

Inspection of Engaging Potential

Progress House, 79 Gaywood Drive, Newbury RG14 2PR

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Engaging Potential's main aim is summed up in the name of the school, to engage pupils in learning so that they can reach their potential.

All pupils have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Pupils typically have had significant periods out of education before joining the school. Many have struggled to control their emotions in previous schools. Staff build positive, safe, professional relationships with pupils, based on a strong understanding of each pupils' specific needs. Adults help pupils to understand themselves. Over time, pupils attend school more regularly and start to focus on learning. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. When they do happen, adults help pupils get back on track quickly.

Each pupils' curriculum is carefully designed to ensure that pupils can be successful and so gain confidence. Pupils learn in a variety of places. This includes in classrooms where they are the only pupil, outside in the community accompanied by an adult, or at an alternative provision.

Pupils feel safe in school. Pupils know that adults will listen to them and help them if they have any problems. They say that bullying rarely happens, but if it does, staff notice and reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

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

Leaders and staff are ambitious for pupils' attendance and re-engagement in learning. Right from the start, staff work carefully with each pupil and their family to design a bespoke curriculum based on that pupils' specific interests and needs. Pupils' timetables are constantly adapted in response to pupils' SEMH needs. Over time, pupils gain more stamina and increase the time they spend learning. Parents praise highly the school's responsive approach. As one said, 'Staff made my son feel comfortable by being adaptable and understanding right from the start.'

Pupils learn a core curriculum of English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Over time, other subjects such as personal, social and health education (PSHE), humanities, science and citizenship are added in. Teachers plan what pupils learn in each subject, based on their different starting points. Teachers are adept at uncovering pupils' gaps in learning and making sure these are filled. They use their understanding of pupils' special educational needs to decide how best to help each pupil learn. Adults' calm and patient approach helps build pupils' confidence in learning and in themselves. As one parent said, 'Since joining the school my child is a lot happier, more sociable and has more confidence.'

As in other subjects, the curriculum in English is carefully matched to pupils' individual barriers and starting points. However, currently, the delivery of the English curriculum is not as strong as could be. Sequences of learning do not build on pupils' gaps sufficiently well. The school's phonics programme is not being

implemented well enough for the very few pupils who need help to decode words. Although some pupils read voraciously, others need more support to develop a love of reading. Leaders recognise these issues and have plans in place to rectify them quickly.

Pupils' personal development is rightly prioritised throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn to interact with their community through regular visits to places such as the garden centre and gym. In PSHE, adults teach pupils how to manage the risks they face in their lives, including learning about healthy relationships and how to keep safe on social media. As part of citizenship, pupils learn about public institutions through visits to the law courts and discussions with local police. Often such activities are designed to support the school's careers programme. Older pupils also typically take part in work-related learning, although opportunities for this have been limited during the pandemic. This strong focus on understanding the world helps pupils to think constructively about their futures and the positive contribution they can make to life in modern Britain.

Pupils enjoy attending alternative provisions where they participate in a wide range of activities, including animal care, coppicing, canoeing and hiking. Such activities build pupils' self-confidence, as well as encouraging pupils to be active and healthy. They also contribute strongly to their improved attendance at school.

Staff feel well supported by leaders and that leaders are mindful of their workload. They enjoy working at the school. Staff act as positive role models. They go out of their way to undertake additional specialist training to help them in their roles. Adults' calm approach helps pupils to be successful in this school. Parents spoke of being grateful to staff for the work they do. As one said, 'The school gives pupils the opportunity to succeed, when I know pupils don't always see that in themselves.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are well trained in safeguarding. They are alert to the signs that might indicate that a pupil needs extra help. Effective systems enable staff to share concerns and act promptly to reduce risks and promote pupils' safety and well-being. This includes close liaison with the alternative provisions pupils attend. Safeguarding leads are persistent in making sure that pupils get the support they need from outside agencies.

Leaders carry out the necessary recruitment checks on all adults who work with pupils. This includes checking the safeguarding arrangements in place at the alternative provisions used by the school.

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

- The curriculum in English is not being implemented well enough. Approaches to teaching pupils to learn read accurately, and more regularly, are not rigorous enough. Leaders need to ensure that staff across the school are more familiar with how to improve pupils' literacy, in particular their reading. This will enable pupils to be more successful in their future lives.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	139963
DfE registration number	869/6017
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10202275
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Tracy Watson
Headteacher	Tracy Watson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,842
Telephone number	01635524113
Website	www.engagingpotential.com
Email address	admin@engagingpotential.com
Date of previous inspection	27 to 29 June 2017

Information about this school

- Engaging Potential is an independent special school for pupils who have complex difficulties that have prevented them from regular attendance at previous schools. All pupils have an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have autism spectrum disorder. Most pupils have been out of formal education for a significant period of time before coming to the school.
- Pupils are referred to the school by West Berkshire local authority.
- The school's headteacher is the proprietor. Because of the pandemic, she has not been in the school building as much as she usually would be. Prior to the pandemic this was once a week. She is in regular daily contact with the school. There is also a full-time centre manager.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school currently uses two unregistered providers of alternative education.

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 the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the proprietor, the centre manager, the curriculum leader and other staff. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from West Berkshire local authority. She also visited Upper Lodge Farm, one of the alternative provisions used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and art. This involved discussion with the leaders of these subjects, checking curriculum plans, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with pupils and staff about learning in these subjects.

- Inspectors also visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work from a wider range of subjects taught in the school, including humanities, personal, social and health education and careers provision.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and other safeguarding leaders. They spoke to a range of staff and some pupils. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records, including those relating to the safer recruitment of staff.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through consideration of the five responses to Ofsted's online parent survey and accompanying free-text comments and by telephone conversations with four parents. They considered the views of staff through conversations and scrutiny of the seven responses to the online staff survey. Inspectors spoke to pupils in class and around the school and considered the two responses to the online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Bagust

Ofsted Inspector

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