

Inspection of The Tower School

33 High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BA

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 May 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils join The Tower School having previously had negative experiences of education. Leaders and staff show an unwavering commitment to understanding the individual needs of each pupil. Staff spark a passion for learning in pupils, who work incredibly hard. Pupils make remarkable progress both academically and socially and achieve the sky-high expectations the school sets.

Consistent and predictable routines help pupils quickly settle into the life of the school. Throughout the day, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupils value the friendships they make in school. Whether playing football on the games area or queuing for a mid-morning snack at the pupil-led tuck shop, pupils chat happily away to each other during social times.

There is a sharp focus on developing the important life skills pupils need when they leave school. Student councillors are confident and proud to represent their peers. The high-quality enrichment programme sparks pupils' talents and interests. Pupils rise to the challenge of performing musical instruments during school concerts or displaying their artwork in local galleries. The meticulous work of the school ignites in pupils an ambition for their future. All this work means pupils leave The Tower School thoroughly prepared for adulthood.

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

The school has sequenced the curriculum expertly to account for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum builds coherently so pupils have highly effective opportunities to acquire the building blocks of knowledge they need to be successful in their education. For example, pupils gain a thorough understanding of the important mathematical knowledge they need to help them solve more complex problems. Across the school, pupils achieve extremely well and secure deeply what they need for their future destinations, including furthering their studies at college.

The proprietor ensures that staff receive high-quality professional development. This begins with a thorough induction process from both the school and the wider organisation. Consequently, staff have exceptional subject knowledge and are experts at teaching pupils with autism. Of note is the way staff forensically check for gaps in pupils' knowledge. They use these checks to adapt their teaching to help pupils quickly close these gaps. This helps pupils secure the important knowledge they need for their future learning.

Staff are highly knowledgeable at how to weave specific targets contained in pupils' education, health and care plan (EHC plan) into the work they set pupils. Staff make careful adaptations to their teaching to support pupils to thrive. For example, the use of visual prompts helps pupils successfully communicate their wants and needs. Staff skilfully make sure that once pupils feel safe and confident, they engage with activities that stretch and challenge them. This helps pupils use their strong

knowledge to communicate in new and unfamiliar situations such as when shopping in the community.

The school has established a strong culture of reading. Pupils settle incredibly well first thing in the morning to their reading time. Whether choosing a book from their classroom or reading material online, pupils value this time. The school is resolute in its aim to introduce pupils to new and diverse authors and broaden pupils' reading diet. They are highly successful in this work. The school has a razor-sharp focus on ensuring pupils develop a broad and rich vocabulary. Staff check that pupils understand what they have read exceptionally well. This helps pupils when they encounter subject-specific language in other subjects. Should a pupil require help with their reading, expert staff are swift to provide the support these pupils need. As a result, pupils are fluent and confident readers.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum flows through all aspects of school life. Pupils understand important themes such as consent or what constitutes a healthy relationship. The PSHE curriculum also knits together incredibly well with pupils' individual targets from their EHC plans. Working adeptly alongside the clinical team, staff instil in pupils the confidence and assertiveness they need to become more independent.

Running alongside the PSHE curriculum is the rich and carefully crafted personal development offer. Older students take ownership for working with the school to identify ways to enhance the enrichment opportunities. This leads to constant improvements to the extensive offer. Students benefit greatly from the individualised careers advice the school provides. For example, thoughtful work experience with the in-house facilities team supports students in developing aspirations for their future. This builds carefully to bespoke and targeted external opportunities for students to learn in the community such as completing work experience in a local café.

The school has clear systems to help pupils improve their attendance. Staff work sensitively with pupils and their families to identify and break down the barriers pupils may have from attending school regularly. This helps pupils to improve their attendance over time. Equally, the school has robust systems to track and analyse information it receives about pupils' behaviour. This helps the school to tailor its approach and support those pupils who require extra help. As a result, behaviour across the school is exemplary. Pupils flourish in the calm learning environment that exists.

The school implements rigorous checks on education quality. These checks enable school leaders to provide the additional support and guidance staff need to thrive in their roles. This also supports staff to manage their own workload and well-being. Staff are immensely proud to be members of the school.

The governing body provides additional layers of expertise to scrutinise the work of the school further. It works well alongside the proprietor and external quality assurance checks to ensure there is clear oversight of the school's work. This helps

the school to meet the independent school standards securely and consistently. For example, a comprehensive maintenance programme ensures that the site is maintained impeccably. This, in turn, makes it conducive to learning. It also makes the school accessible for pupils with SEND. The school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	148422
DfE registration number	881/6078
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10374847
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Lauren Gibbs
Annual fees (day pupils)	£64,827 to £91,172
Telephone number	01992 926020
Website	www.thetowerschool.co.uk
Email address	office@thetowerschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 November 2022

Information about this school

- The school operates from one site located at 33 High Street, Epping, Essex, CM16 4BA.
- The proprietor is Acorn Care and Education Ltd. There is a governing body which is responsible for monitoring the performance of the school.
- There have been changes to leadership since the previous inspection. The current headteacher took up post in September 2023.
- All pupils have an EHC plan relating to their autism.
- Most pupils have had significant periods of disruption to their formal education prior to joining the school.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school does not currently provide a key stage 5 education, but pupils can stay on past key stage 4 to build on prior learning, secure accreditations and further prepare for adulthood should they need to.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the proprietor and governing bodies, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, staff and a representative from a local authority that commission places at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects; English, mathematics, the creative curriculum and PSHE. Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, considered curriculum information, visited lessons, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with pupils.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with leaders and pupils about some other subjects.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- To check compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. They visited classrooms, toured the school site, visited the school's local allotment plot and reviewed pupil information, school policies and records relating a range of aspects of the school such as behaviour and health and safety.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with some parents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. Inspectors also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's survey for school staff. Inspectors also met with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lynne Williams

His Majesty's Inspector

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