

Inspection of Options Higford

Higford Hall, Higford, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 July 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

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?

Pupils, including those in the sixth form, are happy and safe at this school. Teachers and learning support assistants surround them with care and kindness. As a result, they have learned what it means to be kind to one another. Staff deal with incidents of bullying quickly and effectively.

Many pupils have struggled in other schools. Some have missed large chunks of education completely. Every child is an individual here and so is the support they receive. Leaders make sure that they quickly identify pupils' needs. This means that pupils settle quickly, make progress and thrive.

All staff strive to support pupils to behave as well as they can. Pupils enjoy earning rewards through the stars system. They know that their efforts will be celebrated, and they respond very positively to praise. As a result, pupils work hard in lessons and enjoy their learning.

Personal development is central to the school's work. Every pupil has an ambitious target to help them work towards achieving independence. The Learning for Life curriculum is woven through everything pupils do. This means pupils have many varied opportunities to develop skills for independence.

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

Leaders have provided a broad and rich curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils. Through the choices they have made and the resources they provide, leaders and staff deliver a clear focus on the learning that will help pupils most. Leaders want every pupil to learn to read and to be able to use and apply mathematics in their daily lives. They are determined that pupils will develop the skills they will need to achieve a happy and productive life outside school.

All aspects of the school's curriculum are carefully planned and sequenced. The curriculum helps pupils to understand that they have choices, which encourages their level of independence. This helps pupils to start taking greater control over their own lives.

Teachers and learning support assistants work together effectively in order to help pupils do the best that they can. They create learning environments that have specialist resources which motivate pupils and help them to make progress. Staff know each pupil exceptionally well. This means that learning is presented in different ways for different pupils, according to their needs.

Teachers have good subject knowledge in most areas of the curriculum. However, where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, pupils do not make the progress they could.

Reading is taught throughout the school, including in the sixth form. A few pupils are at a pre-phonics stage. Teachers support pupils to access the phonics programme. The majority do so effectively. Pupils enjoy learning to read and being read to. Reading champions make sure that progress is recognised, recorded and celebrated. Pupils have many opportunities to access a range of stories, poems and non-fiction texts. Pupils enjoy going to the library to choose their own books.

Teachers use assessment effectively in order to make sure that pupils are consistently working towards their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets as well targets for academic learning and independence. Staff keep a daily log of everything that pupils achieve. As a result, even the smallest steps of progress are measured and monitored.

Every pupil has a personal behaviour support plan. These are based on a wide range of information, assessments and observations. Strategies to help manage pupils' unacceptable behaviours and the triggers that cause them are carefully identified. Leaders are clear that, over time, pupils should be helped to use the strategies themselves. However, this is not yet happening often enough for those pupils who could take this step. This means that they remain overly reliant on adults to regulate their behaviour.

Preparation for the next stage of pupils' lives is carefully planned. Leaders have made sure that pupils can take part in enterprise projects, community activities and visits to colleges and workplaces. For instance, sixth-form pupils run the school's snack shack. They are involved in ordering stock, preparing and serving food, and taking payment. Most pupils go on to specialist colleges.

Leaders provide a wide range of training for all staff, which staff value. Leaders are keen to develop staff from within. As a result, many have taken further training and qualifications. Staff enjoy working at the school because they feel valued and supported. This is reflected in the happy and positive ethos noted by inspectors. Staff say leaders are always available, and that their well-being and workload are always considered.

Parents spoke about the school as a 'lifeline'. They described years of struggling to find suitable education for their children and the relief when they found Options Higford. One parent said, 'They don't find problems; they find solutions.'

The proprietor makes sure that the school consistently meets the independent school standards. Regular and detailed headteacher reports ensure that the focus on pupils' safety and outcomes is always at the fore. School leaders are effectively held to account through well-established systems and processes. Equally, they have access to support when required.

There is a strong focus on safeguarding. The policy takes account of the latest government guidance and is published on the website.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. An accessibility plan is in place which considers how improvements can be made for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is central to the school's work. Leaders leave no stone unturned to keep pupils safe. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe both physically and when working online. Staff are well-trained. They refer all safeguarding concerns, no matter how small, and know that leaders will follow them up. Leaders work effectively with other agencies across a wide area to make sure that pupils and their families get early help when they need it. Appropriate checks are completed for all staff before they start working at the school. Safe recruitment is embedded at school and company level.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Not all teachers have the appropriate subject knowledge across all the curriculum areas they teach. This means that pupils do not always make the progress they could. Leaders should ensure that relevant support and training are put in place to further develop teachers' subject knowledge in all subjects.
- Adults do not always give pupils opportunities to make choices about their behaviour, where they are able to do so. Leaders should consider how and when pupils can be offered these opportunities safely and appropriately so that they can begin to self-regulate their behaviour.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135445 |
| DfE registration number | 893/6106 |
| Local authority | Shropshire |
| Inspection number | 10220401 |
| 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 | 26 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 2 |
| Proprietor | Richard Power |
| Chair | Chris Groome |
| Headteacher | Richard Winzor |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £86,200 to £115,000 |
| Telephone number | 01952 630600 |
| Website | www.optionsgroup.co.uk |
| Email address | higford@optionsautism.co.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 26 to 28 June 2018 |

Information about this school

- The school is registered to provide full-time education for boys and girls aged 8 to 19.
- The school is in Higford, near Shifnal in Shropshire. It was registered as an independent school in November 2007 and is housed in a range of refurbished and purpose-built premises within 28 acres of grounds.
- The school's last standard inspection was in June 2018 when it was judged to be good overall. In October 2021, the school received an unannounced emergency inspection. At this time, the school did not meet all the independent school standards that were checked.
- Options Higford is an independent special school within the Outcomes First Group. The school provides education for pupils who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. All pupils have an EHC plan. Many have attended several schools, and some have missed a significant proportion of their education.
- The school does not 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.

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and the safeguarding lead. The lead inspector also spoke with those responsible for governance, including the proprietor and two parent governors.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in reading, mathematics, physical education and Learning for Life, the school's programme which encompasses, personal, social and health education, relationships and sexual health education, careers education and life skills. Each deep dive included discussions with curriculum leaders, visits to lessons and discussions with teachers. A scrutiny of pupils' work was carried out through a review of the electronic recording system used by the school. Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their learning and, more generally, about their experiences in school.
- Inspectors met with staff to discuss the support they receive to develop their skills and knowledge and to manage their workload.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to curriculum and assessment. Inspectors also looked at school policies, minutes of governance meetings, development planning and self-assessment.
- The lead inspector scrutinised safeguarding documents, reviewed the school's processes for reporting concerns, checked recruitment procedures and checked complaints records.
- Inspectors checked all the independent school standards, including those relating to the school premises.
- The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

During the inspection, we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous unannounced inspection on 6 October 2021.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school now meets the previously failed standards.**

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we 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.

- During the inspection, school leaders asked to increase the material change request from three additional pupils to 11 additional pupils. The school was able to demonstrate that work already completed will provide well-equipped and extensive further accommodation. The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**

Inspection team

Mel Ford, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jane Edgerton

Ofsted Inspector

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