

Inspection of Apple Orchard School

Five Oaks Road, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0RQ

Inspection dates: 29 November to 1 December 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' life chances are renewed at Apple Orchard. Inspirational and highly dedicated leaders focus on pupils restarting their education and gaining the qualifications they need. Leaders know the challenges involved as pupils are supported through an education and therapeutic approach to gain a fresh start in life.

Clinical therapists work in tandem with school leaders to create a bespoke curriculum that prepares each pupil well. There are high expectations of every young person. Pupils know they are expected to commit to the help on offer and work as hard as they can in their academic studies.

Staff teach pupils how to behave through better understanding themselves and building self-control. The school's five behaviour rules are clear and precise. Pupils learn to manage any conflicting thoughts and increasingly act with kindness and respect when around people. The behaviour rewards system really motivates pupils. Furthermore, an anti-bullying and inclusive culture is continually promoted around school. This teaches pupils to interact positively with one another and feel safe.

The personal development programme mapped out for pupils is remarkable. Leaders think outside the box to shape pupils to be responsible and active citizens and harness a character that will help pupils reintegrate back into society.

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

Leaders believe in every young person who attends Apple Orchard. They seek to transform pupils through setting them on a pathway of opportunity. It is about providing pupils with a high-quality education, especially because most pupils have missed a significant amount of schooling. Furthermore, pupils can arrive at any point in an academic year. Some may only stay for a short period of time. Undeterred, leaders ensure that pupils' educational starting points are firmly established and boost pupils' self-belief in the possibility of what they can achieve.

The school's accommodation is of a good standard. Each classroom strongly supports the teaching of the curriculum. Pupils have the resources and tools they need to access high-quality subject material that is required in the independent school standards, for example in scientific and technological education.

Pupils experience a broad and rich curriculum. Leaders work with pupils on the end points they need to thrive in the future. Commonly, this is a set of GCSE qualifications and vocational options at sixth form. Within a subject, knowledge builds incrementally to the goals leaders set for individual students. Careers education is very important. Leaders ensure students receive comprehensive and unbiased advice. As a result, students are upbeat about available options for future employment or further academic study.

Teachers demonstrate strong academic knowledge. They use their love of a subject to motivate pupils in their studies. Lessons are carefully crafted to revisit what pupils have learned before. Assessment checks are precise. The small class sizes mean teachers and additional adults can respond quickly to provide individual support. This ensures that any misconceptions can be remedied swiftly.

Staff receive ongoing training to help them teach subject content consistently well. They break down learning into clear steps to ensure pupils' memory is not overwhelmed. However, occasionally, teachers' choices of how to present information and the tasks which pupils complete do not work successfully in achieving what is planned out.

The status of reading has been elevated. Pupils have a library of rich literature which they can access. Staff encourage pupils to read a wide range of fiction as well as non-fiction books. Reading for pleasure sessions are planned smartly into the timetable so that pupils have time to enjoy their independent reading. Leaders have in place a phonics programme to support those pupils at the earlier stages of reading. However, as yet, teachers do not always ensure that the resources pupils need to read are fully aligned with the programme's expectations. In addition, some staff currently lack the expertise required to help pupils learn to read.

When pupils join the school, excellent transition work ensures that the needs of pupils with special educational needs/and or disabilities (SEND) are addressed right away. Staff know pupils extremely well and put in place strategies and resources to help pupils progress confidently in their learning. When students study at college part time, leaders continue to ensure support is provided when required.

Teachers set high behaviour expectations. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Generally, classrooms are calm places where pupils focus on what they need to learn. Pupils know they must aim to achieve five 'points' at the end of each lesson. This serves them well in doing the right thing and promoting kindness to all.

The exceptional relationships and sex education curriculum is carefully sequenced and tailored to each pupil's needs. Teachers, alongside therapists, support pupils with the knowledge they need to make informed healthy choices. Pupils learn about consent, risk and how to form positive relationships with others. Leaders fully comply with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

School trips are a firm favourite for pupils. For example, staff take pupils to London to visit cultural landmarks and learn how to travel and make independent choices. Pupils' physical exercise is promoted well through competitive sport. Pupils enjoy cooking different dishes and serving food to their peers and staff.

The new proprietor body has quickly got up to speed with the school's strengths and current priorities. It is clear about its statutory duties and regularly monitors the school's performance. Only recently has the proprietor body been able to gain ownership of the school's website. During the inspection, there was some missing information related to the independent school standards. The proprietor body

quickly addressed this to ensure the school continues to meet all requirements in the provision of information. The proprietor body is reviewing with senior leaders the governance structure in place so that everyone is clear of their accountabilities and the actions needed to further develop provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are risk assessing continually to ensure every young person acts and keeps safe. They liaise highly effectively with social workers and other agencies. Management meetings involving the school and other key personnel keep everyone informed about key actions and progress made. Leaders are in regular contact with college staff to ensure students keep safe.

Staff are expertly trained in the latest safeguarding information. They are acutely aware of the risks that pupils could face. The curriculum threads safeguarding through very well. Pupils learn about how to use the internet in a positive way and how to safely manage online interactions.

There is an up-to-date safeguarding policy which is compliant with the latest government guidance.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some of the roles and responsibilities set up by the new proprietor body require further embedding. This has led to some confusion within the leadership team about who is responsible for what. The proprietor body should review that the right checks and balances are in place to hold leaders rigorously to account for the school's educational performance and ensuring that it is consistently meeting the independent school standards.
- When delivering the curriculum, sometimes teachers do not have a firm understanding of how to set the right activities to match the curriculum intent. This can impact on how well pupils learn the intended knowledge and the work they are asked to produce. Leaders need to continue to support teachers' pedagogical knowledge of implementing the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	132069
DfE registration number	938/6258
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10214654
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	12 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Polaris Community
Chair	Jo August
Headteacher	Rebecca Smale
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,578
Telephone number	01403 783 416
Website	www.appleorchard.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@appleorchard.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 to 30 November 2017

Information about this school

- Apple Orchard joined Polaris Community in April 2022. The chief executive is the chair of the proprietor body. The headteacher started at the school in 2019.
- The school specialises in working with male students who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties associated with harmful sexual behaviour. Additionally, some pupils with SEND have communication and interaction difficulties. There is an on-site therapy team, whose members support each young person. All pupils on roll are children looked after.
- Most sixth-form students are dual registered at both the school and a further education college.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, staff and students. The lead inspector met with the chief executive of Polaris Community. He also met with two registered children's homes managers and the lead clinician of the therapy team. In addition, the lead inspector held a telephone call with a senior leader at a further education college.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives into these subjects: reading, science, geography, and personal, social, health and economic education. To do this, they met with subject teachers, looked at curriculum plans, had discussions with staff and students, visited lessons and looked at students' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors spoke with staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads to examine records and actions. This included sampling a range of safeguarding documentation. He reviewed checks on the safer recruitment of adults.
- Inspectors talked to pupils from different year groups about their learning and experiences at school.

- Inspectors looked at the school site and scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence to check on the statutory requirements of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Linda Jacobs

Ofsted Inspector

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