

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Park House School

February 2023

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School's Details

School	Park House Schoo	ol		
DfE number	874/6035			
Address	Park House Schoo	ol		
	Wisbech Road			
	Thorney			
	Peterborough			
	Cambridgeshire			
	PO6 0SA			
Telephone number	01733 271187			
Email address	office@parkhouse	eschool.	co.uk	
Headteacher	Dr Tom Crossland			
Chair of proprietors	Ms Beth Crosslan	d		
Proprietor	Park House Schoo	ol Ltd		
Age range	6 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	23			
	Pre-formal	9	Semi-formal	9
	Formal	5		
Inspection dates	7 to 9 February 20	023		

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1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Park House School is a small independent co-educational day school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). It was opened in February 2005. The school is accommodated in a large private house and a nearby former chapel, with access to adjacent public playing fields in the village of Thorney, Cambridgeshire. The school comprises three sections: pre-formal for pupils aged 7 to 16 years; semiformal for pupils aged 13 to 16 years; and formal for pupils aged 13 to 19 years. It is owned and governed by the proprietors. Since the previous inspection, the school appointed a new chair of proprietors in October 2022 and a new principal in January 2023.

What the school seeks to do

1.2 The school aims to provide its pupils with a broad, balanced and individualised curriculum which enables them to gain appropriate knowledge, skills and strategies to ensure a successful and effective transition to adulthood. Where appropriate, possible and practical, the school endeavours to reintegrate children into a mainstream educational setting.

About the pupils

1.3 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds, mostly from families living in Cambridgeshire and neighbouring counties. All 23 pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. They require support for ASD and other disabilities and learning difficulties, including complex and severe challenging behaviours and social communication difficulties. The ability profile of the pupils is wide but is generally below average. No pupil has English as an additional language.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Additionally, this visit serves as a material change visit to assess the school's proposal to increase pupil capacity from 23 to 28.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> Regulations 2014.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 Pupils take GCSE examinations at a time that is appropriate for them. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education at a developmentally appropriate level. Generally, younger pupils receive relationships education and older pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1-4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 - Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 - Provision of information

- 2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.
- 2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.
- 2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change request

Summary of findings

3.1 Welfare, health and safety policies and procedures meet the standards. Arrangements to offer additional placements for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans indicate that the standards will continue to be met with the proposed increase in numbers. Existing accommodation is suitable for the proposed increase. The school meets the standards for recruitment of staff and has either already employed new staff or plans to employ new staff as pupil numbers increase. The school has produced suitable proposals to show how the anticipated increase in numbers will be effectively managed, so that the standards continue to be met.

Recommendation

3.2 It is recommended that the request to increase in school numbers from 23 to 28 is granted.

4. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

School name	National Curriculum name	
Pre-formal	Year 3 to Year 11	
Semi-formal	Year 9 to Year 11	
Formal	Year 9 to Year 14	

Key findings

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
 - Pupils make strong progress from their starting points and reach a level of achievement that fully reflects their potential.
 - Pupils across the school develop highly effective communication strategies that help promote their learning.
 - Pupils exhibit excellent attitudes in their approach to learning and make significant personal progress in their achievements in school and at home.
 - Older pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are highly developed in their chosen areas of learning.
- 4.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils are happy, confident and self-aware; they are proud of their achievements.
 - Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and increasingly take responsibility for their own actions.
 - Pupils display a genuine concern, compassion and social responsibility for each other.
 - Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

Recommendation

- 4.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
 - Ensure that all pupils consolidate their learning and, where developmentally appropriate, receive clearer guidance on what needs to be achieved next.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 4.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 4.5 Taking account of their widely differing starting points, data show that almost every pupil makes rapid progress. The proportion making and exceeding expected progress is high. This trend has been maintained and improved on since the previous inspection. Leaders at all levels, including the proprietorial board of directors, have a clear picture of pupils' strengths and areas for development. Their support for pupils and commitment to provide excellent teaching sustain high-quality learning in a school that is always looking to improve still further. All of the parents who responded to the preinspection questionnaire agreed that teaching, including any online provision, enables their child to make progress, and all pupils agreed that their teachers are supportive. Pupils follow pathways appropriate to their learning needs. Most pupils gain award scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) awards in modules such as horticulture, animal care, stable management, meal preparation and cookery. For many these include independence and life-skills focused courses such as getting ready to go out, using transport and food hygiene. More able pupils achieve GCSE and functional skills awards in English, mathematics and science or BTEC in media and business. Pupils develop their skills and understanding because they know what they are learning on a daily and weekly basis because all staff have a detailed knowledge of pupils' progress based on their education health care plans (EHCPs). However, not all staff use the recently introduced tracking and assessment system effectively enough to ensure that all pupils are challenged to make the same consistently rapid progress.
- 4.6 Pupils develop excellent communication skills, especially in speaking and listening. They make progress from pre-formal non-verbal communication to formal groupwork where they are able to analyse, discuss, justify, and express opinions. For example, whilst older pupils were working on An Inspector Calls, they ably discussed the complex social themes of the play, critiquing the playwright and justifying their opinions with confidence. Pupils develop their communication skills effectively because professionals such as speech and occupational therapists play a key part. For example, pupils engaged purposefully during acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), accepting and tolerating uncomfortable feelings, exploring core values and promoting psychological flexibility and well-being. Younger pupils use a range of communication techniques extremely well. These help pupils to remain or become calm, understand events and express their needs and preferences. They make excellent progress in reading because staff consistently teach them to recognise symbols, shapes, letters and words. Older pupils demonstrate the systematic process of how to pronounce, read and write new and complex words. They capably demonstrated drama skills through their ability to act out scenes from Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde during drama lessons. Pupils write detailed analytical essays on texts they are reading. For example, some drafted more than 200 words of prose after considering both sides of an argument as part of a task to write a hotel review.
- 4.7 Pupils develop positive and excellent attitudes to their learning. This has a significant impact on their progress. They stay focused and motivated to do well. Younger pupils settle quickly to each new activity and show high levels of engagement. Those who are developmentally ready develop successful interactions with their classmates to share, play and enjoy a book together. Older pupils appreciate the relative freedoms of the learning environment in the chapel building. They listen attentively to instructions and show consideration and respect to others who are often working on different material or at a different level.
- 4.8 Younger pupils make significant progress from exhibiting anxiety and aggressive behaviour to becoming much calmer and being able to regulate their own behaviour. As a result they begin to grow in confidence to engage with personal achievements in school and at home, for example developing less self-injurious behaviour, being able to spend more time without direct physical adult support or having the confidence to use the toilet independently. Those who could not participate in mealtimes start to eat at home as a family group. Older pupils take on daily responsibilities for feeding and caring for the school chickens. Pupils have successfully created a series of ten outings planned by pupils.

- These include walking and mapping a route and going into local towns with a budget. Several participate in DofE and complete work experience in dog grooming, stable care or volunteer in the local café. Other pupils are now able to cook independently at home or swim up to 100 lengths a week.
- 4.9 Pupils demonstrate excellent progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding from their individual low starting points in English, communication, mathematics and a range of individual topics which develop skills to support independence. Younger pupils learn the sounds and names of letters and words about plants. Other pupils made a model of a story communicating this through symbols. Pupils' horticultural work with plant pots involved talking with an adult about the shapes and sizes of the pots and so practising mathematical and communication skills. Older pupils confidently used litmus paper to test for chlorine and a squeaky pop to test for hydrogen as products in an experiment on the electrolysis of sodium chloride in water. Displays show excellent levels of engagement in art, design and home economics. A small minority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire did not agree that their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons. Some pupils compare themselves to their siblings and struggle with understanding that they are on a different learning journey. Inspection evidence, including pupils who spoke to inspectors confirms this view. Many pupils are adept at the acquisition of life skills, such as ironing or cooking.
- 4.10 Pupils demonstrate excellent progress in numeracy relative to their starting points. Younger pupils use practical applications, such as counting capfuls and measuring spoonfuls. In a mathematics lesson, they were able to rote count and used positional language correctly to describe the location of an object in a series of photographs, whilst others accurately sorted three-dimensional shapes according to their properties. Pupils reinforced their knowledge of three-dimensional shapes by excitedly investigating their properties when testing the ability of these different shapes to roll down a slope. Pupils calculated distance travelled and successfully communicated this information in metres, centimetres and millimetres. Older pupils can measure angles with a protractor, understand degrees in a circle and link this to compass point directions. They showed perseverance when solving equations before moving on to algebraic multiplication and division and making accurate calculations. They also engaged effectively in life skill numeracy tasks when determining costs for burgers, working out a correct portion price.
- 4.11 Pupils are very competent users of information and communication technology (ICT). Younger pupils, including those with severe learning difficulties, use a range of new technologies to communicate effectively with their teachers and key workers; for example the use of a clicker programme to express their thoughts in a written format. They confidently progress in their use of devices to enliven learning and make their curriculum even more exciting. For example, they used and experienced words and phrases through songs and movement using an electronic board effectively to stimulate their mind and reinforce their learning. Older pupils are adept at working independently, using software to read, comprehend, navigate and respond to tasks, for example when choosing to work through modules on football and related issues. They also used software to create a stage set model for the musical Wicked, complete with moving characters and closing curtains, and sang along to the music score. Pupils use these sessions productively as a way of discussing feelings and as part of therapy sessions. In English lessons, pupils successfully fulfil digital tasks such as using email, learning to use functions such as reply, reply all or forward. In mathematics, pupils use software to practise number bonds or complete more complex calculations. More able pupils download their own resources for tasks, source images, word process and work sequentially through ICT functional skills qualifications.
- 4.12 Pupils make excellent progress in their ability to study. Younger pupils successfully overcome anxieties, demonstrate engagement and respond well to the close questioning and support of teachers and key workers. Success is gradual and eventually leads to them developing their ability to take part in group lessons, working alongside other pupils for short periods as well as undertaking a range of independent tasks. They also begin to make choices about the study skills and resources they themselves want to use. For example, pupils worked independently on different tasks in mathematics groups and had to decide whether they require counting blocks or a number square. Older pupils can

concentrate on different subjects in the same physical space. Some progress their own study skills by doing research at home, for example to enhance their understanding of a set text in English. This enabled them to speak with confidence and start to synthesise the author's intentions regarding development of plot and themes.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 4.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.14 Pupils make excellent progress in all aspects of their personal development. Younger pupils quickly develop core skills of self-understanding, self-regulation, and the ability to express themselves whilst working alongside each other. They increasingly show self-confidence and positive self-esteem with the help of supportive adults and a tailored curriculum. This is a significant achievement given the anxieties and educational setbacks they have previously experienced. Older pupils develop lasting friendships, confidence and resilience when they transfer to formal education in the chapel building. They appreciate the freedom to express opinions, such as when discussing the quality of J.B. Priestley's writing of dialogue or his tendency towards stereotypes. Pupils talk confidently about their own initial limitations and levels of ability. They know what they can achieve now and are confident to ask about what they have to do in order to improve. They share with others the strategies they have adopted to fulfil their potential because disability, in themselves and others, is never seen as a barrier to learning.
- 4.15 Pupils develop an excellent understanding of when they have done well through praise and patient explanation. They respond positively to feedback on how to make their work better. Younger pupils listen to the options offered by adults, make a suitable choice, and then carry that through. They articulate confidently why the choices they make are the right ones. Older pupils are highly enthusiastic about the elements of the curriculum into which they have had an input and the life skills choices they have made linked to their interests. For example, pupils make informed choices about suitable work experience. They speak passionately about the school and appreciate their tailor-made curriculum. Pupils acknowledge the benefit of additional freedoms they are afforded on progressing to the formal education building. These include the responsibility to choose activities they complete and the challenges they want to set for themselves as well as the responsibility to make their own way to school and the sign in and sign out process of attendance. The additional responsibility for themselves helps them cope with initially uncomfortable topics in PSHE and relationships and sex education.
- 4.16 Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of spirituality because an ethos of tolerance and positive support for others pervades the school. Younger pupils make effective use of time out to reflect on how to regulate their behaviour. They quickly acquire coping strategies, using spaces such as the school gardens to help them become calm. Pupils use comforting spaces such as the chill-out room or the den effectively to regulate mood or be quiet. Pupils of all ages take daily walks round the site or further afield in the village, accompanied by an adult, which helps them with their emotion regulation. Others use mindfulness or yoga to cope with negative emotions. Different pupils have different special places, but there is somewhere all can go to feel better. Some prefer to lay on a hammock, light a fire; toasting marshmallows or cooking popcorn provide a transformative experience. Many pupils enjoy the natural world, such as the calming effect of horse riding, collecting eggs or feeding the school's chickens.
- 4.17 The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Younger pupils know how they should behave in certain class-based situations and were able to remind adults about classroom rules. They quickly adapt to behave considerately towards each other and respond very positively to small reminders about personal space and respect for others. Incidents of challenging behaviour are looked on as opportunities for learning how to behave in the future. As a result, pupils are quiet, behave sensibly and respect the emphasis on 'kind hands, kind words, kind feet'. Older pupils learn to forge outstanding relationships with classmates. They feel privileged to be allowed to transfer to the chapel building if they have proved

themselves worthy and are 'grown up'. A minority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire did not agree that pupils are kind and respect each other. Records show that there have been some recent incidents requiring reparation and support, particularly for pupils who felt themselves subject to intended unkindness. However, inspection evidence confirms that this was dealt with appropriately and sensitively.

- 4.18 The pupils' excellent social development is a huge strength of the school. It is incrementally gained throughout their time in school, but the change in pupils' ability to collaborate from entry to the time they leave is remarkable. Younger pupils use a variety of techniques such as a one-minute timer at the outset which gradually increases until they develop coping strategies and skills to work alongside their classmates. They rapidly make progress in learning to take turns and show patience with each other. Older pupils support each other very well. For example, in mathematics sessions they helped each other calculate angles and in a Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) session more able pupils supported classmates when constructing a French style clock. They collaborate naturally when sharing their cooking in life skills with chosen classmates who offer feedback in the form of evaluation sheets. Some pupils take on responsibilities such as during enterprise activities at the summer fair, special dress-up themed days and starting a dungeons and dragons club.
- 4.19 Throughout the school pupils and adults get on together very well, and classrooms are places of learning where pupils are always encouraged, and calmly challenge themselves, to do their best. All pupils complete activities well adapted for their ability and interests. They learn to confidently take part in walks around the village, including trips to the local library to choose their own reading books. Pupils contribute effectively to their school community by learning to make hot drinks for themselves and others and organising tuck shops. They advertise, source produce, cook and manage money as part of their financial learning whilst providing a service to others. Pupils also have responsibilities for feeding the hens and collecting eggs which they use in their cooking. Older pupils increasingly engage with the local community by visiting the abbey for community festivals or learning about the history of the area by meeting the village's museum curator. Pupils also organised a recent fundraising initiative in aid of the Macmillan charity by holding a coffee morning for local people. The pupils display high levels of tolerance and acceptance of each other and the range of diverse difficulties they face.
- 4.20 Younger pupils appreciate the individual learning spaces provided for them and gradually begin to share learning environments, getting on well with their classmates. They initially learn effectively alongside each other and start to collaborate effectively, showing great respect and tolerance. There is certainly a high level of tolerance shown towards those who are struggling emotionally, and an understanding of their different needs. Pupils seem to give each other space intuitively when required. All of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people and all of the pupils agreed that the schools teaches them how to build positive relationships and friendships. Pupils show an understanding of other faits when they celebrate Diwali and Chinese New Year and the celebration of Christingle in the local abbey. The latter was a special emotional opportunity for some pupils when they held their own Christingle candles.
- 4.21 Pupils are happy learners and feel safe, secure and valued by all staff. They successfully demonstrate their understanding of how to stay safe in a variety of situations ranging from personal hygiene to online safety. Pupils know how to identify and avoid unsafe situations. They practise this in the community, for instance in crossing the road or behaving appropriately in supermarkets and in the street. The pupils gain a good understanding of how to keep safe through their preparation for work experience and longer periods of vocational training outside school. They approach practical situations such as horse riding in a thoughtful and careful way. All of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that the school provides a safe environment to learn and a very large number of pupils agreed that school is a safe place to be. Pupils understand about healthy eating and how to use the cooker safely, wearing suitable protective clothing and applying basic hygiene and safety measures effectively to prepare vegetables.

Inspection Evidence 14

5. Inspection Evidence

5.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of proprietors and a group of proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Desmond Dunne Reporting inspector

Mrs Claire Hewitt Accompanying reporting inspector (Former head, GSA school)

Mr Ben Edwards Compliance team inspector (Head of department, HMC school)

Mrs Carolyn Moss Team inspector (Headteacher, ISA school)

Mrs Pamela Hutley Team inspector (Former head, ISA school)