

The Yellow House School

1 Alderford Street, Sible Hedingham, Halstead, Essex CO9 3HX

Inspection dates

4–6 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Insufficient evidence
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, working closely with the proprietor and trustee, the previously unmet independent school standards are now met.
- Strengthened governance arrangements ensure that senior leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Leaders' ambition for continual improvement is clear.
- The school offers a fresh start in a supportive and nurturing environment, so many pupils begin to enjoy their learning for the first time.
- The curriculum is flexible and suitably planned to meet the diverse needs of the school's community.
- After significant gaps in their education, pupils make stronger progress than previously, often from very low starting points.
- Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well and plan effectively to meet their learning needs.
- Safeguarding is a high priority. Staff understand their responsibilities in protecting the vulnerable pupils in their care.
- Most pupils behave well. This is often a marked contrast to their behaviour in previous schools.
- Pupils and their parents and carers are extremely positive about the difference the Yellow House provision makes to their lives.
- Pupils make strong progress in developing their confidence and social skills. Most go on to further study and/or training when they leave the school.
- Pupils' progress in English and with their literacy is not as strong as it is in mathematics.
- While pupils' attendance overall improves, a few pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should.
- The most able pupils are not challenged consistently to achieve their potential.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - pupils are supported to catch up quickly with their reading and writing skills
 - pupils gain greater confidence in writing at length across the curriculum
 - the most able pupils are challenged effectively to make the progress they should.
- Ensure that leaders use all available information to identify strategies to build on current work to improve pupils' attendance and reduce incidents of persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are now met and likely to remain met. Working closely with the proprietor and trustee, the headteacher's decisive action has eradicated the weaknesses identified at the previous standard inspection and the additional concerns raised at the first monitoring inspection. The whole-school team is effusive in praising his 'transformational' leadership.
- Strong and effective working relationships underpin the good-quality provision that the school offers. Staff and leaders at all levels are unrelenting in their commitment to improve the life chances of the vulnerable pupils they support. For many of the pupils, this is the first time they have regularly attended school since they began their secondary education.
- The learning environment is now welcoming, bright and suitably maintained. The proprietor has invested in updates to the premises. This includes new flooring and paintwork on both sites and improvements to the heating and water supply at the Clare building. The impressive window displays at the Sible Hedingham Yellow House celebrate different cultures and important themes, such as women's suffrage and Remembrance Days.
- Leaders have extended the curriculum to include a wider range of subjects. All pupils study English, mathematics and sciences. Wider opportunities provide access to, for example, humanities, art, music, cookery, technology, business studies and projects linked to a variety of life-skills challenges. Pupils can join in sporting activities, including the Yellow House football team, playing matches against other schools.
- The school's allotment, which is part of the 'Yellow Shed' project, provides a safe space to learn in a nurturing environment. Lessons cover aspects of the science of horticulture as pupils grow plants, fruit and vegetables. Then, as the seasons move on, they gain cookery and enterprise skills by turning their produce into preserves, which they sell locally.
- Alerting pupils to the importance of healthy lifestyles and making the right choices is a non-negotiable component of the curriculum. The basic principles of British values, such as tolerance and respect, are well established in all aspects of the school's work.
- Effective systems are now in place to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is checked and improved. The information gathered through monitoring and reviews is used appropriately to share good practice and to identify any further staff training needed.
- The strength of the working relationships between school staff, pupils and parents is impressive. The effectiveness of these relationships was clearly evidenced in feedback to Ofsted during the inspection and in the school's own surveys of staff's, pupils' and parents' views. As one parent said, 'The Yellow House has given me back my child.' The local authority is equally positive about the responsive nature of school leadership and of the provision.
- The headteacher and other leaders are clear about what is working well and the things that need to improve. In close collaboration with the proprietor and trustee, the team is well set on a journey of continual improvement.

- Leaders have identified that there is more to do to ensure that pupils are confident in their reading skills and in improving their ability to write at length. Consequently, plans are under way to establish closer links with local primary schools to learn from shared good practice. This work is focused to help ensure that pupils' progress in English is more closely matched to the strong progress that they make in mathematics.
- Recent changes to management information systems, including, for example, the electronic recording of assessment and attendance information, are providing leaders with greater detail about the school's performance. This is helping them to identify more precisely suitable actions to bring about further improvement.

Governance

- The proprietor and trustee are ambitious for Yellow House pupils. Since the previous inspection, they have taken steps to formalise meeting structures. Meetings are regular and suitably recorded. Leadership roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability have been clarified.
- Regular reports to the board ensure that the headteacher is held to account for the school's performance. Meeting notes track the implementation of improvement strategies and keep leaders at all levels focused on what else needs to be done to continue to develop the provision.
- All statutory policies are in place and reviewed regularly.
- Working closely with the headteacher, the proprietor and trustee have taken effective action to ensure that the independent school standards are now met. New proposals aim to strengthen governance structures further by involving professionals from other education settings in governance meetings.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the heart of the provision. The new electronic system of recording information ensures that all staff are alerted to concerns and that any issues arising are dealt with promptly.
- The school's safeguarding policy is now up to date and is available on the website.
- The single central record of pre-employment checks on all staff is suitably maintained and meets statutory requirements.
- A link director for safeguarding has been appointed and appropriately trained. Staff training, including 'Prevent' duty and training for the designated safeguarding lead, has been updated. Strong links exist between the Yellow House team and external agencies, including health professionals and referring authorities, to ensure that vulnerable pupils get the help that they need to keep them safe.
- Staff, parents and pupils are consistent in their view that the school is a safe place.
- The team is vigilant and know pupils exceptionally well. Routine discussions and checks ensure that concerns are reported and shared. Contact with parents and, as necessary, other strands of support is regular and systematic.

- The school's curriculum makes pupils aware of issues that could influence their personal safety and well-being. They are taught about the dangers of, for example, gang affiliation, drugs and knife crime. Pupils are confident to speak with staff if they need to raise any concerns.

The school's progress towards meeting standards that were not met at the previous inspection

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

- This standard was met at the standard inspection in November 2017 but judged as unmet at the first progress monitoring inspection because arrangements to safeguard pupils were not effective. Leaders were unfamiliar with changes in the new version of the Secretary of State's guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education', September 2018. The safeguarding policy and aspects of staff training were out of date. Some pre-employment checks on staff suitability were incomplete.
- Since the monitoring inspection, suitable improvement plans have been implemented. The safeguarding policy is up to date. Staff training on current safeguarding requirements and responsibilities is complete. All staff have been trained in their duties under 'Prevent' and are aware of how to safeguard pupils from the threat of radicalisation.
- A link director for safeguarding has been appointed and trained to the appropriate level. The single central record of staff suitability is complete and regularly checked by the proprietor.
- This independent school standard is now met.

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

Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(ii)

Paragraph 21(1), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(viii)

- These standards were met at the inspection in November 2017 but not met at the first progress monitoring inspection in September 2018. This was because some staff information was missing from the single central record of suitability checks.
- Since the first progress monitoring inspection, leaders have addressed the concerns associated with recruitment (as explained above in this report in the section for safeguarding).
- These independent school standards are now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

- This independent school standard was not met at the inspection in November 2017 or at the first progress monitoring inspections. This was because leaders had not ensured that all the independent school standards were met.

- The current position is that leaders have taken effective action to ensure that all requirements are met, including those relating to safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff recruitment.
- This independent school standard is now met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most pupils become more motivated to learn because of the nurturing and strong working relationships formed between them and the adults in the school. Staff are trusted by their pupils and act as effective role models.
- Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well. New entrants join the school on a six-week programme of induction and assessment. The information gathered is used well to plan personalised programmes. The programmes are linked appropriately to pupils' education, health and care plans, as well as their additional learning needs and interests. Parents, pupils and placing authorities are fully involved in this process.
- New pupils settle in to the provision quickly. Individual learning plans are regularly reviewed and adapted as pupils' needs change. Communications between the school, parents and the placing local authorities are strong and effective.
- Suitable systems are in place to check pupils' progress and to plan learning so that gaps in previous knowledge and skills are reduced. Pupils' individual targets are refined at the end of each lesson and used appropriately to plan for next time. Careful planning and good teaching combine to help pupils overcome often significant barriers to their learning.
- Staff meet regularly, formally and informally, to share information about how well pupils are doing. They work closely together to ensure that learning strategies are working in the pupils' best interests and to adapt their planning to meet pupils' changing needs.
- Pupils' work is marked in line with the school's policy. Helpful feedback helps pupils to improve their work over time. Effective support is offered by school staff in individual and small-group sessions.
- Lessons cover an appropriately broad range of subjects. There is a strong focus on ensuring that any gaps in pupils' mathematics and English knowledge and skills are closed.
- Although generally pupils make strong progress, the most able pupils do not always make the progress they could because some of the work set is too easy and they are not moved on quickly enough to the next level.
- Some pupils are held back by limitations in their literacy skills and reading. This means that they are sometimes reluctant to write at length or unmotivated to read. Strategies are evolving to stimulate pupils' interest in reading and to help those in need of extra support. However, these approaches are at a relatively early stage of implementation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- The calm and welcoming environment offered is the catalyst for a positive step forward from pupils' previously disrupted learning experiences. Initial assessments at the point of entry to the school check individual pupils' starting points, including their personal and social skills development as well as their academic needs.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements. From the outset, they are taught how to manage their anxieties, while building their communication and social skills alongside other work. Most pupils make rapid gains in confidence and quickly become part of the Yellow House community.
- A designated member of staff is assigned as a key worker to each pupil to keep them on track. However, pupils know that they can speak to any staff member if they have a problem. Pupils trust Yellow House adults to look out for them and so they feel safe in school. Taught sessions improve their understanding of the basic principles of using the internet safely and the potential dangers associated with social media.
- In their free-text comments to Ofsted, and in telephone conversations during the inspection, parents gave high praise to the positive changes in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. They spoke of the 'amazing support' and staff who 'go above and beyond' to help pupils, and their parents, to get the best out of the provision.
- The importance of tolerance and respect are central to the curriculum, culture and ethos of the school. Fundamental British values are modelled by staff and threaded through the core of the 'life-skills challenges' that are routinely set for pupils. Sensitive issues, such as the cause and effect of hate crime, are regularly discussed. In the spirit of continual improvement, further work is currently under way to refine the range of personal, social and health education opportunities available across the curriculum.
- Staff and pupils eat sociably together at break and lunchtimes in pleasant surroundings. The high-quality working relationships evident during the inspection underpin pupils' typically strong progress in developing their personal skills from their different starting points.
- Leaders ensure that strong links are maintained with the Construction Training Partnership. This provider offers successful one-day work-related placements for a few Yellow House pupils. Effective communications are in place to check safeguarding arrangements and attendance when pupils are off site. Pupils enjoy these courses and gain useful skills which help them to progress to the next stage in education and/or training.
- Regular checks ensure that pupils' personal development, behaviour and attendance continue to improve over their time in the school. Recently introduced electronic tracking systems are helping leaders to analyse more precisely the reasons why some pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. This is enabling staff to pinpoint suitable actions for further improvement.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- This good behaviour is a strong feature of day-to-day life at the Yellow House. The behaviour policy is clearly stated and suitably applied in lessons and around the school. Staff have consistently high expectations of what is acceptable in terms of standards of pupils' conduct.

- Working together as a team, staff act as positive role models in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Consequently, pupils typically meet leaders' high expectations very well.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and not tolerated. Swift action is taken, including involving parents in discussions so that concerns are dealt with quickly.
- Pupils are friendly and polite to visitors. They are confident to talk about their work and get on well together in social spaces around the school.
- While most pupils' attendance represents a marked improvement from their starting points, a few do not attend school as regularly as they should. Staff make every effort to encourage reluctant pupils to attend, including discussions with parents and home visits. Where necessary, timetables are temporarily adjusted so that appropriate additional support can be put in place.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils join the school with low levels of prior attainment and have had extended periods away from education over time. Typically, they make much better progress, from their different starting points, than they did in their previous school.
- By the end of Year 11, pupils typically leave the school with a range of level 1 and level 2 awards, including functional skills and the accredited 'life-skills challenges'. The school's highly successful gardening award focuses on horticulture in the school's allotment and combines therapeutic learning with impressive practical skills. According to their ability, a few pupils gain GCSE qualifications, for example in English, mathematics and science.
- Pupils make especially strong progress in gaining confidence and in improving their social skills. Many arrive with low self-esteem and limited understanding of how to be successful in education or society. At the Yellow House, effective teaching, therapeutic learning and success in gaining qualifications combine to make a positive difference to most pupils' lives and ambitions for the future.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education. Effective careers information, advice and guidance help them to plan for taking their next step. School staff offer good support in helping to prepare applications and for college interviews. Almost all pupils go on to further education and/or training when they leave the school.
- Pupils attend well and make good progress on the work-related courses that are offered through the vocational training provider, the Construction Training Partnership. Some pupils are motivated to study at the next level with the provider when they leave the school at the end of key stage 4.

Sixth form provision

**Insufficient evidence –
amnesty granted**

- The school offers extended placements, agreed with the local authority, for a few students in Year 12. This is because these students need more time to complete their programmes, typically because of extensive gaps in previous learning, personal circumstances or health-related concerns. The provision is successful in helping these students to achieve the skills they need to progress to further education and/or training post-16.

- The sixth-form provision only applies to a few Year 12 students each year and for short periods of time. There is insufficient evidence to make a separate judgement for sixth-form provision.
- Evidence gathered for current students in the sixth form has been used in the sections above as appropriate.

School details

Unique reference number	134398
DfE registration number	881/6048
Inspection number	10093914

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	20
Proprietor	Debra Pester
Headteacher	David Ollier
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,087
Telephone number	01787 462504
Website	www.theyellowhouseschool.essex.sch.uk
Email address	yellowhouse@btconnect.com
Date of previous inspection	28–30 November 2017

Information about this school

- The Yellow House School is a small independent special school operated by a sole proprietor. The school is located on two sites across Essex and Suffolk. The main site, which opened in 2002, is at 1 Alderford Street, Sible Hedingham, Essex CO9 3HX. The Suffolk site opened in 2006 and is based in premises at 1 Nethergate Street, Clare, Suffolk CO10 8NP.
- The school offers full-time and part-time programmes. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and histories of extensive periods away from education. Some pupils

have not attended their previous school for up to three years prior to joining The Yellow House.

- Part-time provision is agreed with the placing authorities and tailored to meet the complexities of individual pupils' needs.
- A few pupils spend some of their time on work-related courses with a specialist provider, The Construction Training Partnership.
- A few pupils stay on at the end of key stage 4 to complete their programmes in Year 12.
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2017.
- The school does not use supply staff.
- The school received its previous standard inspection in November 2017, when it did not meet all the independent school standards. At that time, the school's overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. The independent school standards relating to premises and accommodation and leadership and management were not met.
- The Department for Education (DfE) issued a notice to the school on 21 November 2018.
- Following the 2017 standard inspection, the school submitted an action plan to the DfE to address the areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The action plan was evaluated on 5 March and judged as not acceptable. A second action plan was evaluated as not acceptable on 1 June 2018.
- The first progress monitoring inspection found that the school's premises and accommodation met the required standard, but the standards linked to the quality of leadership and management remained unmet. In addition, unmet standards were identified concerned with the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The school's single central record of the pre-employment checks carried out on staff suitability was not up to date.
- The follow-up action plan to the first progress monitoring inspection was judged to be not acceptable in January 2019.

Information about this inspection

- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to consider, as part of this standard inspection, the school's progress in meeting the independent school standards that were not met at the progress monitoring inspection in September 2018. This standard inspection includes the second progress monitoring inspection of the school since the previous standard inspection in November 2017.
- The progress monitoring element of this inspection, commissioned by the DfE, considered the unmet standard related to leadership and management identified at the inspection in November 2017. It also looked at the additional standards that were previously met but judged as not met during the first progress monitoring inspection.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and observed them learning in a range of subjects. The work of the school was discussed in meetings with the proprietor, the trustee, the headteacher, subject leaders and other school staff.
- The evidence from a wide range of documentation was reviewed. This included leaders' evaluations of the school's performance, development plans, assessment information linked to pupils' attainment and progress, and attendance and behaviour logs.
- The school's policies, including those linked to health and safety and child protection, were looked at alongside relevant records covering routine checks and the recruitment of new staff.
- In telephone conversations, the inspector spoke with an officer from one of the local authorities commissioning placements at the school, a representative of The Construction Training Partnership and three parents.
- The inspector looked at 13 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, the free-text comments from two parents and the views of staff and pupils recorded in the school's own surveys.
- There is no judgement in this report for the sixth-form provision because there is insufficient evidence to make a separate judgement. Although there are students of sixth-form age, on this occasion there were too few for too short a period of time to make a separate judgement.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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