

# Inspection of Apple Orchard School

Five Oaks Road, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0RQ

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Inspection dates: 16 to 18 September 2025

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Apple Orchard is a happy school where relationships matter. Pupils feel safe here. They are proud of the school, their work and the progress they make. Staff are ambitious for pupils when it comes to learning and behaviour. Pupils know this and appreciate the help that staff give them. The behaviour of pupils is good.

School, home and therapy teams work in close partnership. This means that every pupil receives timely and effective support. Building pupils' confidence and self-esteem is central to everything the school does. Pupils happily play an active role in school life. Several pupils are part of the school council, which is led by a dedicated head boy. This group is responsible for making key decisions about the school.

Pupils are keen to get into school each morning. They arrive ready to learn. Staff are determined for them to succeed. As a result, pupils make good progress through the curriculum.

Pupils receive an exceptional personal development programme. This has a life-changing impact on pupils and their future pathways. Pupils develop trusting relationships and thrive here. They leave the school with a much brighter future ahead of them.

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

This school is improving rapidly following a period of turbulence since the last inspection. Leaders at every level have worked quickly to ensure positive changes for pupils. There is a clear sense of purpose and direction for the school's future. Staff are positive about how the school is led and managed.

Those responsible for governance have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and next steps. They understand their roles in ensuring good-quality provision. The impact they have is clear to see in many aspects of the school. Statutory duties, including compliance with the independent school standards, are understood and met. Similarly, those aspects required by the Equality Act 2010 are fully in place.

The school's curriculum is continuously evolving. Pupils study a wide range of subjects. This sets them on a positive path and means that they follow a curriculum that is similar to that of their peers in mainstream. For example, pupils enjoy learning subjects such as Spanish, art and geography. Importantly, the curriculum is highly personalised and bespoke. This is particularly the case in the sixth form, where some students follow vocational programmes at college alongside school. Nearly all pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are successful in assessing and meeting pupils' individual needs. This helps pupils to attend well. When the time comes, pupils complete qualifications and are supported well through helpful careers advice to move on to suitable next steps in education, training or employment.

Staff have thoughtfully designed each subject so that what pupils learn develops over time. However, in some subjects, the school has not defined clearly what pupils need to learn and when. In these subjects, the school is over-reliant on preparing pupils for exams instead of providing them with the key knowledge and skills they need. Pupils soak up what they learn. They have positive relationships with staff and their peers. This means that they feel comfortable giving their opinions and getting involved in lessons. The curriculum is delivered consistently most of the time. Staff provide helpful, clear explanations and ask questions to check pupils' understanding. They often demonstrate new learning by providing useful examples. However, not all areas of the curriculum are taught consistently well. For example, the questions staff ask are not always effective in checking for pupils' understanding. This means that pupils develop gaps in learning.

The profile of reading is high. Pupils join the school with different levels of reading knowledge. Staff quickly check how well pupils can read and write. They provide bespoke support, including phonics, where this is appropriate. Pupils are provided with opportunities to read a wide range of books in and out of lessons. The library is a vibrant and welcoming space, where pupils are starting to enjoy reading.

Pupils enjoy mathematics. The mathematics programme is overall well thought through. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of mathematical concepts and procedures.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is exemplary. It is precisely woven through all aspects of school life. This means that there are plentiful opportunities for pupils to grow in confidence, develop resilience and have a more positive outlook for the future. Respectful, kind and caring relationships were evident during the inspection. The personal, social and health education programme is all-encompassing. It carefully tackles relationships, sex education and many other important themes and topics. Pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe is constantly developing. Enrichment opportunities give pupils a chance to develop their individual talents and interests. For example, pupils have enjoyed a visit from the Bank of England, which provided an opportunity for them to find out about careers in finance.

Opportunities to link pupils' learning in lessons with visits to places of importance are developed with careful thought. Pupils have enjoyed visits to museums and theatres.

Pupils thrive on responsibility here. They have a voice. Pupils are fully invested in all that life at Apple Orchard includes. It is because of them that the school introduced a formal uniform last year. A former pupil designed the school tie.

## **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, the precise knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn are unclear. Sometimes, the focus is on preparing for exams rather than providing pupils with the knowledge and skills they need later in life. This means that the lesson content is not precisely matched to the learning intentions. The school should ensure that the curriculum in every subject clearly sets out what pupils need to learn at each stage.
- There are some inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is taught. For example, not all staff use questioning effectively to check on pupils' understanding. As a result, in some subjects, pupils develop gaps in learning and do not make as much progress through the curriculum as they could. The school should ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver the curriculum more consistently.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	132069
<b>DfE registration number</b>	938/6258
<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10391729
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent day school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	12 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	14
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	6
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Polaris Community
<b>Chair</b>	Jo August
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Keightley
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£54,578
<b>Telephone number</b>	01403 783 416
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.appleorchard.org.uk">www.appleorchard.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:enquiries@appleorchard.org.uk">enquiries@appleorchard.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 November to 2 December 2022

## Information about this school

- Apple Orchard School is part of Polaris Community. The chief executive is the chair of the proprietor body. The headteacher took up his post in September 2024 since the last inspection.
- The school works with male pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs associated with harmful sexual behaviour. Additionally, many of the pupils also have SEND. The school benefits from an on-site therapy team whose therapists support pupils during the school day. All pupils on roll are looked-after children and are accommodated in children's homes which are owned by Polaris Community. Two of these homes are co-located on the school site. These homes are inspected separately.
- Some of the school's sixth-form students spend part of their time at a local registered college each week completing vocational studies.
- The school does not currently use any 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- 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 senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector spoke to the chair of the proprietor body and the chair of governors. Inspectors also met with groups of staff to explore their views about the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans for all subjects across the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and experiences at school. They observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes throughout the school day.
- The views of parents and carers were gathered through the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- The lead inspector toured the school site to gather evidence about compliance with the independent school standards. Inspectors also reviewed a range of other documents and policies, including on the school's website. They scrutinised school records, including attendance and behaviour records.

### **Inspection team**

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Vicky Matthews	Ofsted Inspector

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