

# Options Higford

Higford Hall, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

**Inspection dates**

12 July 2017

**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, 7(a) and 7(b)*

- Safeguarding is effective.
- The school has a thorough and comprehensive safeguarding policy which complies with the latest statutory guidance and is available on the school's website.
- The policy helps create a culture of safeguarding in the school. For example, teachers' planning, pupils' care plans and the plans for the new buildings conform to the policy's requirements. Leaders ensure that the specific safeguarding needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are managed through careful planning, information sharing and risk management.
- There is clear accountability for safeguarding in the school. The designated safeguarding lead has appropriate seniority. Her work is closely monitored by the proprietorial body. The proprietor supports the work of safeguarding by sharing practice across other schools in the Options schools group.
- Staff are regularly trained in all aspects of safeguarding as required by current government guidance in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2016), such as signs of abuse, female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and children missing from education. As a result, staff understand the school's expectations for keeping pupils safe and make sure that securing pupils' welfare is a priority.
- The school has a comprehensive single central record that links to the school's well-maintained records of staff recruitment and training. References are meticulously checked and pre-employment checks are completed in a timely fashion. All appointing staff have had safer recruitment training.
- Leaders have carefully considered the safeguarding implications of their material change plans. These include the safe recruitment, induction and management of new staff and securing the welfare of pupils in the new classrooms.
- The standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraph 11*

- Leaders have implemented an appropriate health and safety policy. Leaders keep the policy up to date and monitor and review the policy regularly in school and at the level of the proprietorial body.
- Education leaders work closely with all staff to ensure that health and safety are managed effectively. There is regular communication between staff with different health and safety roles. Health and safety matters are clearly reported to the proprietorial body and any resulting needs identified. The proprietorial body is responsive to leaders and places the highest priority on the health and safety of pupils and staff.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraph 12*

- Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service recently completed a full safety audit. The service found the school to be compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 Regulations. The school has addressed the minor issues raised as points of development by the service.
- The school has appropriate plans for fire escape and these are regularly monitored by staff, their leaders and the proprietor. Leaders ensure that emergency lighting and fire exits are well maintained.
- Leaders have sought and acted on building regulations with respect to fire safety in the new buildings. Leaders will wait for the appropriate authority to sign off the new rooms before they use them for educational purposes.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraph 14*

- Leaders make sure that pupils are appropriately supervised at all times of the school day.
- Staff display exceptionally high levels of care for pupils and for their colleagues in their planning and delivery of learning activities, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- The school ensures that all the rooms, corridors and external spaces are well supervised and maintained. Leaders plan that between one and two adults will be allocated to each new pupil as part of the planned material change. This allocation is entirely appropriate given the high levels of need presented by pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder conditions.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraphs 16, (16(a) and 16(b)*

- Leaders have implemented an appropriate risk assessment policy. Leaders have designed and implemented full, detailed, thorough and effective risk assessments. These clearly describe what actions to take, who is accountable, what steps are needed to lower risk and what should happen in emergencies.
- Careful risk assessments inform all aspects of the school's life, from learning on site to

out-of-school activities and excursions.

- Staff implement the policy with consistent rigour. For example, in the multi-sensory facility which the school calls 'The Barn', care is taken to plan for the risks associated with the furnishings, space and interactive equipment. Plans clearly describe how staff can keep risks as low as possible while not inhibiting the use of multi-sensory resources.
- Staff have developed full risk assessments for the new building site. Leaders have risk assessed the new shared spaces such as the horticulture and play areas. Leaders have given consideration to the high risks posed by pupils whose potential for challenging behaviour in a new environment is considerable.
- These standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

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

*Paragraphs 18(2)(a), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(2)(f), 18(3), 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(2)(e), 19(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a) and 21(7)(b)*

- The school's recruitment processes are robust, thorough and secure. Leaders follow all the safer recruitment guidance in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2016). For example, they only recruit staff who have been subject to rigorous pre-employment checking.
- The proprietor closely oversees staff to make sure that leaders conform to the highest standards of recruitment. Staff with different responsibilities work together to share appropriate information about recruitment and pre-employment checking.
- Leaders work with colleagues at Options Education to ensure accountability and accuracy of checking, recruitment and induction training.
- The school records pre-employment checks in an exemplary manner on the single central record. The single central record is comprehensive, clear and easily accessible to authorised staff.
- Staff follow up references scrupulously and maintain training records to ensure that staff are inducted thoroughly and in a timely manner. The induction programme is new to the school since the last inspection and offers a thorough, bespoke and corporate training programme to ensure safety.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

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

### *Paragraph 22*

- The school has clear, detailed and effective plans for the construction of two new buildings. Each of these facilities will have two rooms. In the first building, there is capacity for two adequate-sized classrooms. In the second building, the school plans to use one room as a computer room and one room as a music and family contact room. All these facilities will be ready to use in September 2017 if permission is granted. Each building will have adequate storage spaces.
- In addition, the school plans to re-equip the indoor gymnasium space, the multi-sensory room and the exterior horticulture area. This will make these spaces capable of offering a wider range of controlled sensory stimulation, fitness and relaxation therapy to pupils. The horticulture area will offer pupils opportunities to plant, grow and manage a range of vegetables and decorative plants. The plans are well considered for the special needs of the pupils who will use them. The risk assessments will feature in the detailed care plans for each prospective pupil.
- The planned new rooms are designed to offer purpose-built learning facilities for pupils, and their families. These classrooms will be used mainly for teaching and learning. The size and fittings of the rooms will enable the school to cope with the increase in numbers it proposes.
- Learning resources have been planned so that flexibility has been considered and core provision planned. For example, the new classrooms have the capacity for interactive media, furnishings that allow pupils to learn about touch, and furniture arrangements that allow for safe space management.
- The classrooms have been designed according to building specification, health and safety and fire regulations.
- The classrooms are very close to existing provision. This means that pupils can access the main school's rich variety of learning resources, medical facilities, toilet suites and dining facility. The new classrooms are close to easy access to emergency fire and medical services.
- Premises and accommodation are entirely suitable. Existing classroom and storage space offers a high standard of provision. Most classrooms are for the exclusive use of individual pupils and their teachers, which means that classrooms can be designed around the specific needs of the pupils who use them.
- Meticulous care has been taken to ensure that furniture, signage, corridor design, posters, resources and storage are appropriate to the very complex needs of the school's pupils.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraphs 23, 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b) and 23(1)(c)*

- There are extensive toilet and washing facilities throughout the school and in easy reach of the new buildings. In some areas of the school there are toilets accessible from every learning space. There are enough toilets for the expansion to 34 pupils.
- There are appropriate showers. The toilets are separately provided for boys and girls.
- These standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

*Paragraphs 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(1)(c), 24(2) and 24(3)*

- There are very high standards in the medical rooms. They are entirely suitable to the needs of pupils currently at the school and for the proposed expansion in numbers. There is detailed regulation of medical equipment and medication. Leaders ensure that the medical facilities are well managed, planned for and securely distributed.
- There are two fully trained school nurses employed by the school. They maintain the medical facilities. Their record keeping is exemplary.
- These standards are likely to be maintained if the material change is granted.

*Paragraph 25*

- The school is well maintained, tidy, secure and planned with exceptional care around the needs of staff and pupils. Most resources and rooms have been tailored to the specific needs of individuals.
- There are some highly innovative features. Features include: the multi-sensory room with interactive three-dimensional graphics for teaching literacy and numeracy; the flexible and personalised gym; and the water features around the site that allow pupils to safely experience and control the sight and pressure of water in varying volumes of fountains. These features will all be accessible after the proposed expansion.
- This standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

*Paragraph 26*

- Leaders have carefully provided for the specific acoustic learning needs of their pupils. For example, the school plans to provide minimal interruption to learning and maximise curiosity by making use of the sound of water, music and information technology systems. Thought has also been given to the management and organisation of furniture.
- The timber-frame construction of the new buildings is intended by leaders to baffle unnecessary sound and offer a regulated sound environment for pupils.
- The standard is likely to be met if the material change is granted.

*Paragraphs 27, 27(1), 27(a) and 27(b)*

- Specialist lighting has been used to lower and raise the lighting levels to keep pupils safe and manage their emotional responses to learning environments.
- The new classrooms have been designed by leaders to capitalise upon and regulate natural light. Exterior lighting has been planned by the school for the new buildings to provide safe entrance, exit and transit to the buildings area.
- These standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

*Paragraphs 28, 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a) and 28(2)(b)*

- Drinking water has been provided throughout the school and is clearly labelled and

separate from water sources for all other purposes. The new buildings have been planned by leaders to offer similarly accessible drinking water.

- These standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

*Paragraph 29, 29(1), 29(1)(a) and 29(1)(b)*

- The school maintains the grounds, pathways and transit roads to a high standard. There are clear warnings for those using transport to be aware of the needs of pupils.
- The horticulture areas planned by the school have been considered carefully by leaders. They are secured with fencing and are close to accessible first-aid, fire safety and emergency ambulance services.
- The new areas for play are planned for safe access to toilet and washing provision. Equipment is planned to meet regulatory safety standards.
- These standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

Part 6. Provision of information

*Paragraph 32(1)(c)*

- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. Therefore, this standard is likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)*

- Leaders have taken effective action to plan for the new buildings and expansion in numbers. Throughout their plans, leaders have been thorough in taking account of the special educational needs and/or disabilities of the additional pupils. Leaders plan for a slow, incremental growth in numbers. Next academic year, for example, they do not want to admit more than two additional pupils. They do not anticipate 34 pupils being admitted until approximately 2020.
- Plans for the new classrooms are entirely in keeping with the rest of the school. Leaders have provided meticulously planned provision in the school for existing pupils. Previous inspection reports have been very positive. Overall effectiveness was good in June 2015. Personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged to be outstanding.
- The school has exemplary procedures for risk management and safeguarding, illustrating the way it actively promotes the well-being of pupils.
- The proprietor has devised a clear business plan for the expansion in numbers and facilities. The funding has been secured by investment from the Options Group. New staff have already been appointed so they can be effectively trained in advance of any increase in numbers.

- The school's planning and self-evaluation are highly effective. They are detailed, thorough and relate specifically to the plans for the new development. Teachers, support staff and administrative staff are well supported to be rigorous and creative. Staff are well trained to meet the needs of the current cohort of pupils and those the school plans to admit.
- Therefore, these standards are likely to be met if the material change is granted.

## **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	135445
DfE registration number	893/6106
Inspection number	10039336

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 likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Special
School status	Independent residential special school
Proprietor	The Options Group
Chair	Graham Baker
Headteacher	Ms Anne Adams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£75,000
Telephone number	01952 630600
Website	<a href="http://www.optionsautism.co.uk/school_home/options-higford">www.optionsautism.co.uk/school_home/options-higford</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:higford@optionsautism.co.uk">higford@optionsautism.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	24–26 June 2015

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	8–19	8–19	8–19
Number of pupils on the school roll	25	34	34

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	25	34
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities	25	34
Of which, number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	24	34
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	24	34

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	36	46
Number of part-time teaching staff	2	2
Number of staff in the welfare provision	2	2

## **Information about this school**

- Options Higford is part of the Options Group and provides education for boys and girls with autistic spectrum disorder conditions and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school is registered for up to 26 pupils. There are currently 25 on roll, of whom 20 are boys.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. All have been placed at the school by local authorities, and 11 pupils are children looked after by their respective local authority.
- The school first opened in 2008. Its last full inspection was in June 2015 and overall effectiveness was good.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- Since the last inspection, demand for places at the school has steadily grown, hence the request from the school to the Department for Education for additional capacity to admit up to 34 pupils.
- The school has already appointed a new full-time teacher to meet the needs of any additional pupils it is given approval to accept.

## Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector observed learning in key stages 2, 3, 4 and 5.
- Evidence of pupils' learning was reviewed in the presence of the headteacher.
- The lead inspector held a range of meetings with the headteacher and with the Options Group head of residential schools, representing the proprietorial body.
- He also met with pupils and discussed their learning with them.
- The single central record was reviewed. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and scrutinised a range of records of recruitment, welfare plans and actions taken to keep pupils safe.
- The lead inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and development planning, policies and documents published on the website.
- There was a visit to the new-build site, and meetings with the project manager, the headteacher and the proprietorial representative.
- The lead inspector reviewed planning, risk assessments, fire safety records and health and safety documentation for the existing and new sites.

## Inspection team

Graham Tyrer, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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