

Inspection of The Tower School

33 High Street, Epping CM16 4BA

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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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?

Pupils are safe and happy at The Tower School. Many come here after gaps in their education. If pupils are anxious, the nurturing ethos helps them to settle. They receive skilful support with their well-being from clinical staff. For example, pupils who need it get physiotherapy, which strengthens their physical health so they can learn better.

Behaviour is purposeful. Pupils develop their concentration in lessons. They enjoy positive and respectful relationships with staff. If pupils become upset, they learn strategies to manage their emotions. There is very little bullying. Staff help pupils to resolve any issues that occur. Pupils make friends and gain social skills.

Pupils in all year groups receive the guidance they need to help them make informed choices about their next steps. They are encouraged to explore their interests in possible future careers. Pupils take part in trips to the local area or to London. They learn to assess the risks involved in such activities. This helps pupils build up their independence and confidence.

Pupils benefit from leaders' high expectations of what they can achieve. Pupils learn a curriculum that meets their needs. This helps them to do well, including in the sixth form.

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

Since the school opened to pupils in April 2021, leaders have maintained their clear and ambitious vision. They have managed the growth in pupil numbers well. Leaders are ambitious for pupils to learn what they need to be ready for adult life. For instance, the weakest readers get the help they need so they can understand the curriculum. Pupils' needs are prioritised, for example by teachers planning the therapeutic curriculum alongside pupils building their knowledge. This means pupils learn a lot, and enjoy doing it.

Leaders have put in place a well-designed curriculum. Subject plans are detailed and show the knowledge and understanding that pupils should learn. Leaders make sure the curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs. For example, pupils visit the supermarket to make calculations about weights and pricing. This helps them practise and apply what they are learning in mathematics. Teachers take into account pupils' individual needs when they plan learning. Sometimes, the information leaders give to staff is not clear about how best to support pupils in class. This means that, on occasion, pupils do not get the precise help they need.

Teachers mostly deliver the curriculum well. They have good subject knowledge. This supports pupils, including students in the sixth form, to deepen their knowledge. Staff check what pupils are learning to ensure that their knowledge is secure. This helps teachers to deal promptly with any misunderstandings pupils may have. In a few cases, staff plan learning activities which do not help pupils well

enough to understand the content and why they are learning it. Because of this, pupils occasionally disengage and do not develop their knowledge as well as they could.

Leaders ensure that pupils are clear about their expectations for behaviour. Staff are well trained. They help pupils to understand what might trigger their anxiety and how this can affect their behaviour in and out of school. Pupils trust staff and are confident in the school's routines. This is because staff are consistent in their approach. Pupils are supported to manage their behaviour well in school.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of the curriculum. Leaders know the attributes they want pupils to develop. Leaders consider carefully how to support pupils' understanding of difficult concepts, such as consent. Staff teach this well. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, learn about diversity and to respect difference. They understand why discrimination is wrong and articulate sensitive awareness of others' individual characteristics. This helps them prepare for life in a changing world.

The proprietor's oversight of leaders' work is robust. The proprietor has supported leaders to address challenges as pupil numbers have grown. This includes staff recruitment. Governors challenge leaders' work effectively, for example regarding safeguarding.

Leaders and the proprietor have ensured all the independent school standards are met. The school's website provides the information that parents and local authorities require. Leaders ensure pupils receive well-considered relationships and sex education. Strong health and safety processes mean that the school site is safe. The proprietor has ensured that they fulfil statutory responsibilities, for example with regard to equalities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a vigilant culture of safeguarding. Staff, including new and agency staff, receive regular training. All staff know how to spot the potential signs of abuse and report concerns. Leaders act promptly. This includes making referrals to external agencies.

Leaders know the risks pupils face, such as those online. They monitor this closely and ensure that pupils learn about online safety. Leaders communicate regularly with parents about any risks pupils encounter.

Pupils know who to talk to if they have worries. The strong pastoral approach helps them to feel safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders do not always give teachers clear information about how to support pupils' learning needs. This means that, on occasion, teachers do not identify and address the needs of pupils they work with as effectively as they could. Leaders need to refine their processes for providing information to staff so that staff know the best actions and strategies to use in each situation to support pupils' learning.
- Some staff do not always plan learning activities effectively. Sometimes, pupils do tasks which do not support them well enough to access the more ambitious knowledge identified in the curriculum plans. Because of this, pupils occasionally do not understand what they should be learning, and lose interest. Leaders need to ensure that staff know how to implement the curriculum effectively. In particular, staff need to know how to plan activities that break down the knowledge pupils learn in a way that helps pupils to understand and apply it.

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	10243315
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent 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	36
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Rob Walton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54485
Telephone number	01992 926020
Website	www.thetowerschool.co.uk
Email address	Rob.Walton@thetowerschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened on 26 April 2021.
- The headteacher was appointed in May 2022.
- The chair of governors is also the regional director for the proprietor. In addition, the governing body consists of the headteachers of two other local schools owned by the proprietor. The proprietor intends to appoint parent governors by January 2023.
- The number of pupils on roll in the first year of opening was 17. The current number on roll is 36. The school has capacity for up to 62 pupils.
- The school provides education for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils are funded by local authorities. All have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have missed periods of education prior to joining the school.
- The proprietor has reduced staff's working week to four days. This does not involve a reduction of salary. Leaders say this is with the aim of improving staff well-being and recruitment.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- The school is registered for pupils aged 11 to 18. Pupils in the sixth form do not study key stage 5 courses. They complete key stage 4 courses or build on prior learning.
- Leaders use some agency staff.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the proprietor body, the chair of governors, senior leaders, other leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector had a conversation by telephone with the commissioning officer from Essex local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, physical education and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also evaluated the curriculum in some other subjects, notably science and humanities.
- As part of the evaluation of safeguarding, inspectors checked the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, considered its safeguarding policy and procedures, and spoke to leaders, staff, parents and pupils. The lead inspector also had a conversation by telephone with the local authority designated officer about the school's safeguarding practices.
- The lead inspector had conversations by telephone with several parents.
- Inspectors reviewed the six responses that were submitted from this academic year by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and six free-text responses submitted during the inspection. Inspectors considered the 24 responses to the staff survey, and the nine responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Katherine Douglas

His Majesty's Inspector

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