

# Yew Tree Farm School

Swanton Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8AT

**Inspection date**

24 April 2025

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented**

## Main inspection findings

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

*Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 11 to 14, 16 to 16(b)*

- There is a culture of vigilance at the school. Staff are mindful of the additional safeguarding challenges which pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) may face. The school ensures that staff have the required knowledge and support so that they can identify and act on any concerns immediately and effectively.
- The school's safeguarding policy is appropriate and reflects the latest safeguarding guidelines. It is available on the school's website.
- The headteacher, who is also the proprietor, and two members of staff have completed training as designated safeguarding leads. They manage referrals effectively.
- All other staff complete safeguarding training, including specific training in the 'Prevent' duty, online safety and female genital mutilation, when joining the school's staff. Staff understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. They know how to identify and report concerns regarding pupils' welfare accurately.
- The school's expectations for reporting and recording concerns are followed well. Records of safeguarding concerns show that when issues are reported leaders take prompt, and appropriate, action, to help keep pupils safe. Information about safeguarding and behaviour is used to review the support available for individual pupils, in line with their education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- The school's curriculum, particularly in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, is tailored to meet pupils' needs. It focuses on personal safety and well-being, teaching pupils how to stay safe in various situations. The programme is designed to help pupils understand how to maintain safety in friendships and relationships. It also links closely to farming and work around care and respect for the animals, the farm breeding programme, as well as cooking on the campfire. PSHE lessons are delivered daily. They support pupils to develop understanding and respect.

- The staffing arrangements at the school are suitable and provide more than adequate supervision of pupils. The school has reviewed its staffing to ensure that it remains appropriate should the proposed material change be granted. For example, it is in the process of considering the recruitment of an additional teacher, and two additional welfare staff have recently been appointed.
- There are whole-school health and safety, fire safety and first-aid policies in place which support pupil and staff safety. These are compliant and would likely remain so if the material change were granted.
- The school undertakes and records the necessary health and safety and fire risk checks. Leaders ensure that all required checks are completed accurately and on time with regular oversight from leaders and representatives of the proprietor body.
- There is an appropriate risk assessment policy in place. Detailed risk assessments, including for the site and off-site visits, identify potential hazards accurately. The procedures in place provide effective guidance to staff to help reduce such risks. Careful thought has been given to the potential increase in pupil numbers.
- The premises are maintained well.
- The school is likely to meet these independent school standards if approval for the implementation of the material change is agreed.

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

##### *Paragraphs 18(2) to 21(6)*

- The single central record (SCR) meets statutory requirements. Appropriate recruitment and suitability checks have been completed for all staff and members of the executive board. These are recorded accurately on the school's SCR.
- In anticipation of the planned increase in pupil numbers, the school knows it will need to recruit an additional teacher. Its plan involves having two classes, with a teacher in each and the five welfare staff between the two classes. The proposed additional teacher and the recent recruitment of two new welfare staff would likely be appropriate to effectively manage four additional pupils.
- The school does not use or intend to use any supply staff. All staff are employed by the school.
- Leaders have completed suitable training in safer recruitment procedures.
- The school is likely to meet these independent school standards if approval for the implementation of the material change is agreed.

#### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

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

- The school's premises is suitable for the type of provision it looks to secure for its pupils. There is plentiful space, including useful indoor and outdoor spaces which are all utilised for learning. The school's plans show that the current site is sufficient to cope with the planned growth.

- The indoor spaces are appropriately resourced and offer suitable lighting and acoustics.
- The rest of the space is outside farm acreage that provides plenty of space for pupils to play and learn. Due regard is given to health and safety and ensuring muddy paths have bark spread to limit slips and falls, as well as mess.
- Toilet facilities consist of mobile toilet cabins. These are emptied weekly by an external company.
- There is only one tap on the farm that provides drinking water. Warm water for handwashing is heated and changed regularly to maintain temperature. This is supplied in urns next to the toilet and tent facilities, so pupils have access to hot and cold 'running' water.
- The medical room is fit for purpose, with handwashing facilities and the portable toilets close by. There is suitable space for pupils to lie down if needed. There are also facilities for the secure storage of medicines. Any medical treatment or injury is recorded in the medical book and saved in the school's online system.
- The school shares a site with a heritage railway. The railway does not operate during weekdays. There is a fence around the farm and a gate. There is a public footpath that runs along the edge of the site, this opens for a short section. Risk assessments in place mitigate the risks and staff are diligent in ensuring safety at all times.
- The school is likely to meet these independent school standards if approval for the implementation of the material change is agreed.

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

### *Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)*

- Leaders and the proprietor understand their roles well. Leaders are committed to ensuring that the school continues to meet these standards should the application for the material change be approved.
- The school has considered the implications of the proposed material change thoroughly. They have developed the school premises to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to be able to teach up to 10 pupils at any one time. There are plans in place to continue this development over time, for example to include permanent toilet facilities.

## Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school has an appropriate accessibility plan, which is available on the school's website. It details how the school meets the requirements set out in schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **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 that are relevant to the material change.

## School details

Unique reference number	150379
DfE registration number	886/6183
Inspection number	10397723

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent special school
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 233 711
Website	<a href="http://www.yewtreefarmschool.co.uk">www.yewtreefarmschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@yewtreefarmschool.co.uk">office@yewtreefarmschool.co.uk</a>
Dates of previous standard inspection	7 to 9 January 2025

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	7 to 11	7 to 11	7 to 11
Number of pupils on the school roll	6	10	10

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	6	10
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	6	10
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	6	10
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	6	10

### Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	1	2
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	5	5

### Information about this school

- Yew Tree Farm School is an independent special school for pupils with SEND between the ages of 7 and 11. It opened in September 2024.
- Pupils' primary needs are autism and/or social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils at the school have an EHC plan. They are placed at the school by their local authority.
- The school is located in Sittingbourne, Kent. The site is on a working farm and most of the learning takes place outside. The school shares the site with a Heritage Railway. This operates from the same address: Swanton Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8AT.
- The school accommodation consists of a timber classroom, a weatherproof indoor activity area and a large canopy. 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, chickens, goats, sheep and guinea pigs.

- The school's last standard inspection took place in January 2025, when the school was judged to be good.
- The headteacher is also the proprietor. There is an executive board with delegated responsibility for governance.
- The proprietor also operates an unregistered alternative provision on the same site.
- The school currently uses no alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make some 'material changes' to its registration. At the DfE's request, the inspector checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.
- The DfE commissioned the inspector to inspect the suitability of the school's provision in relation to pupils' welfare, health and safety; recruitment of staff; the suitability of the premises and accommodation; and the quality of leadership and management.
- This was the school's first material change inspection for this proposed change to the provision.
- The school has requested an increase in capacity from six to 10 pupils. There are currently six pupils on roll.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and spoke to some staff.
- The inspector spoke with some pupils.
- The inspector undertook a tour of the school site to check the suitability and safety of the school's plans to increase the maximum number of pupils.
- The inspector looked at a range of documents relevant to the material change request. She discussed with leaders their plans for implementing the proposed material change.
- The inspector checked the school's arrangements for safeguarding as part of the inspection. This included a meeting with the school's designated safeguarding lead and looking at records of safeguarding concerns.
- The inspector looked at the school's single central record and the school's processes for undertaking recruitment checks on new staff.

## Inspection team

Samantha Ingram, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
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