

# Inspection of Hawthorn

Chalkhill Farm, New House Lane, Chartham, Kent CT4 7BF

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Inspection dates: 4 and 5 February 2025

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The school is a haven of calm and positivity. The friendly, supportive atmosphere promotes pupils' personal development very well. Pupils attend school keenly and are rarely absent. Pupils arrive promptly to school, and transition swiftly into the established morning routine. Staff and pupils work hard, side by side, cleaning stables and the yard. Interactions between staff and pupils are informal, yet respectful. Early morning conversations centre on pupils' feelings and well-being. This helps them to be ready for the learning activities to come.

Staff model the behaviours that they want pupils to develop. This works effectively. It is demonstrated in pupils' willingness to talk politely with visitors about their learning and wider experiences. Pupils feel safe and valued at school. They appreciate the staff and enjoy learning about, and looking after, the animals, particularly the horses.

High expectations for pupils' engagement in therapeutic activities are met successfully and, over time, pupils build positive self-identities. Conversely, leaders' expectations for pupils' learning across the academic curriculum, including in reading, English and mathematics lack ambition. Lessons in key subjects are insufficiently frequent, and learning does not always build sequentially. Consequently, pupils do not learn and achieve as well as they should.

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

Hawthorn school has been open to pupils for a short period of time. The school is passionate about providing pupils with opportunities to re-engage with education and with society more widely. Typically, pupils have experienced highly disrupted education and have missed extensive periods of schooling. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Most targets relate to strengthening pupils' social, emotional and mental health and well-being. Staff know and plan for these targets well. They check and evaluate pupils' progress effectively towards achieving these targets.

The school has established a core curriculum, including English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Leaders have plans to adapt and strengthen the curriculum as the school becomes more established. All pupils access mental health support and study wider subjects, including horse care. The curriculum offers acceptable breadth. Additional subjects and opportunities are gradually being introduced to reflect fully the school's aspirational curriculum policy. Staff make use of opportunities to enhance pupils' oracy, literacy and numeracy skills throughout the day.

Curriculum subjects are planned and sequenced, with identified goals. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong, and they present information clearly to pupils. In some cases, what is taught does not reflect the intended curriculum. In English, for example, learning moves from one theme to another, without sufficient

consideration of what pupils know and understand. Consequently, pupils move to new content before previous learning is secure. Expectations of what pupils can achieve academically is too low. In some cases, workbooks show tasks that are too easy. Little time is spent learning English and mathematics. Therefore, pupils do not get maximum opportunity to make up for gaps in their learning. Nevertheless, pupils are proud of their progress at Hawthorn and know that they learn more successfully than before.

Leaders plan to raise the profile of reading. Currently, there are no systems to ensure that pupils engage with or hear a range of texts. Therefore, opportunities to increase pupils' literacy skills, to widen their horizons and to increase their confidence and enjoyment in reading are limited.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is prioritised. Pupils take responsibility for tasks around the farm, and work with independence. They demonstrate care for the animals, respect for nature and the environment, and support for staff and one another. Pupils benefit from high-quality, individualised pastoral support and say typically that they are confident to talk to staff 'about everything'. Staff help pupils to identify and manage their emotions, to discover their strengths, to find interests, and to develop ambitions. The school ensures that pupils access bespoke advice and experiences to prepare them for adulthood and the next stage of education, training or future employment. The school has established a strong sense of inclusive community. This contributes well to pupils' strong desire to attend school; their attendance is very high, and they have positive attitudes to learning.

Staff and pupils know and follow routines and procedures around the farm. Risks are identified and appropriately mitigated. Information, including a safeguarding policy, is available to parents and carers on the school's website.

The proprietor body understand their role. The school communicates regularly and effectively with parents, carers and staff. Staff say that their well-being and their workload are considered. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Leaders have worked to strengthen provision since the school was registered. They have capacity to continue improving the school. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The independent school standards (the standards) are met. However, the proprietor body's oversight of the school's effectiveness, including checks on the curriculum, lacks rigour. The proprietor body has not given suitable priority to the quality of education, nor considered in enough detail how to improve the school further.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Curriculum thinking and sequencing in English and mathematics are not an accurate reflection of what pupils currently learn. Learning moves from one theme to another, without sufficient consideration of what pupils know and understand. Therefore, pupils do not learn and progress as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that they identify the precise knowledge that they want pupils to know, and sequence this well. Leaders should ensure that staff check pupils' learning carefully and adapt their teaching as required.
- Reading has not been prioritised. There are currently no systems to ensure that pupils engage with, or hear, a range of texts routinely. Consequently, there are limited opportunities to increase pupils' cultural capacity as well as fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading. The school should ensure that its plans to raise the profile of reading are completed and introduced.
- Staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve academically are often too low. This is reflected in the small amount of time afforded to academic subjects, particularly English and mathematics, as well as in low-level learning activities. Consequently, pupils' opportunities to catch up on previously missed learning are reduced. The school should ensure that staff have consistently high expectations for what pupils learn and practise during lessons.
- The academic provision and extra-curricular opportunities on offer currently are not reflective of the school's stated aims. Pupils do not benefit from the rich variety of subjects and experiences that leaders intend. Leaders should continue work to implement their plans so that pupils benefit from the full range of subjects and opportunities that leaders intend.
- The proprietor body does not have robust systems for oversight or to assure the quality of education. School improvement planning lacks precision and does not prioritise the quality of education. This means the proprietor body does not hold a sufficiently helpful view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The proprietor body should ensure that systems to evaluate the school's work and to hold the school's leaders to account are strengthened.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	150446
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6185
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10342226
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent day school
<b>Proprietor</b>	Chalkhill Farm Youth Activities Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Julie Hardy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sarah Watson
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£45,000 to £65,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	07889 762 782
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.chalkhillfarm.co.uk">www.chalkhillfarm.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:chalkhillfarm123@gmail.com">chalkhillfarm123@gmail.com</a>

## Information about this school

- The school was registered on 30 January 2024 and admitted pupils from September 2024. This was the school's first standard inspection.
- The school is registered to admit up to eight pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs, attachment and trauma difficulties. Some pupils may also have speech, language and communication needs and cognition and learning difficulties.
- Pupils are likely to have been out of formal education for extended periods and some may be looked after by local authorities. All pupils have an EHC plan and are funded by a local authority.
- The school is located at Chalkhill Farm. The site is expansive and includes stables, horse schools, paddocks and a wild garden. In addition to horses, the school also has goats, chickens and dogs. The school offers education, equine therapy and mental health support. Accommodation consists of a timber classroom, known as the 'cabin' and a timber kitchen. The kitchen space is used flexibly for breaktimes, lunchtimes and for some lessons.
- The school does not use 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 requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the head of school, the head of therapies and other leaders and staff. They also held informal conversations with staff at different times throughout the inspection.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through discussions and through Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, while at work in the yard and at other times of the school day.
- 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.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, personal, social and health education and horse care. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons where possible, spoke to staff, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. In addition, inspectors spoke to leaders about reading, including relating to resources and leaders' plans to raise the profile of reading.
- Inspectors looked at wider records and toured the school as part of their checks to ensure compliance with the independent school standards.

### **Inspection team**

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Liz McIntosh	Ofsted Inspector

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