

Options Higford

Higford Hall, Higford, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 9ET

Inspection date

3 July 2025

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

- The school proposes to increase the number of pupils on role from 60 to 80. The proprietor has considered the welfare and health and safety of pupils throughout this application.
- The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance. It is published on the school's website. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. The safeguarding team ensure that all staff are well trained to be alert to any signs that pupils may be at risk. Reporting and recording systems are established and used effectively. The school has a clear understanding of contextual safeguarding risks, including the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has established strong working relationships with the local authority children's services and safeguarding teams.
- The school's health and safety policy is comprehensive and regularly reviewed. Leaders and the proprietor carry out regular and detailed checks to ensure that the policy is being implemented effectively.
- The proprietor has ensured compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The fire evacuation plan has been updated to include the new buildings. This plan has taken account of the specific needs of the pupils. A fire safety logbook is in place detailing the testing, fire drills and equipment. A detailed site map shows the positions of fire exits and assembly points.
- The school intends for class sizes to continue to be five or below. The school has detailed plans to ensure that the level of staff to pupil supervision is high.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school identifies and takes action to mitigate against any risks. The school has carried out risk assessments for all new buildings and the new sports facilities. Leaders have thought about ways to reduce risks to pupils, for example continuing to have staggered lunchtimes and increasing the size of one of the school's 'bistro' dining areas.

- The school has considered potential risks that the proposed increase in pupil numbers may cause, for example the additional cars dropping off and collecting pupils. Leaders have put plans in place to ensure that this is managed effectively.
- It is likely that the independent school standards (the standards) checked in this part will be met if the proposed material change is approved for implementation.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(5) to 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(c) to 21(6)

- The school's single central record of pre-employment checks is compliant and records all the required background checks for adults responsible for and working at the school.
- The school makes the required checks prior to the employment of supply staff at the school. It also makes checks relating to section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to ensure that staff with leadership and management responsibilities, including members of the proprietor body, are suitable to manage a school.
- Leaders are aware of the procedures that they should follow in the event of employing supply staff to ensure that these staff are suitable to work with pupils.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change is approved and implemented.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The school has applied to increase its registered number on roll from 60 to 80. It has refurbished a building on site to accommodate three additional classrooms, each with an additional 'breakout' space. In the same building, there are also three additional toilets, a shower, a medical room and a sensory room. This building has been finished to a very high standard. Leaders have also refurbished an additional classroom in another building, that has its own pupil and staff toilets.
- The school's lunchtime facilities have been redeveloped. There are three 'bistros' for pupils to have their lunch. One has had an extension to accommodate 20 more pupils. Leaders plan that lunchtimes will continue to be staggered so that the number of pupils in the bistros at any one time are limited.
- Outside, the school has created an additional playground. This area has been 'soft tarmacked' to ensure that it is safe for the pupils.
- The school has also built a new gym area, showers, changing facilities and a new sports hall. The gym has a range of gym equipment for the use of pupils.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change is approved and implemented.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor and leaders demonstrate a secure knowledge of how to cater for the wide and varied needs of pupils with SEND. They have taken this into account when planning for this material change.
- Leaders have adapted the school site and educational provision successfully to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers. Leaders have demonstrated their commitment to maintaining the quality of education and provision for all pupils while increasing the number of pupils on roll.
- All leaders are vigilant in promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils and demonstrate a secure understanding of the independent school standards.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change is approved and implemented.

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	10390856

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	Other Independent Special School
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	P Bloom Ltd
Chair	Melanie Callaghan-Lewis
Headteacher	Samantha Denniss
Annual fees (day pupils)	£64,000 to £94,000
Telephone number	01952 630600
Website	www.optionsgroup.co.uk
Email address	higford@optionsautism.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	29 April to 1 May 2025

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	5 to 19	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	60	80	80

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	60	80
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	60	80
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	60	80
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	60	80

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	70	84
Number of part-time teaching staff	5	5
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this school

- 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 education, health and care plan. Many have attended several schools, and some have missed a significant proportion of their education.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for boys and girls aged 8 to 19. The school operates from one site at Higford Hall, Higford, Shifnal TF11 9ET.
- The school's last standard inspection was in April 2025 when it was judged to be good overall.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned this inspection to check the suitability of the school's premises for the material change and whether the school can accommodate an increase in pupil numbers. The proprietor body would like to increase the maximum permitted number of pupils on the school roll from 60 to 80 pupils.
- This was the first material change inspection that the school has applied for in respect of this proposed change.
- To check compliance with the independent school standards, the inspector had a tour of the school premises. The inspector also reviewed the school's fire safety arrangements and several related health and safety policies. The inspector also looked at the school's approaches to manage risk.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the school's single central record and met with the designated safeguarding lead. The inspector also spoke with a representative of the proprietor body.

Inspection team

Eve Morris, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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