

Abbey Gardens School

The Albany, Beard Road, Bury St Edmunds IP32 6SA

Unique reference number (URN): 152428

Pre-registration inspection report:

17 April 2026

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards if it is registered

The purpose of this inspection was to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the proposed school's likely compliance with the independent school standards and associated requirements that are required for registration as an independent school.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

When we carry out pre-registration inspections of proposed independent schools, we report on the provider's likely compliance with part 8 of the independent school standards first. Under part 8, the proprietor is required to ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards consistently. The standard in part 8 is intended to ensure that the quality of leadership and management at the school is sufficient for that purpose.

The proprietor oversees many schools across the country. It plans to use its existing systems for governance and quality assurance in this school. These approaches suggest that leaders will keep a tight and well-informed grip on standards. For example, regular, data-led discussions across the group highlight areas such as safeguarding patterns, attendance changes or any rise in restrictive physical intervention. If data or leaders' insights highlight concerns, the proprietor body will deploy specialist teams to step in quickly and provide support to resolve issues early.

The proprietor has learned from challenges faced by the schools it has opened in the past. Some leaders and staff appointed to this school previously worked together in another of the proprietor's schools. They already understand the organisation's ethos, policies, systems and curriculum. Alongside the induction and

ongoing professional learning that leaders will provide, these staff are well placed to support pupils and to help new pupils and colleagues settle quickly.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the Department for Education (DfE) decides to register the provider as an independent school.

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Curriculum

The curriculum policy and schemes of work set out how pupils will study language, mathematics, science, technology, humanities, physical education and creative subjects through structured and well-sequenced teaching. For example, in food technology, pupils will learn fundamental cooking skills through dishes such as apple crumble and spaghetti bolognese, supported by individual workstations that should help them to focus on learning.

There are workable ways to ensure the curriculum is shaped around pupils' ages, aptitudes and special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders plan to use information from education, health and care (EHC) plans, alongside insight from therapeutic and clinical professionals, to identify the extra help pupils will need to access the curriculum successfully.

The personal, social and health education programme covers the required elements, including how pupils can care for their physical and mental health. The relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) policy is clear. It explains what parents and carers can withdraw their children from and what they cannot. Leaders plan to communicate closely with families and share lesson content in advance. The programme is designed so that statutory content is revisited over time and introduced in ways that match pupils' developmental stage. Life skills and citizenship further prepare pupils for adulthood by introducing everyday tasks such as booking medical appointments or loaning a book from the local library.

Pupils will learn about a wide range of careers and the pathways to these careers through further education and training. Leaders recognise that some pupils may limit their aspirations to roles they know. They therefore plan to broaden pupils' horizons through structured careers content and exposure to different professions. For example, pupils will meet visitors who represent varied career routes, including visitors with additional needs who have succeeded in their chosen fields, so pupils can see that many different futures are possible.

The curriculum and extra-curricular activities promote fundamental British values and should help to prepare pupils for modern Britain. For instance, pupils will take part in classroom elections and learn how local councils work to develop their

understanding of democracy and public institutions. Staff will be trained to teach political issues neutrally. They will help pupils to understand and accept why people hold different views.

Teaching

Teaching will be planned to help pupils understand new ideas securely and apply them with growing confidence. Teachers will use information from EHC plans and from therapeutic and clinical professionals to shape how they introduce and explain new learning. Lessons will be designed to be calm and predictable, with clear routines that help pupils settle quickly and focus on their work. Teachers will break learning into manageable steps and use practical models, examples and guided practice so pupils can grasp key ideas. They will check understanding throughout lessons and adjust their explanations or pace when pupils need more time or a different approach. For example, in RSHE, some pupils may learn best through stories, pictures or short role-play activities. Others may deepen their understanding through structured discussion and questioning. Leaders expect teaching to build pupils' knowledge securely across subjects and prepare them well for the qualifications they will work towards.

Assessment

Leaders have set out suitable systems for assessing pupils' starting points and tracking their progress. They plan to use cognitive tests and screening tools to understand what pupils know and can do when they join the school. Ongoing assessment will be regular and purposeful. Teachers will check pupils' understanding in lessons, give clear feedback and revisit key ideas so pupils can strengthen their knowledge. Leaders also plan to review pupils' progress across subjects to ensure they are working towards the most appropriate qualifications.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

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

Leaders have planned clear opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils will have regular chances to reflect on their feelings in line with the behaviour policy. They will celebrate their own achievements and notice the achievements of others. Moral development will come through simple scenarios that help pupils think about fairness, honesty and the effect of someone's actions. Social development will be strengthened through structured sports and games at breaktimes. Mobile phones will be locked away for the whole school day. This will help encourage pupils to talk to each other, build friendships

and practise people skills such as taking turns, agreeing rules and sorting out small disagreements. Cultural development will be promoted through planned encounters with music, art and traditions from different communities. These arrangements show a deliberate approach to helping pupils develop empathy, respect and a sense of belonging in a diverse society.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Safeguarding

The safeguarding policy follows statutory guidance. It sets out responsibilities clearly, such as the lead person for safeguarding, checking online safety systems, guiding staff on how to record concerns and making sure every decision is written down. Leaders plan to reaffirm their expectations about how staff should raise and report concerns so that speaking up becomes a normal part of daily practice and no behaviour or comment that may point to a wider worry is overlooked. The training that will support this culture is well planned. It will include a detailed induction, twice-daily team briefings and weekly supervision for safeguarding leads with colleagues from other schools in the group. Leaders plan to be persistent in keeping pupils safe by keeping cases under review and escalating concerns with statutory partners when needed.

Behaviour and supervision of pupils

The behaviour policy explains how the school's calm and supportive approach will work in daily routines. It places a strong focus on respectful relationships and clear routines. Leaders will help staff create positive behaviour support plans. These will show, for example, the steps staff should take when a pupil reaches crisis point. The aim being to ensure situations can be calmed safely. Staff will record any serious incidents or use of restrictive physical intervention on the school's incident-logging system. Leaders can support pupils and staff to repair the situation, keep parents and carers informed and check for patterns that may need action.

Leaders have thought carefully about supervision and pupil-to-staff ratios. Pupils will be taught in classes of six, with one teacher and one teaching assistant. Leaders will review these arrangements as part of admissions and after any serious incident to ensure a suitable level of supervision. Day to day, staff will stay alert during busy times, such as arrival and departure, so that pupils are not left without support.

Anti-bullying

The anti-bullying policy gives a clear definition of bullying. It recognises that some pupils may be more vulnerable. For example, those with trauma histories or pupils who find it hard to read social cues or speak up when something feels wrong. It sets out practical steps to prevent bullying, such as mentoring, assemblies, curriculum work, anonymous reporting and regular pupil surveys. The policy also explains how staff will respond to incidents in a calm and restorative way so that pupils can repair relationships and feel safe again. When a parent or carer raises a concern, staff will speak with the pupils involved, help them rebuild trust where possible and keep families informed about the actions taken. They will ensure all staff stay alert through daily briefings and any needed changes. For example, amendments to seating plans or increased staff supervision at social times.

Health and safety, fire and first aid

The health and safety policy sets out clear procedures for accidents, hazardous substances, manual handling and lone working. It gives staff a clear framework to follow. Leaders will carry out routine checks and upload evidence to the online compliance platform so that any issues are picked up quickly. Staff will act straight away when they spot a hazard. They will make the area safe, report it to leaders and record it in the maintenance book so that repairs and follow-up actions happen promptly.

The fire safety arrangements include a full fire risk assessment, clear evacuation routes, working alarms and regular drills. This means that pupils and staff will know exactly what to do in case of emergency. Leaders will record drill times, check that fire marshals complete their sweep of the building and keep logs up to date so that routines stay sharp. Ahead of this inspection, leaders completed all remedial actions set out in the fire risk assessment. This includes improving signage and making sure visitors know the evacuation procedure.

The procedures for first aid are set out clearly in the health and safety policy. Medicines will be stored securely in the medical room, checked regularly and given by trained staff, with two adults signing the medical book to show that the right medicine was given to the right pupil. First-aid equipment, including the defibrillator, will be checked and maintained so that it is ready to use. All incidents will be recorded. Staff will receive regular training to make sure safe practice is consistent across the school.

Admissions and attendance

Leaders plan to use an electronic system that prompts staff about the information that must be included on the admissions register, helping them keep accurate and up-to-date records. The same system will record attendance using the full range of

national codes and produce reports that help staff spot patterns early. Leaders also draw on successful practice from another school in the group, using strong pastoral support, enrichment and trusted relationships to help pupils build confidence and develop regular attendance over time.

Risk assessment

The health and safety policy contains a clear and detailed section on risk assessments. It explains that staff must work proactively to spot hazards and respond quickly when a near miss or incident shows that a risk was not reduced well enough. It sets out the areas that need risk assessment, such as off-site visits and lone working. Through induction and training, staff will learn how to notice risks and how to follow agreed control measures. They will use pupil-specific plans that give clear steps for keeping each child safe. Twice-daily briefings will give leaders a chance to share updates so that all staff stay alert to new information and changing needs.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

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

The recruitment checks made on staff, supply staff and the proprietor

Leaders have clear arrangements to ensure the required pre-employment and vetting checks are completed for the proprietor body, staff and any supply staff.

All members of the proprietor body have undergone the required suitability checks, such as confirming their identity and checking they are not prohibited from taking part in the management of a school. The chair of the proprietor body ensures that these checks are completed before any new member takes up their role.

For leaders and staff already appointed, and for those leaders plan to recruit, all checks follow statutory guidance. These include criminal records checks and checks to ensure individuals are not prohibited from teaching. Leaders also look at a person's social-media presence to gain further assurances about their suitability.

If leaders do go on to use supply staff, they understand the actions they will need to take. For example, they will request written confirmation from the agency that all required checks have been completed. No supply worker will start until all information has been received to assure leaders that the staff member is deemed safe to work with pupils.

The single central record of these recruitment checks

Leaders keep a single central record that meets statutory requirements. It is stored electronically and is up to date. It includes all required entries for the proprietor body, governors, staff, contractors and supply staff. It shows the dates of each check, the evidence seen and the person who carried out the check. This provides a clear and reliable record of the school's approach to safer recruitment.

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Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Toilet and washing facilities, water supply, changing accommodation and showers

The toilets are self-contained, unisex rooms, each with a toilet and wash basin behind a full-height, lockable door. The hot water does not present a scalding risk. This is because leaders ensure the maximum temperature is set at a safe level and check regularly to ensure it remains within safe limits.

Leaders ensure all drinking-water taps are clearly labelled. Pupils can use the water fountains to drink directly from the spout or to refill reusable bottles using the automatic chilled-water dispenser.

Each shower sits in its own fully enclosed, lockable room with a wash basin, so pupils can wash and change privately rather than in shared spaces.

Medical room and accommodation for pupils' therapy needs

The medical room holds a full range of first-aid supplies. Staff will secure medication in a lockable cabinet or lockable fridge. The room includes a bed and wash basin. The medical room is located opposite a toilet, giving pupils immediate access to all essential facilities.

Specialist spaces show how leaders have planned thoughtfully for pupils' therapeutic needs. The therapy room is calm and private. It will give pupils a safe space to access speech and language work, occupational therapy or counselling. Close by, the immersive reality space will offer a soothing environment for pupils who experience sensory overload. It will also provide an engaging tool that therapists and staff may use to enrich learning and therapeutic programmes.

Ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils

The school sits on a clean, well-kept site where leaders have prioritised safety and security. New, higher fencing gives the grounds a purposeful, protective feel and helps keep the site secure. Ramps, wide corridors and clear routes make the building easy for everyone to move around. Fire exits and assembly points are clearly marked and correctly positioned. Hazardous materials are stored securely and compliance checks kept up to date, giving the whole site a sense of readiness and reassurance.

Lighting and acoustic conditions

Lighting across the school matches the purpose of each space. Classrooms, for example, have large windows overlooking the school grounds. This will give pupils bright, natural light for learning. In contrast, the immersive reality space will stay dark so the projector can show images and videos clearly. All internal, external and emergency lighting is compliant with the required lighting standards. Acoustic panels on the ceilings should help to reduce noise so that classrooms and other learning spaces remain quiet, focused places to work.

Outdoor space

There is ample outdoor space for the number of pupils the school plans to admit. Pupils will access green space for exercise, a fenced multi-use games area for sport and an outdoor gym. They will also benefit from a dedicated zone for horticulture and outdoor learning.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

Part 6. Provision of information

Leaders have prepared a school website that is ready to go live if the DfE approves the school's registration. It brings together all required information, including the school's contact details, leadership and governance information, the school's aims and ethos and all key policies. Policies, including those for safeguarding, behaviour, admissions, curriculum and complaints, are written in jargon-free language to make them more accessible. The website will also include inspection reports and the number of formal complaints from the previous year.

Regarding pupils' achievement and entitlements, parents and carers will receive written reports about their child's progress. Leaders have set up systems for sharing information with placing authorities, including taking part in reviews of education, health and care plans. They will keep transparent financial records that show how each pupil's funding has been used.

As they did on this inspection, leaders will make all required information available to inspectors on request.

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Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The complaints policy sets out a clear three-stage process with firm timescales. It states that the final panel will include three people, with at least one independent of the school. Also, it allows for complainants to be accompanied to any panel meeting. The policy requires detailed written records of each complaint, the actions taken and the outcome. It also states that the findings will be shared with all relevant parties and kept on site for review. Finally, leaders plan to publish the number of formal complaints from the previous year on the school website. It suggests leaders will maintain a transparent and well-structured approach to handling concerns.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

The school's accessibility plan

The accessibility plan meets Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. It clearly sets out actions to improve curriculum access, the physical environment and access to information for disabled pupils. For example, it includes specific measures to ensure smooth transitions through pre-admission meetings and clinical liaison. The plan also assigns responsible individuals, timescales and success criteria. It shows a structured and proactive approach to meeting the relevant duties.

The proprietor has ensured that standards are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the provider as an independent school.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. Inspectors checked the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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Following our updated inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke to leaders during the inspection, including the operations director, regional director, new school lead, safeguarding governor, headteacher and clinical lead.

Abbey Gardens School is located at one site: The Albany, Beard Road, Bury St Edmunds IP32 6SA.

Acorn Care and Education Limited will act as the proprietor of the proposed school. It sits within the Outcomes First Group, which oversees a wide network of independent special schools and other independent schools.

The proprietor plans for the school to cater for pupils with a range of needs, including cognitive and learning needs, speech, language and communication needs, hearing impairment, autism, and social, emotional and mental health needs. The provider also seeks to cater for children who are looked after by the local authority. All pupils will have an EHC plan, and local authorities will commission school placements.

The school does not have plans to use alternative provision.

Lead inspector

Daniel Short	His Majesty's Inspector
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Team inspector

Bessie Owen	His Majesty's Inspector
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About this proposed school

Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Headteacher	Kay Park
Type of school	Other independent special school
Capacity	48

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	Provider's proposal: 48
Number of part-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	Provider's proposal: 0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities on roll	Provider's proposal: 48
Number of pupils on roll who have an education, health and care plan, or who are looked after by a local authority	Provider's proposal: 48
Age range of pupils	Provider's proposal: 11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Provider's proposal: Mixed
Total hours operating as a school per week	Provider's proposal: 26
Total hours of teaching provided per week	Provider's proposal: 26
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Provider's proposal: 15
Number of part-time teaching staff	Provider's proposal: 0
Annual fees for day pupils	£57,680 to £87,680
Email address	Kay.Park@abbeygardensschool.co.uk

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