

Inspection of The Shires at Oakham

3 Uppingham Road, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6JB

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff provide a warm welcome to pupils when they arrive at this school. Well-established routines help pupils feel safe. Relationships between pupils and staff are secure and trusting. Pupils appreciate that staff know them well and care about them. Staff are attentive to meeting pupils' needs. Their support ensures that pupils' attitudes to learning are mostly positive.

The school's atmosphere is calm and purposeful. Pupils make the most of the well-designed outdoor space. They cooperate well with others. Pupils know that their views matter. They say that bullying does not happen. They know that staff will listen to them if they have any worries. Parents and carers are positive about the school. Typically, one parent praised the 'support, understanding, compassion and encouragement' that staff provide.

Pupils enjoy activities such as visiting the local museum, shopping in the outdoor market and learning to swim. They know what they need to do to be successful. One pupil reflected the views of others by saying, 'I have never had such a good experience at school.'

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

Pupils are supported very well when they join the school. Leaders check pupils' communication and sensory needs carefully. Staff use this information to make sure that each pupil can access an ambitious curriculum. Teachers pay close attention to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans when designing the curriculum. They provide pupils with plenty of opportunities to meet their specific targets. Pupils settle quickly into school life and begin to flourish.

Staff are skilled at using different approaches to communicate with pupils. There is a structured approach to teaching phonics. Teachers frequently revisit the letters and sounds that pupils know. Pupils following the semi-formal curriculum pathway enjoy reading daily. They recall stories they have read by choosing appropriate words to describe the characters. However, reading is not prioritised across the school. Pupils following the formal curriculum pathway do not have consistent opportunities to read for enjoyment. Some of them lack confidence when reading and do not read as well as they should.

Each curriculum pathway is logical and well structured. In mathematics, teachers present new subject knowledge clearly and check pupils' understanding systematically. They help pupils remember new information. For example, pupils accurately identified the differences between median, mode and range using a rhyme. Staff make learning relevant to the real world, such as budgeting for food shopping. Pupils carry out mathematical operations with increasing accuracy and independence.

Pupils learn about important themes such as fair trade, the Second World War and the local environment. However, teachers are not always clear about what they want pupils to learn when studying these topics.

On the whole, pupils are well prepared for adulthood. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They learn about healthy relationships and how their bodies change as they get older. Pupils regularly engage with people who work in a wide range of occupations. They benefit from personalised careers advice and work-experience placements as part of their preparation for adulthood. There is a rich variety of extra-curricular activities for pupils to enjoy. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to learn about different faiths and cultures, and what it means to live in modern Britain.

Most pupils attend school well. Regular therapy sessions help them to understand their emotions and the triggers that make them unsettled. Staff encourage pupils to reflect when things go wrong so that they can make better decisions in the future. Pupils learn to manage their behaviour more effectively.

Staff are very positive about working at the school. Leaders support them to manage their workload and promote their well-being. Staff value opportunities to engage with training to develop their careers.

The proprietorial board is well informed about all aspects of the school. It carries out regular monitoring to ensure that the independent school standards are met securely. The board ensures that the school is suitably resourced. Routine health and safety checks help maintain the premises to a good standard. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have consulted with parents about the school's policy on relationships and sex education and health education. Other policies are up to date and reflect the latest statutory guidance. The safeguarding policy is available on the website. Some risk assessments do not pay close enough attention to the guidance in the policy.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable about safeguarding. They act quickly when a pupil is at risk of harm and take swift action. Leaders frequently liaise with external agencies to secure the right support for pupils. They ensure that appropriate recruitment checks are completed before adults begin to work at the school.

Staff are vigilant. They update their training regularly to stay well informed. Staff know the procedures they must follow to raise a safeguarding concern. They understand their responsibilities to report any adult who might put a pupil in danger of being harmed.

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

- Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum. They have not thought carefully enough about the knowledge they want pupils to learn in all aspects of their learning. Leaders should ensure that there is clarity about what pupils need to learn, including through enrichment activities. Leaders should provide pupils with the knowledge they need to achieve as highly as they can, so that they are well prepared for adulthood.
- Leaders have not promoted reading consistently well. Some pupils do not enjoy reading. Some cannot read with consistent accuracy or fluency. Leaders must provide pupils who follow the formal curriculum with the skills and knowledge they need to read different types of books confidently and independently.

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

Unique reference number	142635
DfE registration number	857/6006
Local authority	Rutland
Inspection number	10204899
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Charlotte Van Niekerk (Head of Service) Jamie Hill (Head of Education)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£76,500
Telephone number	01572 720357
Website	https://theshires.org.uk/shires-oakham/
Email address	info@theshires.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 March 2017

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and severe or moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is registered to provide education for up to eight pupils. Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Peterborough and Southampton local authorities currently have pupils placed at the school.
- Pupils who are above compulsory school age pursue a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, including preparing them for adulthood.
- The residential children's home that previously existed on the same site as the school closed at the end of January 2022. Most pupils live in accommodation that is provided by the proprietor, Acorn Care and Education Ltd, located off site.
- Since the previous inspection, the head of education, the chair of the proprietorial board and, most recently, the head of service have taken up their roles.
- The school uses the services of one unregistered alternative provider: Melton Learning Hub.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place on 21 to 23 March 2017.

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 had 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 head of service and the head of education.
- The lead inspector met with the safeguarding leader, who is also the head of education, to examine safeguarding records, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education, and the semi-formal curriculum pathway. They spoke to teachers, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors listened to some pupils read.

- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during social times and met with some pupils. Adults were present during most of these meetings so that they could support pupils and help them to communicate with inspectors.
- The lead inspector met with a group of support staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietorial board.
- The inspection team reviewed a range of documentation, including a variety of school policies, examples of pupils' support plans and EHC plans, and information about pupils' attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors took into account responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to the staff survey or the pupil questionnaire.
- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed facilities at the school site.

Inspection team

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Horrocks

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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