Inspection of Arbour House School

15-17 Glendinning Avenue, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 7QF

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	**Outstanding**
The quality of education	**Outstanding**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Outstanding**
Personal development	**Outstanding**
Leadership and management	**Outstanding**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has the highest expectations and aspirations for pupils. As a result, pupils thrive. The school values the interactions it has with pupils. It works creatively to ensure pupils are always learning. The school's sites are close to amenities such as libraries, shops and sports areas. Pupils spend time in the community developing essential skills for living. Considering what pupils already know, teachers have high expectations for what pupils can do. As a result, pupils develop well, both socially and academically.

The school is calm and respectful. If pupils struggle, staff use their bespoke knowledge of each pupil to support them effectively. Teachers help pupils manage their friendships and social interactions. Staff are vigilant to make sure there are many ways in which pupils can communicate their worries to them.

The school community enjoys celebrating the pupils' accomplishments and achievements, for example, awards events and open days for parents and carers. As the school grows, pupils engage in decisions which shape their school. School council representatives from both sites meet to talk about their school. Older pupils visit the lower school to work with younger pupils such as sharing cooking skills. Pupils relish these events.

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

The school has designed a broad and rich curriculum. This helps pupils learn the important skills and knowledge they need next for their development. Pupils who join the school have often missed significant amounts of learning, or they are in the earlier stages of their formal learning. Through carefully broken-down checks of what pupils understand and can do, the school is precise in identifying the next steps pupils need to know. The school closely tracks how well pupils learn new skills.

The school helps pupils to master life skills such as managing cutlery or handling money. Through the well-designed 'creative' curriculum, pupils try new things. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Teachers are highly skilled in understanding the needs and diagnoses of the pupils they work with. They expertly adapt their approaches to meet the needs of pupils. The school reviews pupils' targets and updates them in a timely way to reflect their progression.

Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read, learn the letters and sounds they do not know. Teachers teach reading in creative ways so that pupils develop their reading skills. As a result, pupils improve their reading. The school ensures pupils understand the importance of reading and enjoying books. All pupils walk to the local library once a week or use the well-furbished school library. The books teachers select to read and share engage and interest pupils.

Prior to joining the school, many pupils have had time out of school or had negative experiences of education. Once pupils complete their transition, the school expects

them to attend school regularly and full-time. It works with families to support pupils doing this. As a result, pupils attend very well. They enjoy coming to their school.

The school's programme for pupils' personal development has been exceptionally implemented throughout the curriculum. Pupils experience a plethora of meaningful and well-considered experiences, visits and trips. They work with the community to develop a community garden. Others raise money for charities they have engaged with or learn to sail. These experiences help pupils to develop their understanding of others and to explore their interests.

The school makes sure pupils have a secure knowledge of how to look after themselves through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. The school regularly teaches about the risks where pupils may be especially vulnerable, for example learning to keep themselves safe online. The school shares this with parents so they can work together to share this important learning. Pupils learn about sex education, change and puberty so that the key information is meaningful and relevant for them.

The life-skills curriculum and an ambitious careers programme prepare pupils ambitiously for their next steps. Pupils visit post-16 colleges, careers fairs and organisations. Pupils enjoy work experience opportunities tailored to their interests and ambitions. As a result, pupils follow a variety of pathways such as mechanics, animation or hospitality.

Leaders have planned and resourced the school sites to a very high standard. The resources, spaces and design of the school provide a respected environment for pupils to flourish and develop. Leaders ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met fully. The school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The proprietor has a wealth of experience in social care. It supports the school with its knowledge and expertise in this sector. This strengthens the actions of the school to put the welfare and happiness of pupils at the heart.

High-quality professional development is highly respected by the staff. Some support staff have been inspired to train successfully as teachers. The programme of support and development means staff continually extend their expertise in working with pupils. The proprietors and the school leaders create a culture of support, care for welfare and aspiration, which the staff and parents value.

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	143642
DfE registration number	838/6039
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10374879
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Potens
Chair	Nicki Stadames
Headteacher	Julie Perks
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,761
Telephone number	01305781400
Website	www.potens-uk.com
Email address	arbouradmin@potens-education.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 to 19 May 2022

Information about this school

- Arbour House is an independent special school. It caters for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, primarily autism spectrum disorder and learning difficulties.
- Since the last previous standard inspection in May 2022, the school has had a material change inspection. This took place in March 2023.
- The school is registered for 60 pupils between the ages of six and 18.
- The school opened its second site in September 2023. The original site in Weymouth is the lower school and pupils transition to the Dorchester site for upper school when they are ready to do so.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- All pupils who attend have an EHC plan. Two local authorities commission places.
- The school has appointed a head of school for each site and the headteacher has oversight of the whole school.
- Arbour House School is located at Glendinning House, Glendinning Avenue, Weymouth DT4 7QF and Maen House, Maen Gardens, Dorchester DT1 1QQ.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of each school and with the chief operating officer (COO) of Potens. The COO is a member of the proprietor body and the school's chair of governors. The lead inspector also held a discussion with the governor for safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, mathematics, science and PSHE. 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.

- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority who commissions places from the school.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils, as well as spending time in lessons and observing social times.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors toured the school site and scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence to check on the statutory requirements of the standards, including how well leaders ensure that pupils' health, safety and welfare are protected.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils and staff. They also considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.

Inspection team

Rachel Hesketh, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jyotsna Paranjape	Ofsted Inspector

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