

Inspection of Yarrow Heights School

Cobden Avenue, Southampton SO18 1FS

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
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The quality of education	Outstanding
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Outstanding
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff have worked tirelessly to create a school which provides a first-class education for its pupils. The school's vision 'to nurture aspiration, develop resilience, and empower learning' guides every aspect of its work. Leaders and staff have exceptionally high expectations of pupils' achievement and behaviour. Pupils know this and respond very well. They develop a perceptive understanding of their own needs and are keenly aware of their own progress since joining the school.

Pupils make remarkable progress, both personally and academically. Several spoke to inspectors about how quickly the school has helped them to catch up with learning missed before joining the school. One proudly described learning to read for the first time. Pupils are keen to learn and behave very well. They respect adults and each other. Leaders take any concerns about bullying very seriously and act swiftly.

Pupils spoke to inspectors about many things they like about the school, including the way that staff help them with their mental health. One said, 'They take you seriously,' while another described the profound impact the school has had on her personal and academic progress. One pupil summed it up by saying, 'This is why this school is here.'

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

Leaders and staff have established a broad, balanced and well-sequenced curriculum which prepares pupils extremely well for the next stage of their education. It includes a wide range of GCSE options for the older pupils and is securely underpinned by the national curriculum. Parents are understandably pleased with the school's work. One said, 'The wonderful staff have the time, patience and knowledge to help my child to achieve their full potential.' Another said, 'This school is an SEN parent's dream...I will thank them forever for saving my child and for helping him to move forward.'

Pupils have often had extended periods of time outside the education system and have significant gaps in their learning as a result. The school sets out to support each pupil's specific needs while making up for lost learning. It does this very well. Teachers are experts in planning activities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which capture pupils' interest while building on previous learning. They use questioning skilfully during lessons to check pupils' confidence and understanding. The curriculum is supplemented with a range of highly effective therapies, such as speech and language therapy and mental health support.

Learning to read is given a high priority in the school's curriculum. Some pupils struggle with reading when they join the school. The school's well-established phonics programme supports these pupils very well. They make rapid progress and quickly grow in confidence.

Pupils behave very well, although sometimes their individual needs make it hard for them to behave as well as they should all the time. Adults respond with understanding and sensitivity while maintaining the school's high expectations of behaviour when this is the case. Strategies to support behaviour and engagement are used effectively and without fuss. Strong staff teamwork, and consistently clear communication, ensures that everyone is well informed about pupils' welfare.

Pupils work hard in lessons and present their work with care. They respect adults and each other and have a strong sense of right and wrong. One pupil commented, 'We're all different here and everyone is respected.' One parent said, 'My child is finally happy, fulfilled and able to learn...and is beginning to like who he is.' The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Pupils from Year 7 upwards benefit from high-quality careers guidance. The school actively challenges preconceived ideas about pupils' options in the next steps of education and employment. Pupils speak confidently about their aspirations.

The headteacher and her team provide exceptional leadership for the school. They have established a school which demands the best for its pupils. The proprietor body shares the headteacher's vision. Directors provide robust support and challenge for school leaders and ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Ensuring pupils' safety lies at the heart of the school's work. Staff have a confident and up-to-date understanding of safeguarding issues. They follow the school's procedures for reporting any concerns consistently. Leaders monitor records carefully and act swiftly to ensure pupils' safety wherever necessary. They work constructively with agencies and parents to ensure pupils' welfare. Regular staff briefings about topical issues, such as online safety and county lines, help to keep pupils' safety at the top of the agenda. Pupils are well supervised throughout the day. The school building and its grounds are safe and well maintained.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	148599
DfE registration number	852/6013
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10232329
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Yarrow Heights School Limited
Chair	Alfred Foglio
Headteacher	Karen Gaster
Annual fees (day pupils)	£71,000 to £84,000
Telephone number	023 8212 4590
Website	www.yarrowheights.com
Email address	reception@yarrowheights.com

Information about this school

- Yarrow Heights School is a special school for up to 60 pupils between the ages of seven and 16. Currently, the oldest year group in the school is Year 10. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, as well as other associated needs. Most pupils have autism spectrum disorder.
- Pupils have often spent considerable periods of time outside formal education prior to joining the school.
- Pupils are placed in the school by a number of local authorities, including Hampshire and Southampton.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school was registered by the Department for Education in June 2021. This is the school's first standard inspection.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included discussions with the headteacher, the chair of the board of directors, the head of education and other senior leaders. Inspectors also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's surveys and discussions. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, during breaktimes, in the dining hall and around the school. The lead inspector also met with a group of pupils to hear their views of the school.
- Inspectors considered the school's culture of safeguarding throughout the inspection. The lead inspector checked the single central record and talked with leaders responsible for safeguarding. She also considered a range of documentation associated with the independent school standards, including the school's safeguarding policies and records.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors also reviewed documentation relating to subjects such as art, history and the performing arts, as well as talking with leaders and looking at pupils' work in these subjects.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department of 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.

- 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.**
- The proprietor wishes to increase the maximum number of pupils on roll from 60 to 102. This was the school's first material change inspection.
- Leaders have made suitable arrangements for the proposed material change. They intend to admit new pupils at staged intervals, for example, to ensure a smooth transition into school. Leaders are currently in the process of recruiting two new teachers and have an ongoing recruitment schedule planned for the coming months.
- The proprietor has ensured suitable accommodation for the proposed increase in the number of pupils. The second storey of the school building has been refurbished to a high standard. The refurbished accommodation includes four spacious classrooms, including one with a well-equipped kitchen area, as well as additional learning spaces, office space and suitable toilet facilities. The classrooms are bright and furnished appropriately. Fire routes are clearly indicated throughout, and new fire extinguishers have been installed.
- The school's attractive and well-maintained outdoor areas provide ample space for pupils to relax and play. A substantial perimeter fence surrounds the school grounds. Existing arrangements for entering and exiting the school are safe, well established and suitable for the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
- The school is likely to continue to meet the needs of pupils with SEND if the proposed increase in the number on roll is approved. The school's highly effective curriculum provides a robust framework for teaching. Teachers are skilful in adapting the curriculum according to pupils' individual needs and responses. The curriculum is supplemented by a range of therapies.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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