

Options Higford

Higford Hall, Higford, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

Inspection dates

6 October 2021

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a–b) and 32(1)(c) (Part 6 – provision of information)

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned this inspection because of potential concerns raised about the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- The school has a suitable safeguarding policy, which takes account of the most recent guidance issued by the government. It is published on the school's website. Leaders ensure that staff receive annual training in safeguarding matters, as well as regular updates on different aspects of safeguarding. Staff are aware of the potential risks that pupils face because of their vulnerabilities. As one member of staff explained, 'We have to be their voice.'
- Staff are clear about how to report any safeguarding concerns, and to whom. Concerns are stored securely. Leaders take swift action to follow up any concerns, including liaison with area safeguarding officers, where appropriate.
- Leaders keep detailed records of all aspects of staff training, including first aid, safeguarding and physical intervention training. Any staff who have missed training due to absence, or who require refresher training, have to attend additional sessions.
- Staff and clinical staff at the provision work collaboratively to develop detailed behaviour support plans for pupils. Plans identify potential risks for pupils and detail the strategies to be used to reduce these risks. Physical interventions are only used as a last resort. When they are used, they are recorded in detail. Leaders and staff take the opportunity to reflect on these incidents to inform and improve future practice.
- Pupils with the most complex needs have personalised communication systems to enable them to express their needs and feelings. As a result, pupils can regulate their behaviour more effectively and keep safe.
- These standards are met.

Paragraphs 11 and 13

- Leaders have suitable first aid and health and safety policies. Most staff are trained to administer first aid. Leaders keep suitable records of any actions taken should first aid be required for a pupil.
- Controlled medication is stored securely. Protocols and permissions for the administration of medication are up to date. They are reviewed whenever there is a change to pupils' medication. The inspector found an administrative error relating to the duplicate recording of medication received from home, but this did not put pupils at risk of harm.
- These standards are met.

Paragraph 14

- Pupils are very well supervised at the school. Pupils are accompanied at a safe distance by staff as they move around school from one activity to another. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are clear to see. Staff to pupil ratios are adjusted according to the type of activity pupils are undertaking. For example, when pupils are using the play equipment in the expansive grounds at the front of the school, additional staff are allocated to supervise and keep pupils safe.
- This standard is met.

Paragraphs 16, 16(a–b)

- Leaders have a suitable risk assessment policy and carry out appropriate risk assessments. Pupils' individual risk assessments are detailed and highly personalised. Where relevant, they include how pupils' emergency medication is stored and accessed.
- The proprietor body is in the process of making changes to the fencing around the school building as they know that some pupils have tried to scale the fence. Leaders plan to replace key external sections with more suitable fencing. The proprietor has also planned for the removal of some sections of fencing, which will enable pupils to move more freely around the school site.
- On occasion, leaders have been slow to formally review risk assessments following an incident. While it is clear that staff are adapting their day-to-day practice to reduce risks, risk assessment documents have not been updated in a timely way. While pupils are not at significant risk of harm, some potential risks could remain for pupils.
- These standards are not met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 24, 24(1)(a–c), 24(2)

- At the time of the inspection, the school was undergoing some building and decorating work. This work has had an impact on the provision of the medical accommodation. The allocated room is not suitable as it is being used to store equipment. It is also being used as an office base. There is no suitable bed available in the room for pupils to rest on, should they become unwell. Leaders told the inspector that they are planning to make changes to the room, which is not easy to access.

- These standards are not met.

Paragraph 25

- Leaders have ensured that the school premises are maintained to a good standard to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. Classroom areas are clean and well lit, with appropriate displays of teaching materials and celebrations of pupils' work. At the time of the inspection, a few classes were being redecorated. While classrooms are accessed via a key fob, pupils can exit classrooms freely should they wish. Some individual areas have limited displays, but this is purposeful. Some pupils require a low-arousal approach, identified through clinical assessments and subsequent sensory diets.

- This standard is met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34, 34(1)(a–b)

- The standards in this part were not in the original scope of this inspection. However, the proprietor body and leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are consistently and continually met.
- The proprietor body has systems in place to ensure suitable oversight of the school, including audits of safeguarding, the use of physical interventions and the quality of education. Despite this, conclusions from these audits and visits do not filter through quickly enough to school leaders, nor are they followed up sufficiently well. For example, a safeguarding audit took place a month ago, but leaders have not received any follow-up report or guidance yet. Minutes of governors' meetings do not show how the proprietor is challenging leaders or holding them to account for actions taken.

- These standards are not met.

Paragraph 34 (1)(c)

- The proprietor body has invested in well-trained staff at the school, as they want to ensure that pupils get the right support for their education and well-being. Leaders ensure that staff use personalised strategies to support pupils. These approaches are informed by information gathered from clinicians, parents and carers.

- This standard is met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	135445
DfE registration number	893/6106
Inspection number	10209318

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	P. Bloom Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Richard Winzor
Annual fees (day pupils)	£96,800 to £112,495
Telephone number	01952 630600
Website	www.optionsautism.co.uk/education-3/
Email address	higford@optionsautism.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26–28 June 2018

Information about this school

- Options Higford is an independent special school that caters for pupils with complex needs, including autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is situated on a 28-acre site in a rural part of Shropshire.

- The proprietor is listed on the DfE's 'Get Information about Schools' website as Outcomes First Group. P. Bloom Ltd is a subsidiary company of the Outcomes First Group.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils are placed at the school by several different local authorities.
- The school was previously inspected in June 2018 when it was judged to be good overall.
- A small number of pupils are being taught at another registered independent school on a temporary basis. They are supported there by staff from Options Higford.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE because of potential concerns raised relating to the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils. The school was given 20 minutes' notice of the inspection, so that practical arrangements relating to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic could be discussed.
- The inspection reviewed: how well pupils are kept safe; how well first aid and health and safety policies are implemented; how pupils are supervised; assessment of risks; the management of medication and medical accommodation; suitability of the building; and staff training.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. She conducted a tour of the school premises and outdoor area, accompanied by the head of service. She had a telephone conversation with the chair of the proprietor body. She met with three members of staff.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation to check compliance with the independent school standards, including safeguarding and associated policies; records of referrals; behaviour, physical intervention, accident and first aid records; medication records; the school's single central record; pupils' individual behaviour support plans; risk assessments; and governor documentation.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View.
- The inspector spoke to a small number of pupils informally. She did not speak with parents and carers.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including–
 - 24(1)(a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility; and
 - 24(1)(c) where a school caters for pupils with complex needs, additional medical accommodation which caters for those needs.
- 24(2) The accommodation provided under sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purposes set out in sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b).

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)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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