

The Tower School

33 High Street, Epping, Essex, CM16 4BA

Inspection dates

17–18 March 2021

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(a)–(b), 2(2), 2(2)(a)–(i)

- The school will provide six lessons every day. Pupils will also have a daily tutorial, and time for reading for pleasure and for reflection, providing them with more than 25 hours of on-site education each week.
- There is a written curriculum policy which reflects the school's aims to ensure that pupils leave with the concepts, attitudes, skills and knowledge they need to take a meaningful place in society.
- All pupils will have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, based on a primary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. They will follow a broad and balanced curriculum that includes a wide range of subjects, vocational study, learning outdoors and suitable therapies.
- Curriculum plans are in place to give pupils suitable experiences in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. These plans include detailed schemes of work for pupils in all key stages in English, mathematics, science, humanities, physical education (PE), design technology, food technology, music, art, computing, and personal, social and health education (PSHE).
- Careers advice and guidance will be taught through PSHE lessons in all key stages. In Years 8 to 13, pupils will have a personal one-to-one interview with a careers adviser. In key stages 4 and 5, students will have opportunities for work experience as part of their community service and vocational learning.
- Curriculum plans indicate that teaching will enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability. The school's curriculum and wider enrichment programme are intended to foster in pupils: self-motivation; the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort; interest in their work; and the ability to think and learn for themselves.
- The school's numeracy policy includes a range of approaches to develop pupils' numeracy skills across all subjects. The literacy policy contains suitable strategies to

encourage pupils to read regularly but does not include a clear approach to supporting pupils joining the school with limited understanding of phonics.

- Procedures are in place to assess pupils' prior learning when joining the school. This includes testing, reviewing information provided by their previous schools and considering the personal information contained in their EHC plans. Further assessments will take place, in all aspects of their learning, six times each year.
- Staff currently employed are suitably qualified and experienced to teach the planned curriculum across the age range and for the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of the proposed pupils. The current staff are a headteacher, head of education, a teacher and a teaching assistant.
- Teaching will take place in 10 classrooms, some of which have specialist equipment to teach science, design technology, food technology and computing. All classrooms are suitably resourced to teach groups of up to seven pupils.

Paragraph 4

- Nationally recognised tests and examinations, including vocational and entry-level awards, GCSE examinations and BTEC National Diploma qualifications will be used to assess the outcomes achieved by pupils.
- The three independent school standards for the quality of education are likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5, 5(a)–(d)

- The proposed curriculum is designed to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Schemes of work for all subjects clearly identify suitable opportunities to promote pupils' SMSC understanding.
- The proprietor intends to give pupils daily opportunities to meet together in tutorials to discuss moral and social issues, and to consider their own and others' views. Time for reflection at the end of each day aims to give pupils time to think about their own feelings and review their own behaviour.
- PSHE lessons in all year groups will enable pupils to broaden their cultural awareness and learn about the diverse lives of others. Pupils will learn about the importance of fundamental British values.
- Daily enrichment activities will provide opportunities for pupils to work and play together, develop healthy lifestyles and gain in confidence. A programme of regular, off-site visits to a broad range of venues aims to increase pupils' awareness of the world around them and enrich their cultural understanding.
- This independent school standard is likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)

- The school's safeguarding policy was reviewed in 2021 and reflects the latest statutory guidance.

- The headteacher and head of education are designated safeguarding leads. Both have attended recent training in managing safeguarding and the safer recruitment of staff.
- As part of their induction, all new staff will receive training in child protection and further training in autism spectrum disorder, and managing pupils' behaviour safely.
- A wide range of policies are in place to manage pupils' health and safety, promote their well-being and keep them safe.

Paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 10

- Suitable policies are in place to manage pupils' behaviour, positive handling, pupil exclusions and preventing bullying.
- The behaviour policy will encourage pupils to 'be ready, be respectful and be safe'. Suitable sanctions and rewards are in place.
- Procedures are in place for recording incidents of challenging behaviour.

Paragraph 11, 12, 13, 16(a), 16(b)

- All the necessary policies and risk assessments are in place to manage the health and safety of pupils on the premises, manage hazards on site and keep pupils safe when they leave the school site for enrichment activities.
- The school has a first aid policy and a book to record incidents. First aid bags are positioned around the school.

Paragraph 14

- The ratio of pupils to staff will generally be two staff to seven pupils, which is suitable to support the proposed provision. This ratio would change if specific needs identified within pupils' EHC plans show that increased supervision is necessary.

Paragraph 15

- An attendance and admissions register is in place, ready to record all of the necessary information as pupils enrol or leave the school.
- The nine independent school standards for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are likely to be met by the proposed school.

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

Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)–(f), 18(3), 19(2), 19(2)(a)–(d), 19(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a)–(c)

- The school's records show that all of the necessary checks have been made prior to staff starting work in the school. Personnel files show that two references have been received and followed up appropriately.
- Staff have a range of relevant professional qualifications, experience and expertise to teach the proposed curriculum and support pupils' special educational needs.
- Plans are in place to recruit additional staff over the next three years as the number of pupils increases.
- The school does not use supply staff.

Paragraph 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a)–(b), 21(4), 21(5), 21(5)(a)–(c), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a)–(b)

- A single central register of employment checks is in place. It shows all of the required information, including section 128 checks of the proprietor.
- The four independent school standards for the suitability of staff and proprietors are likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1), 23(1)(a)–(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a)–(c)

- Suitable toilets with washing facilities and hot water are provided. Toilets can be locked from the inside. There are separate facilities for staff. A disabled toilet is available on the ground floors of the main building and the annex.
- Shower facilities are available on the school site. PE lessons are planned to take place off site at a nearby sports centre. Changing rooms are available in these premises.
- There is a medical room which has a bed, toilet and sink.

Paragraph 25, 26, 27, 27(a)–(b)

- The accommodation is a converted retail building over two floors. It comprises a reception area, hall, 10 classrooms suitable for teaching specialist subjects, two therapy rooms, a library, break-out areas, toilets, a first aid room and offices. It has a small outside area for play.
- The building has suitable soundproofing, natural light and electric lighting, and ventilation. Emergency lighting, smoke and fire alarms and fire extinguishers are all in place and are suitably checked and maintained.
- Drinking water is readily available and adequately labelled.
- The accommodation is suitable to support the proposed curriculum, the number and range of pupils proposed at its opening, and pupils' specific special educational needs.
- The outside area for pupils to play is small. As the school grows and accepts more pupils, this outdoor space will not be large enough for all pupils to play safely at the same time.
- The proprietor acknowledges that this issue presents a challenge for school leaders and that further arrangements will be needed to keep pupils safe. A programme of rolling breaks and lunchtimes has been formulated but this is very new and has not been fully risk-assessed.
- The seven independent school standards for the premises and accommodation are likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)(a)–(j), 32(2), 32(2)(a)–(d), 32(3), 32(3)(a)–(g), 32(4)(a)–(c)

- All of the required information is available to prospective parents on the school's website. The proprietor will also provide a published handbook and welcome packs for pupils and their parents.
- The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school website.
- This independent school standard is likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(a)–(k)

- A written policy for handling complaints is in place. The policy provides clear guidance on procedures, timescales, composition of panels, representation and confidentiality.
- This independent school standard is likely to be met by the proposed school.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a)–(c)

- Essex local authority officers recognise that there is a need for specialist provision in the area. They support the proprietor's application for registration as an independent school.
- The proprietor is Acorn Care and Education Ltd, which is part of the Outcomes First Group. The proprietor is experienced in this field. It operates another 42 independent schools across the country.
- The proprietor shows a thorough understanding of the independent school standards. Significant investment and planning has taken place to ensure that all standards are likely to be met.
- The proprietor has put in place suitable arrangements for the school's governance. Two school leaders of other nearby schools run by the proprietor will join with the headteacher in overseeing the school's work. This body will be chaired by the proprietor's regional director. As the school grows, the proprietor intends to appoint parent governors.
- Links have been made with a local secondary school and tertiary college to develop the school's provision of GCSE courses and BTEC awards.
- This independent school standard is likely to be met by the proposed school.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's equality policy provides details of how all pupils can access the curriculum, premises and information effectively.

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.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	148422
DfE registration number	881/6078
Inspection number	10179575

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Kerry Linden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,950 to £72,420
Telephone number	07436313660
Website	www.optionsautism.co.uk
Email address	kerry.linden@ofgl.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	11 to 18	11 to 18
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	62	62

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	62
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	62
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	62
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	62

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	3
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this proposed school

- The proprietor seeks registration with the Department for Education as an independent special school to admit pupils who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.
- The proposed proprietorial body is Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
- The new proposed accommodation is a converted retail building. The premises are situated at 33 High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BA.
- The proprietor is seeking to establish the school for up to 62 pupils. The proprietor intends to increase pupil numbers over a three-year growth plan. In its first year, the school will admit up to 24 pupils.
- The proprietor proposes to admit pupils from Essex local authority, and in the future other nearby local authorities.
- The proposed school is not yet operating.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Some of the inspection was conducted remotely. This was due to changes made to inspection activity during this period of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The inspector who visited the school site met with the proprietor, the headteacher and head of education, and the site manager responsible for health and safety. She toured the premises and accommodation, scrutinised the single central register and met with leaders responsible for the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation provided by the proprietor, including a wide range of policies and procedures, curriculum plans and other information about the school.
- Inspectors spoke with a representative from Essex local authority.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Cindy Impey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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