer from significant anxiety. All pupils have an EHC plan and are funded by a local authority.
- The school is located within five acres of farmland. Accommodation consists of a timber classroom, a weather- and sound-proof indoor activity area and two large canopies. The school site includes a large allotment area, an outdoor cooking space, several animal paddocks, a woodland area, several large play areas and extensive fields. The school has a variety of animals, including horses, rabbits, pigs, chickens, goats, sheep and guinea pigs.
- The chair of the executive board was appointed on 1 November 2024.
- The school does not use 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 requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, special needs coordinator and other school leaders. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's surveys. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times of the school day.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held

discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Compliance with the independent school standards was checked throughout the inspection, including a tour of the site, discussions with leaders and a review of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mark Rivers

Ofsted Inspector

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