

Options Higford

Higford Hall, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

Inspection date

21 June 2023

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school are implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i), 2A(1), 2A(1)(a), 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d), 2A(1)(e), 2A(1)(f), 2A(1)(g), 2A(2), 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i), 3(j) and 4

- Leaders intend to extend the age range of the school from eight to 19 to five to 19. They have designed a new and appropriate curriculum policy that they plan to implement from September 2023. This policy will mean that pupils follow one of two pathways, depending on their starting points.
- For those pupils who follow the 'engagement pathway', leaders plan to focus on ensuring pupils are ready to learn and that activities have a practical, hands-on approach. For other pupils who will follow the 'application pathway' leaders plan to offer lessons that have a subject-specific focus.
- Leaders intend to adopt a curriculum modelled on the early years foundation curriculum as part of their offer for pupils in key stage 1. This is because many pupils arrive at the school working below their chronological age. The school already employs staff who have experience teaching pupils in the early years, and there are appropriate topic plans in place to support with the delivery of the curriculum.
- Leaders are acutely aware of the importance of each pupil's education, health and care plan (EHC plan). They use this information to develop an individual education plan with specific academic and pastoral targets. Teachers use these targets to help devise a bespoke curriculum that informs their teaching. Targets are regularly reviewed so that they accurately meet the needs of each pupil. Leaders intend to continue with this approach with the addition of younger pupils.
- Leaders already have in place appropriate ways to assess pupils' progress. They intend to use a suitable system to measure pupils' engagement as well as check pupils' progress in phonics.
- The proprietor has ensured that these independent school standards (the standards) are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(v), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5(d)(ii) and 5(d)(iii)

- The school has an established 'learning for life' programme in place to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As part of this curriculum, pupils learn about fundamental British values, respecting others and understanding relationships. Leaders plan that younger pupils will also follow a similar 'learning for life' programme.
- Leaders are aware that because pupils on the school roll are diagnosed with autism, they sometimes struggle to understand social norms and what constitutes appropriate behaviour. The curriculum aims to cover aspects of right and wrong, as well as what are acceptable public and private behaviours.
- The school's 'learning for life' curriculum also explores different cultures and traditions. Different religious celebrations are covered throughout the academic year, as well as events that recognise and celebrate diversity.
- Leaders intend to ensure that younger pupils can extend their learning beyond the classroom with trips to a local park, library and post office. It is also planned that pupils will have the opportunity to go on various modes of public transport.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 11, 12, 14, 16, 16(a) and 16(b)

- A copy of the school's safeguarding policy is available on the school's website and is compliant with the latest government guidance. The headteacher is the school's designated safeguarding lead and has had appropriate training for this role.
- There are clear systems and processes in place to ensure that pupils are safeguarded while attending the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate annual safeguarding training, as well as updates throughout the academic year. Leaders ensure that all concerns are dealt with swiftly so that pupils get the help and support they need in a timely way. It is intended that younger pupils will learn to keep themselves safe through the 'learning for life' curriculum, which includes online safety.
- Leaders have put in place an appropriate health and safety policy which is reviewed annually.
- All pupils have their own individual risk assessment. This is planned to continue for younger pupils who are proposed to join the school. Risk assessments include potential triggers for misbehaviour and appropriate control measures. Leaders ensure that all external visits have suitable risk assessments in place before pupils leave the school site.
- Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that the school is compliant with the Regulatory Reform (fire safety) Order 2005. This includes for the new log cabins the school intends to use for younger pupils. Weekly checks take place on the school fire alarm system and rooms have appropriate fire extinguishers, emergency lighting and

fire doors throughout each building. Leaders have also conducted a fire risk assessment.

- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

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

Paragraphs 18(1), 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 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(3), 19(1), 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)(i)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 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(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(c) and 21(6)

- Leaders have undertaken appropriate safer recruitment training.
- Leaders ensure that all appropriate checks are carried out on staff before they begin working at the school. All staff have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check. Further checks are made through the interview and application process to check whether there are any gaps in employment and whether there are periods where the interviewee has worked abroad.
- The school's electronic single central record contains all relevant information in line with government guidance. Staff personnel files are kept securely online and contain all relevant documentation.
- Leaders are aware of the information they need to gather about supply staff, including written confirmation from the agency, before they begin working at the school.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b), 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a), 28(2)(b), 29(1), 29(1)(a) and 29(1)(b)

- The school premises is set in 28 acres of land spanning eight buildings. The former care home which used to be on the school site has been converted into additional classrooms and communal areas. The premises are suitable to accommodate the proposed increase in number of pupils.
- Leaders have invested in two log cabins that will be used as classrooms for younger pupils. These rooms are well lit and are suitably equipped for the nature of the activities leaders have planned.
- In a separate area next to each classroom is a 'calming space' that can be used if pupils require some time outside of their main lesson. These rooms are appropriately resourced with tables, chairs and books.
- To the side of the log cabins is an enclosed outdoor space for pupils to play. This currently includes a small-squared planting area and wooden seating.

- Around each log cabin there is suitable outdoor lighting.
- Pupils will be able to use the two toilets that are connected to the school's sensory hub. Both toilets have appropriate hot and cold running water.
- The sensory hub has been reconfigured to allow for group activities, assemblies and performances. This building also includes a large sensory room, a gym and a soft-play room. The premises are suitable to accommodate the younger pupils the school proposes to admit.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor carries out his role effectively. He recognises that to increase numbers at the school and expand the age range of pupils, the school needs to be in a secure position with its current provision. Evidence gathered during this inspection would support this view and that the school is now ready to grow.
- Leaders say that there is a need to offer a provision for pupils from five years of age because of demand that is coming from local authorities in the area. They have put in place suitable curriculum plans and have sufficient space to accommodate these additional pupils.
- The proprietor has put in place effective channels of communication and lines of accountability. The regional director, alongside other members of the governing board, meets with the headteacher on a regular basis to review the independent school standards and other aspects of the school's work. This ensures that leaders are provided with effective support and challenge to help the school improve.
- Leaders take an active interest in the well-being of pupils. They are keen to ensure that, regardless of their additional needs, pupils are able to grow and develop while attending this school.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change application is approved.

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	10299612

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	Independent school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Richard Power
Headteacher	Richard Winzor
Annual fees (day pupils)	£80,000 to £125,000
Telephone number	01952630600
Website	www.optionsgroup.co.uk
Email address	higford@optionsautism.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 July 2022

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	8 to 19	5 to 19	5 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	42	60	60

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	36	51

Number of part-time pupils	None	None
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	42	60
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	42	60
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	42	60

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	7	9
Number of part-time teaching staff	3	3
Number of staff in the welfare provision	None	None

Information about this school

- The school is registered to provide full-time education for boys and girls aged eight 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 July 2022 when it was judged to be good overall.
- Options Higford is an independent special school within the Outcomes First Group. The school provides education for pupils who are diagnosed with autism. 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

- The material change inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to determine whether the school could expand their age range from eight to 19 down to five to 19. They also wished to increase capacity by an additional 15 pupils (from 45 to 60 in total).
- This is the school's second material change inspection since it opened.
- Several documents were submitted electronically and were reviewed remotely by the inspector prior to the inspection. The inspector also looked at the school's website. Several additional documents were scrutinised on site, including curriculum plans and risk assessments.
- The inspector spoke with the deputy headteacher and other staff about safeguarding arrangements. The school's single central record was checked, as well as a sample of personnel files. He also visited several lessons during the day to see how staff interacted with pupils.
- The inspector conducted a tour of the school site to look at the building and the proposed log cabins for younger pupils.
- The inspector met virtually with the school's proprietor and met the regional director in person. He also held several meetings with the deputy headteacher throughout the day.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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