

Inspection of The Amicus School

The Coach House, Arundel Road, Fontwell, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 0SX

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

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?

This school is designed and adapted to fit its pupils. Their needs are paramount. Pupils are encouraged to express themselves. The climate is carefully created to allow this to happen. But all this does not stop adults from having high expectations. It is an aspirational and hopeful school. Pupils are given a safe space to grow and learn.

Pupils' love of Amicus is shown by them hardly ever missing school. For pupils who have previously often been out of school, this is really impressive. The support and preparations for pupils to join or leave involve the whole community and show genuine care and compassion.

Adults understand that pupils' behaviour is a way of trying to say something. Adults say aloud their thoughts about the behaviour they notice. This helps pupils to understand some of their own feelings and start to find different ways to communicate them. When appropriate, pupils are encouraged to make the right choices.

Care is taken to ensure the reasons for any hurtful language or actions from other pupils are understood and addressed. Pupils are helped to consider things that they may sometimes do to push others away, as well as recognise possible reasons for the actions of others.

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

The school's distinctive ethos and approach run deeply through everything that it does. The curriculum is well designed to support this. Pupils' personal, emotional and social development are prioritised. The academic emphasis is on communication, literacy, numeracy and life skills. The starting point is always checking carefully what pupils already know and can do.

The sense of common purpose across the school is striking. Every aspect of the promotion of pupils' personal development comes about as a result of careful and deliberate thought. This means that the strategies used are meaningful and stand the best chance of genuinely making a difference. It is an incredibly warm and friendly community. The mutual support between and among staff and pupils is plain to see.

The proprietor and headteacher's clarity of vision is reflected in the day-to-day running of the school and the potentially life-changing difference it makes. Leaders are aspirational for pupils but in a skilled and carefully considered way. Strong support for staff is an equally embedded part of routine practice.

Leaders constantly strive to remove barriers to accessing everything the school offers. Drawing on relevant expertise, advisory board members support the

proprietor and provide helpful challenge to school leaders. All of the independent school standards are met.

Teachers know individual pupils incredibly well. The class groupings, learning environment and approaches are all tailored to pupils' particular needs. The school's therapeutic approach is always prioritised, but there is a clear focus on academic learning whenever pupils are ready. Close teamwork between adults offers invaluable support for the benefit of all pupils.

Individual education, health and care plans form a central strand of the offer for each pupil. Staff identify how to help pupils take small steps towards their longer-term goals. Regular and thorough reviews help evaluate what is going well and where adjustments need to be made.

The importance of phonics in learning to read and spell is well understood. Teachers follow the school's phonics programme but adapt it for each pupil. The school fosters positive attitudes toward reading. Some pupils are particularly enthusiastic about the inviting library, housed in a cabin that a former pupil helped to build as part of his work experience. The librarian enthusiastically encourages a joy of books and, with other staff, broadens the horizons of new books pupils might try. Staff make important and sensitive choices about appropriate texts to introduce to pupils.

Across subjects over time, pupils have a range of enriching experiences. They learn interesting and useful things. Teachers take care to build on what has previously been taught. However, there is less clarity about the end points that the curriculum in each subject is building towards.

The school goes out of its way to nurture, develop and celebrate pupils' talents and interests, from football to nail art. This is hugely significant for some pupils because it better equips them to access activities beyond the school, often for the first time.

The understanding and acceptance that all people are different focuses first on pupils' own sense of identity. The curriculum then extends pupils' experience to the world beyond their immediate community, including a range of cultures, foods and festivals.

Pupils typically engage in the planned activities. Some pupils show sustained focus and concentration. Any disruptions are managed carefully to ensure that the impact on others is limited as far as it possibly can be. Staff unanimously feel well supported in responding to behaviour.

Like everything else in this school, work experience and careers guidance is individualised and worthwhile. It takes account of pupils' aspirations and interests. For many, developing a better understanding of what it means to be a good citizen is an essential part of this. Relationships and sex education are very carefully planned on an individual basis and agreed between professionals, parents and carers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff convey a deep understanding of safeguarding within this specialist setting. Adults are mindful and vigilant of current, contextual and historic safeguarding matters. Notably, they are also acutely aware of the need to anticipate and plan for future concerns. A deliberate approach to creating a climate and culture where pupils are able to make a disclosure, and staff are prepared, is well established.

The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and closely follows the latest statutory guidance. Risk assessments are detailed and kept under constant review. They pay close attention to the views of pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There is not always enough clarity about the end points towards which the curriculum in individual subjects is aiming. Careful account is rightly taken of pupils' needs and starting points. However, curriculum decisions leaders and teachers make do not always focus enough on where they are trying to get pupils to, so sometimes learning has less purpose and direction. Leaders should ensure that there are clearly defined and ambitious end points in each subject and an emphasis on the most important things for pupils to learn and remember to be able to reach them.

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	131504
DfE registration number	938/6265
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10232300
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Rebecca Newton
Headteacher	Leeha Watney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£101,400
Telephone number	01243 544 107
Website	www.theamicuscommunity.com
Email address	leeha.watney@theamicuscommunity.com
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 May 2018

Information about this school

- The Amicus School is an independent special school. It is part of a therapeutic community accredited by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It caters for pupils who have complex social, emotional and/or mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and have suffered significant trauma in their early lives. Pupils are placed at the school by local authorities.
- The school does not use alternative provisions.
- The school's previous full standard inspection was in May 2018. Since then, there have been two further inspection visits to consider requested increases to the school's capacity. These inspections, known as material change inspections, took place in June 2020 and September 2022.

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

- The lead inspector held extensive discussions with the headteacher and proprietor. Inspectors also met other leaders and a member of the advisory board.
- To help understand the quality of education provided, the inspection team carried out focused activities in relation to certain subjects (deep dives). Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and personal, social and health education. This involved discussing the curriculum for these subjects with leaders and teachers, visiting lessons, speaking with pupils and looking at their work.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents and records relating to the independent school standards. They explored the school's work to keep pupils safe with leaders and staff.
- The inspection team took account of the views of pupils, parents and staff, including all submitted responses to Ofsted's online surveys. The lead inspector spoke with two parents by telephone.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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