

Northcroft School

Temperance Hall, Northcroft Lane, Newbury RG14 1BU

Inspection dates

7 October 2024

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h) to 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2)

- The school's curriculum aligns with what is outlined in the national curriculum. Its curriculum policy deliberately seeks to be highly ambitious so that pupils acquire the knowledge they need to be able to sit GCSE examinations at the end of key stage 4. Pupils will learn the core subjects of English, mathematics and science along with other subject areas which fully meet the independent school standards (the standards).
- Northcroft's vision focuses on rebuilding pupils' life chances so they succeed as adults. It is about pupils becoming independent and going on to pursue a post-16 pathway that meets their hopes and aspirations.
- Within different subjects, the school has identified the key knowledge pupils should learn. It has drawn upon curriculum expertise and guidance recommended by the Department for Education (DfE). Curriculum thinking will take into account that pupils may have lower starting points because of missed schooling. Pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans will help underpin the necessary support that pupils need to access the curriculum. This includes adaptations and appropriate flexibility for pupils' learning. The school has also taken into account essential prior knowledge that pupils would need to remember from key stage 2.
- Reading is a high priority and the school sees it as the gateway to accessing a broad and rich curriculum. It will carefully screen pupils' reading skills on entry to identify whether pupils may need to first follow the school's age-appropriate phonics programme. There are suitable books with the programme to cater for older pupils' interests and self-esteem. Across the school, pupils will be encouraged to read widely. The school's library has a range of high-quality books for pupils to choose from. There will be a determined drive for staff to hear pupils read regularly.
- Important therapy work will support pupils' academic education and help identify any barriers to learning that pupils might have. This will include pupils working with occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

- There will be an entitlement for pupils to receive up-to-date and relevant careers information, education, advice and guidance. The school understands the requirements of the provider access legislation where staff will provide information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. The school has appointed a specialist careers teacher.
- The school's location is close by to many businesses. The proprietor aims for pupils to actively engage in the local community and the workplace.
- There is a well-planned and sequential curriculum in place for the teaching of relationships, sex and health education and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This includes teaching content about the protected characteristics which are set out in the Equality Act 2010. The school will liaise with parents to keep them informed of what pupils learn.
- For physical education, pupils will walk to the local leisure centre where they can play sports, swim and develop healthy lifestyles. There are also nearby parks and other green spaces for recreation.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

- The school will only appoint qualified teachers to work with its pupils in the first instance. Over time, it will look to recruit some teaching assistants who have the required skill to best support pupils' academic education. Class sizes will be small with high staff-to-pupil ratios.
- Pupils will typically have a class teacher who will deliver the curriculum. There will also be some subject-specialist teachers to teach pupils where appropriate.
- A range of entry assessments will be used so that the school has a secure baseline of pupils' educational starting points. This will inform what areas teachers need to prioritise, particularly around literacy and numeracy. There will be timely pupil progress meetings between leaders and staff to look at the impact of pupils' achievement.
- The school has utilised expertise from the local authority in training around research-informed teaching techniques and helpful methods to check what pupils know and remember.
- All of the standards in part 1 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5, 5(a) to 5(d)(iii)

- The proprietor will ensure that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils will thread through all the school does. It will be about nurturing pupils' own personal values, their relationships with each other and teaching them to be responsible, young citizens.
- There will be a strong focus on preparing pupils for life in modern Britain with knowledge and understanding of different beliefs, cultures and lifestyles. This will also cover pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils will learn about key festivals and events that happen through a calendar year.

- Throughout a pupil's time at Northcroft, inclusivity will be lived out so that pupils feel safe and valued for who they are. Assemblies each Friday will positively celebrate pupils' successes.
- The personal development programme will enable pupils to visit different places to develop their cultural awareness of Britain. Also, teachers will provide regular opportunities for pupils to discuss and debate key ideas. This will contribute to pupils recognising their part to play in shaping society.
- All of the standards in part 2 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 32(1)(c)

- Keeping children safe is at the heart of the school's approach. The proprietor and school leaders see safeguarding as everyone's responsibility. They demonstrate a strong understanding of their safeguarding duties and responsibilities. The proprietor brings significant experience in supporting vulnerable children and working with other agencies, particularly social care.
- The school will prioritise staff training and provide regular updates so that everyone is clear about how to keep children safe. There will be a focus on local risks such as child exploitation. As pupils mature, key content will be prioritised in the PSHE curriculum. This will support pupils to be safe when outside of school.
- There is an online recording system that the school will use to log any concerns. Leaders will ensure that all staff are trained in the accurate recording of information.
- The proprietor will engage with the local authority in its checking of the school's safeguarding practices. The proprietor will commission external audits so it can assure itself that there is a robust and vigilant safeguarding culture at Northcroft.
- The school's safeguarding policy is up to date with the government's latest guidance and is published on the school's website.

Paragraphs 9 to 10

- The school's behaviour policy outlines the school's vision and approach to supporting pupils with emotional needs. This will focus on early identification with planned strategies to help pupils self-regulate. Staff will prioritise building relationships with pupils so that they feel safe and trust those around them.
- There are systems in place to track pupils' behaviour and analyse trends and patterns. This will inform preventative measures so that any potential emotional triggers can be spotted straight away.
- All staff will be trained in positive handling techniques. These will only be used when absolutely necessary to keep a child, and those around them, safe. Any use of physical intervention will be carefully documented with all staff taking part in an after-action review approach.
- The school has a suitable policy and agreed protocols in place if a child were to abscond from the school site.

- The proprietor has ensured that the use of suspensions and exclusions will follow statutory guidance. The school will also inform the local authority of a suspension or exclusion as pupils have an EHC plan.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 14

- The proprietor has a strong overview of health and safety legislation. It has ensured members of the company are qualified and knowledgeable in checking the school meets these relevant standards.
- The building has undergone all the necessary fire checks so that the school is compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This includes fire extinguishers and clearly marked emergency exits.
- There is an appropriate first-aid policy in place. Staff will be suitably trained to administer first aid and keep relevant records.

Paragraph 15

- The information on the school's admission and attendance registers will be maintained in accordance with requirements of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- There will be close analysis of pupils' attendance and any patterns of absence that needs further exploring.
- The school's attendance policy takes into account the most recent guidance from the DfE.

Paragraph 16 to 16(b)

- Risk assessments are well understood. The school leadership team will produce individual risk assessments where needed for some pupils.
- All of the standards in part 3 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b) and 21(5) to 21(6)

- The school has a rigorous approach to the safer recruitment of adults and exploring potential candidates' motives for wanting to work at Northcroft.
- The single central record contains all required information for appointed staff so far. There is a human resources team that supports the school with carrying out necessary pre-employment checks.
- The headteacher and chair of the proprietor have completed safer recruitment training.
- The school does not intend to use supply staff or volunteers.
- All of the standards in part 4 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(2) and 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The proposed building has been carefully designed in converting it into a fully functional school. Leaders are alert to pupils' sensory needs with classrooms not

overloaded with stimulus or information. This also includes the choice of paint colour to help pupils with autism feel settled and calm.

- The school spans two floors with four spacious classrooms and a computing room. One of the rooms will be designated for teaching science.
- There is plenty of natural light in rooms and all lighting and acoustics are appropriate.
- All toilets are private cubicles with wash basins for individual use only. Single-sex toilets are labelled throughout the school. Pupils will use the local leisure centre if they need a shower following physical activity.
- The temperature of the water is controlled to ensure that it is not too hot. Drinking water is available and clearly marked.
- A suitable medical room will cater for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils. The room is well designed and also has a toilet and washing facility within.
- There is a small courtyard for pupils to be outside in the fresh air. The school plans to use the local green areas and amenities for recreation.
- Hot meals will be served to all pupils and staff. A designated kitchen space will cater for food preparation. All required food safety, hygiene and standards requirements are in place.
- All of the standards in part 5 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1) to 32(1)(j), 32(2) to 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(2)(d), 32(3) to 32(4)(c)

- The school's website contains statutory policies and other information that is required by the standards.
- Parents will be able to request paper copies of policies and documents if needed.
- Reporting to parents about pupils' progress is considered within the school's curriculum and assessment policies and practices.
- All of the standards in part 6 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(a) to 33(k)

- The school's complaints policy is published on its website and outlines clearly the process and timescales to raise a concern.
- Records will be kept of any complaints received and what subsequent actions the school has taken.
- The proprietor demonstrates a strong understanding of handling and managing complaints.
- All of the standards in part 7 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- Both directors of the proprietor are qualified social workers with extensive experience and expertise working in residential childcare. They lead with passion and conviction

to improve the life chances of children. They also work with other professional bodies and share their expertise at a national scale. Furthermore, the chair of the proprietor is experienced in school governance, having previously been chair of governors at a local primary school which was judged good under Ofsted's education inspection framework.

- The proprietor has ensured that appointed senior leaders and staff have strong knowledge and skills to fulfil the vision for the school. This also includes how best the headteacher will lead across both schools of the proprietor.
- There is a careful plan for admitting more pupils gradually over time. In the first instance, the school expects to transfer eight secondary-aged pupils to Northcroft from the proprietor's other school. Leaders are adamant they will only steadily increase pupil numbers when it is in the best interests of all.
- A strength of the proprietor is its processes for quality assurance. It has already commissioned the local authority to provide school improvement support and challenge. There are clear mechanisms in place for the proprietor to fully hold school leaders to account for the educational performance of pupils.
- It is evident the proprietor fully understands its duties in continuing to meet the standards over time if this proposed school is approved to open.
- The proprietor will visit the school regularly during its first year of operation to check on the school's progress and to monitor pupils' education and welfare.
- All of the standards in part 8 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's accessibility plan fulfils leaders' duties under the Equality Act 2010. This will be available on the school's website. It includes pupils' access around the school site and the curriculum.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	150998
DfE registration number	869/6027
Inspection number	10364429

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent day school
Proprietor	Amegreen Education Limited
Chair	Rachel Redgwell
Headteacher	Alexandra Walsh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£56,000
Telephone number	01635 896 344
Website	www.northcroftschoo.co.uk
Email address	northcroft@amegreened.co.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	11 to 16	11 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	30	30

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	30
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	30
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	30
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	30

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	8
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this proposed school

- Northcroft School will be part of Amegreen Education Limited. Its two directors own Amegreen Children's Services which manages several children's homes in the south east of England. All of these children's homes are currently judged good or outstanding under Ofsted's social care inspection framework.
- Northcroft will be the proprietor's second school. Its first school, Haywards Farm, in Theale, Reading RG7 4AS, opened in October 2023. The proprietor also owns 'Stables Futures' which is an outdoor farm and learning centre. Its address is Simms Farm, Simms Lane, Mortimer Common, Reading RG7 2JP. Pupils will access some of their educational provision at this facility where appropriate.
- The proposed school is located just off Newbury's shopping town centre. The detached grade II listed building was formerly a day nursery.
- The school will admit secondary-aged pupils through key stages 3 and 4. All pupils will have an EHC plan, with a diagnosis of social, emotional and mental health needs and/or other associated difficulties. Pupils will attend full time and be placed by their home local authority.
- The headteacher will be in an executive role across both schools of the proprietor.
- The school does not intend to use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to determine if the school is likely to meet the standards if it is given permission to open.
- This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspection focused on compliance with the regulatory requirements of the standards, safeguarding procedures and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
- The lead inspector held discussions with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the chair of the proprietor body. He held telephone calls with two representatives from the local authority.
- The inspector visited all parts of the proposed school premises. He also looked at a wide range of documents and policies.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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