

Inspection of Yarrow Heights School

Cobden Avenue, Southampton SO18 1FS

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 September 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Yarrow Heights prepares its pupils exceptionally well for their next steps. In every aspect of school life, pupils benefit from high-quality care and nurture. Many pupils articulate how much they appreciate being part of this ambitious and inclusive school. They are valued as individuals and therefore flourish and thrive.

Central to this success are the school's unrelenting, high expectations. The school achieves a skilful balance between providing pupils with highly personalised support, alongside allowing them to develop their independence and confidence. Pupils achieve well academically and demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to their learning.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. In lessons, they work hard and show resilience when facing new challenges. School staff are kind and caring and, in turn, pupils show respect and consideration to others. Over break and lunchtimes, pupils enjoy spending time in the Hub and in the multi-use games area.

The school has strong and effective communication systems. These are well supported by the school's responsive and reflective culture. Pupils are routinely consulted about their views on school life. Parents and carers are well informed about their children's academic progress and welfare. They value their invitations to see the school in action and their ongoing and purposeful contact with school staff.

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

All pupils at this school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). On initial admission to the school, many pupils hold negative views about education and their ability to engage with it. Pupils talk with pride about how welcome they are made to feel at Yarrow Heights. They know that diversity, difference and being allowed to be themselves is prioritised and important. As one pupil said, 'it is what our school is all about'.

The school's curriculum is broad and rich, setting pupils up well for success in their next educational steps. Many pupils achieve impressive qualifications across a wide range of subjects. They hold high aspirations for their future education or employment. The school ensures that the curriculum offer is extremely responsive to pupils' needs and strengths. There is an ongoing culture of review and reflection to make sure every pupil gets a variety of opportunities and the right support.

Pupils become fluent and confident readers. Phonics teaching is delivered well to those who need it, allowing them to catch up quickly. Pupils enjoy the wide range of texts that they explore across the curriculum. They show strong analytical and comprehension skills. Pupils enjoy having time to read books of their choice and listen to staff read to them.

Teaching staff are extremely skilled and effective at supporting pupils with their learning. They make adaptations in a highly personalised approach, both in terms of the curriculum design and in a dynamic way during lessons. This is because they identify pupils' needs well. Staff are knowledgeable about pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan entitlements. Staff act on the support detailed in pupils' 'passports to learning' with precision. Pupils remember their learning well. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and questioning skills which they use to check what pupils know and remember across the curriculum. Pupils contribute to this process. They have a strong and meaningful voice when reviewing their accumulating knowledge and skills.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. At the heart of this is the strength in the positive relationships that pupils develop with school staff and each other. Pupils are nurtured well to have self-belief and persevere with their learning. They use resources with care and respect and show that they can negotiate with others to share them to achieve common goals. Pupils who have difficulty in regulating their emotions are supported extremely well and learn how to create their own strategies to be successful. This means that pupils want to attend school and place value in their education experience.

The school's approach to pupils' personal development is impressive. The therapeutic, enrichment and academic offer are woven together seamlessly. This is particularly evident in the way the school assists sixth-form students with their transition into college. There is an ongoing commitment to support the emotional well-being of students as they encounter new environments and experiences. This includes in-depth and tailored careers advice and guidance. Students enthuse about this attention to detail and how they feel 'held' by the school as they successfully transition into their next educational or employment steps.

Staff receive a wealth of tailored training and development opportunities. These reflect their needs and those of the pupils they support. Nothing is left to chance in this culture of reflection and high ambition for all. The school staff are a motivated and happy workforce who take pride in all they do.

The proprietor and governing body have a clear and ambitious vision for the school. They support the school extremely well and have an in-depth understanding about its strengths and next steps. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the independent school standards (the standards) consistently. This includes compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	148599
DfE registration number	852/6013
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10391809
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	13
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cavendish Education
Chair	Aatif Hassan
Headteacher	Liam Gaster
Annual fees (day pupils)	£79,150 to £86,606
Telephone number	023 8212 4590
Website	www.yarrowheights.com
Email address	reception@yarrowheights.com
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2022

Information about this school

- Yarrow Heights School is located at Cobden Avenue, Southampton SO18 1FS. The proprietor body is Cavendish Education Ltd.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, as well as other associated needs. Most pupils have a diagnosis of autism
- The school is not currently using any alternative provision.
- The school is operating beyond its registration with the DfE. It currently has four additional pupils on roll.
- The school supports sixth-form students with their transition into college. These students receive most of their education at these colleges with the school retaining oversight of the quality of education and the students' personal development.

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team met with representatives of the proprietor body, the governing body and with senior school leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, STEM and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, 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 talked to pupils about their learning and experiences at school.
- The inspectors analysed responses to the staff survey and spoke to staff about their views of the school.
- The inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and the additional free-text responses. The lead inspector also met with a group of parents and carers.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The lead inspector toured the school site to gather evidence about compliance with the standards and the proposed material change. Inspectors also reviewed a range of documents and policies.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, the inspectors checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The recommendation for the maximum number of pupils is 145.
- The proprietor has a clear rationale for increasing the number on roll. There is an ambition for the school's strong pastoral and educational offer to benefit more pupils. Planned staffing numbers are well considered and the school's recruitment processes are robust.
- The school's leadership team have expertise in working with pupils with SEND. They lead with moral integrity. The school has strong relationships with local authorities who commission places for pupils at the school.
- The school site and associated facilities are well maintained and suitable to meet an increase in pupil numbers.

Inspection team

Kate Fripp, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gareth Flemington

His Majesty's Inspector

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