

Options Higford

Higford Hall, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

Inspection dates

26–28 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. They have created a safe school where pupils' well-being is at the heart of everything that staff do.
- From a wide range of starting points, pupils develop their personal and social skills exceptionally well. As a result of high-quality clinical planning, pupils develop trusting relationships with staff.
- Leaders ensure that teaching is in tune with pupils' needs. It is very flexible and personalised because teachers know pupils well and leaders plan a unique curriculum for each child. As a result, pupils' progress is good.
- The school's work has a positive impact on pupils' home lives and prepares them well for life after school.
- Not all adults model phonics properly. As a result, some opportunities for literacy learning are missed.
- A new recording system for restrictive physical restraint does not capture all of the information that leaders need to monitor fully this aspect of the school's work.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and their attendance is above the national average.
- Leaders need to develop some aspects of their monitoring such as maintenance and the development of new staff.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of leadership and management on the quality of provision by:
 - ensuring that staff have the training they need so that they are able to model phonics sounds consistently
 - evaluating the impact of the newly appointed literacy leader
 - developing the expertise of new staff more swiftly so that the high quality of teaching is not interrupted
 - improving leaders' tracking of the completion of essential maintenance so that they have a clearer overview.
- Improve the recording of restrictive physical intervention. Do this by:
 - capturing pupils' views when they are restrained
 - more consistently recording managers' monitoring of restrictive physical restraint.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have a deep understanding of learning in this specialised context. They have created a school where staff show genuine care for pupils' wide-ranging needs. As a result, pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are particularly strong, teaching is effective and outcomes are good. Leaders have made sure that all of the independent school standards are met.
- In observations of learning, leaders identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses accurately. They give staff clear and pertinent areas for development. Across the school there are numerous examples of the ways in which leaders develop their staff. Staff talk proudly of the opportunities they have been given to progress from teaching assistant to tutor, and tutor to teacher. Through this scheme of professional development, leaders have developed a supply of experienced and capable practitioners.
- Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel that their training is helpful in enabling them to manage the complex and challenging needs of the pupils in their care. They say that leaders understand their jobs well and that there is an atmosphere of mutual support. One commented: 'Leaders are "hands-on" and wouldn't expect anyone to do a job that they wouldn't do.' Another said: 'The support I have had to develop me in my role has been excellent. Training is really comprehensive.'
- The systems for reviewing pupils' progress are effective. This is because leaders review education, health and care plans in a timely manner and link these to individual education plans which are thorough and detailed. They then plan the curriculum using these documents.
- Leaders work collaboratively with teachers to plan each pupil's bespoke curriculum. They ensure that the curriculum truly meets pupils' requirements and promotes fundamental British values in ways which are relevant to pupils' stage of understanding and needs. They use assemblies to capture pupils' views and preferences, and to involve them in school decision-making. They take opportunities in interactions between pupils to reiterate tolerance and respect. Where pupils have the level of understanding needed, teachers explore these values in more detail.
- Reports for parents are easy to understand. The reports provide parents with clear information about the curriculum that their child is undertaking, the assessments that have taken place and the next steps for learning.
- Parents are very positive about the school's work. They feel that the school meets their children's needs well and has a major impact on their and their families' lives. The comment 'I can't thank the staff enough working with my son through the challenging times in class. When he is having a bad day all the staff stay focused on him and listen to his needs,' is representative of many parents' views.
- Leaders have designed a new system to record events of restrictive physical intervention. While this does give leaders important information about patterns of physical intervention, leaders miss the opportunity to record, and so evaluate, pupils' views and feelings. Additionally, some records lack the sign-off of a manager. As a result of this, leaders cannot always see how managers have supported staff to use physical intervention safely and as a very last resort.

- While the site is safe and generally well maintained, leaders do not have robust systems to check when essential maintenance has been completed in a timely way. They do not track this as well as they need to. They acknowledge that this needs some development.

Governance

- The work of the school is overseen by a school scrutiny board. This board is made up of senior leaders from the school, a managing director of the company and members who work in other parts of the company. This board meets regularly to formally review the school's strategic planning and the quality of provision.
- The board effectively holds school leaders to account. Members understand the school's strengths and areas for development. They also oversee safeguarding to make sure that all policies and procedures are fit for purpose.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective.
- All staff understand the particular vulnerabilities of pupils in the school. Staff are confident to challenge each other, raise issues with leaders and share information appropriately so that pupils' safeguarding is secure.
- Staff are well trained and receive regular updates to their training. As a result, their knowledge of safeguarding is excellent. They see themselves as advocates for pupils and regularly check on each other's work.
- Where staff raise concerns, leaders act on them quickly. They engage the services of other professionals when appropriate and keep meticulous records of their actions and reasons for their actions.
- The culture of care and safeguarding is evident across the whole school. All staff share a passion for pupils' well-being and display this in their interactions with pupils.
- Leaders have made sure that there is a safeguarding policy on their website. This policy follows all of the relevant government guidance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching in the outdoor classroom is inspirational and leads to very strong progress for pupils. Here, pupils are introduced to a highly challenging environment, physically and socially. As a result, they can try out their developing skills while staff support them expertly. Over time, pupils use the outdoor classroom for increasing lengths of time and teachers maintain consistency of classroom routines outdoors. Pupils who have one-to-one support for some time learn in groups and this contributes well to pupils' social progress. Sessions are purposeful, have a variety of interesting and challenging activities and prepare pupils well for life after school.
- The school's physical environment makes a positive impact on pupils' learning. In outdoor areas leaders have created an environment which allows pupils to take effectively managed risks. The environment is open has a small, low fence and pupils therefore need to take much more responsibility for themselves.

- In every classroom pupils have a range of activity areas with different levels of stimulation. Teachers use these areas appropriately to help pupils manage their behaviour. They balance the need for pupils to engage in calming, quiet activities with learning activities. As a result, pupils make good progress.
- Leaders' assessments of pupils' needs are detailed and accurate. Teachers keep assessments up to date as pupils make progress. Assessment files contain very useful information for teachers, including prompts to assist them in interpreting pupils' behaviour and communication.
- Teachers maintain momentum in pupils' learning and spot patterns of regression very quickly. They accurately assess pupils' abilities to make sure that they are undertaking appropriate curriculum and courses. Leaders have rightly identified that pupils who are currently in key stage 4 are very able. Teachers are challenging these pupils appropriately, developing their vocabulary and communication and teaching them very effectively. For example, they are taught in more social and collaborative classes.
- Teachers work flexibly to meet pupils' needs. They observe behavioural cues well. As a result, pupils benefit from a range of activities well matched to their developing needs.
- There are some occasions when new members of staff are not absolutely consistent with their approach to meeting pupils' needs. They miss opportunities to communicate and do too much for pupils. Though these occasions are rare, they stall pupils' progress.
- Leaders acknowledge that the quality of phonics teaching needs to improve. On occasion, staff do not model the correct letter sounds to support pupils' progress. Leaders already have an action plan for this, have arranged extra training for staff and appointed a new literacy lead. The impact of this has yet to be seen.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Many pupils have made vast strides in their personal development since coming to the school. Many are enjoying new experiences and friendships because they can now be taught with other pupils safely.
- Most pupils have developed wonderful relationships with staff. They value these relationships deeply and show real respect for staff. Many pupils are confident enough to have a sense of humour and can share a joke with staff who know them well.
- Staff are exceptionally caring and responsive to pupils' needs. When pupils are in a challenging situation, staff know pupils so well that they know just what support to give to maintain their welfare.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Their much-improved attendance and behaviour when they join the school demonstrate their increasing feelings of security and positive emotional health. Many pupils express pride in their achievements and share photos of these achievements with visitors.
- Leaders take a highly personalised approach to pupils' next steps. Where they are able,

pupils go out of school on increasingly challenging visits to a range of locations in the community. When appropriate they undertake work placements and are involved in school leadership activities to prepare themselves for life after school.

- Pupils are allowed to make choices whenever this is possible. Teachers use a range of communication tools for pupils to do this in personalised ways. As a result of this, pupils become more communicative and therefore their personal development is enhanced over time.
- To help develop pupils' social interaction and tolerance of stimulation, they have multiple sittings for meals in the 'bistro'. This means that pupils can choose when to eat, either with their peers, their teachers or alone. They can also make their choice of food known in different ways as menu choices are in writing, picture form and on an electronic speaking device. Pupils enjoy making their own choices and communicating them with staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour improves rapidly following leaders' initial needs assessments and meeting of their social and emotional needs.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and pupils respond positively to this. Teachers' work to help pupils to maintain their excellent behaviour is highly effective. For example, they make time for regular, spontaneous exercise and understand pupils when they are feeling anxious. As a result, over time, there is a decrease in pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, causing challenging behaviour.
- There are very few incidents of poor behaviour. There have been no recent exclusions and almost all pupils who have started a placement in the school since the last inspection have stayed until their planned leaving date.
- Pupils' attendance is very high, and above the national average. This is particularly impressive given that most pupils had very weak attendance before coming to Options Higford.
- Pupils who can do so wear their uniform smartly. They treat materials and resources respectfully and respond to staff requests readily. They help to tidy classroom resources away and use excellent manners when they speak to staff and each other.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' outcomes are wide in range as a result of their very different starting points.
- Pupils' assessment files show the wide range of skills that they are learning. For example, older pupils make good progress in being able to make phone calls confidently, use kitchen equipment safely, prepare food and maintain a healthy home environment. This prepares them well for life after school. Younger pupils' ability to understand number is developing well, as are their literacy skills.
- Pupils gain accreditations at the appropriate level, given their starting points. Some key stage 4 pupils have already gained their entry level 1 certificates and are moving onto the next level of certificate. They are making good progress towards these more challenging awards.

- Pupils are making excellent progress in their ability to focus on activities for longer periods of time. As a result of this improved focus, their progress since joining the school is improving. For example, some pupils have learned to follow step-by-step instructions to make food. Many younger pupils can now sequence events, recognise key staff and identify colours, numbers and letters.
- Pupils across the school make good progress in their communication and interaction, some making excellent progress in this area. Over time, pupils use signing, gesture and verbal communication increasingly to tell teachers how they feel, their choices and needs.
- Pupils make good progress in their physical skills. Just under half of pupils make excellent progress in this area. They improve their fine motor skills and as a result teachers planning a range of activities throughout the school day such as holding pencils, brushes, finger-trace shapes and household items. Pupils who, in the past, could not write easily, develop these skills well over time.
- Teachers prepare older students well for their next steps in their education or training when they leave the school. Knowing that pupils are unlikely to have the same levels of support when they leave the school, they design bespoke courses to prepare them for gaining more independence. Throughout this transition planning, pupils' views are considered in detail so that the support matches their needs and increases their confidence. Pupils' destinations reflect their different needs. Some go on to adult care placements. All pupils who are able to, go on to other education and care providers.

School details

Unique reference number	135445
DfE registration number	893/6106
Inspection number	10047133

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	Other independent special school
School category	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	28
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Graham Baker
Chair	Jane Worsley
Headteacher	Anne Adams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£78,000
Telephone number	01952 630600
Website	www.optionsautism.co.uk
Email address	higford@optionsautism.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–26 June 2016

Information about this school

- Options Higford is a part of the Options Group, which provides specialist services for young people and adults with autistic spectrum conditions and social, mental and emotional health difficulties.
- All pupils on roll have an education, health and care plan and have been placed by their local authority. Some pupils are children looked after. The school is registered for up to 34 pupils.

- The last full inspection for this school was 24–26 June 2015, when it was judged to be 'good'. It was inspected for a material change to include new buildings in June 2017.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, senior teacher and support staff. He visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' work over time and evaluated the school's assessment information. He also spoke with pupils about their experiences and observed their interactions during social time.
- The inspector considered views of staff through 20 responses to a staff questionnaire and meetings with a cross-section of staff. He also held informal conversations with staff during the inspection.
- There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for the inspector to evaluate these. The inspector considered parents' responses to a recent external review of the school's services.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including curriculum plans, assessment information, vetting checks on staff, health and safety information, fire risk assessments and leaders' self-evaluation.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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