

Doucecroft School

Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex CO6 3QL

Unique reference number (URN): 115426

Progress monitoring inspection report:

3 March 2026

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

At its most recent inspection, the school was judged to not meet all of the independent school standards and associated requirements.

The purpose of this inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

When we carry out progress monitoring inspections of independent schools, we report on the school'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.

At the standard inspection, the quality of delivery of the curriculum was not effective enough. At the time of the previous progress monitoring inspection, two new members of the leadership team had joined the school. This was intended to increase capacity to support staff to improve practice. At that inspection, this improvement was at a very early stage.

In the Department for Education (DfE)'s evaluation of the school's action plan in February 2026, it was found that the proprietor had clear plans for how to use the extended

leadership team to drive up standards. However, the monitoring of these actions needed to be more precise, with clearer timelines.

Prior to the previous monitoring inspection, the school had been through a period of turbulence and this has continued. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have both left, with an interim headteacher leading the school through January and February. A significant number of other staff have also left and been replaced. The new substantive headteacher had been in post for fewer than 2 weeks at the time of this monitoring inspection. The number of staffing changes have drastically slowed progress towards improving the teaching of the curriculum.

Leaders are developing a more collaborative approach to leadership, sharing responsibilities across a wider team, although this work is at the earliest of stages. They understand the strengths and areas for development. They plan to review the school action plan to reflect the changes to leadership and to reflect feedback from the DfE.

The proprietor's board of trustees plan to further develop their understanding of the best education practice, having taken on direct governance of the school in the last year.

The DfE asked for additional, previously met, standards to be checked at this inspection due to concerns that had been raised about pupils' behaviour and safety. It is clear that leaders have prioritised pupils' health, wellbeing and safety, so the related standards remain met. However, there are aspects of the school's work around behaviour, attendance and the site that leaders know need to be a continuing focus so that they do not deteriorate.

The related standards remain unmet.

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Teaching

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the quality of education provided was not of a high enough standard. Although expectations had been raised, the teaching was still not serving pupils well. There were weak choices being made about activities. Leaders had not checked that their revised teaching strategies had been implemented well.

The action plan stated that the leadership team would review curriculum plans and ensure that information about how well pupils have learned the curriculum is used to plan next steps. It stated that staff would receive professional development to raise their skills in how to plan, teach and assess.

The many changes of leaders and other staff have significantly slowed this work. There are some improvements, but these are not yet sufficient to bring about significant improvements.

More whole-class teaching is taking place, making sure that key teaching points are covered before pupils start the activity. However, this is not consistent and there are still times where pupils attempt an activity without having first been taught the knowledge or skills needed to complete the activity with success.

The school is making consistent use of visual timetables so that pupils know what is expected of them and when. The way that time is used still needs some consideration to ensure that the most is made of each school day.

More pupils are now reading regularly. There are books available in the classrooms and pupils read with staff more frequently. This is not fully embedded and part of daily routines in all classes. Staff are not yet skilled in identifying gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge and directly filling these.

Leaders have further reviewed the curriculum to make sure it is appropriate for pupils' various developmental pathways and to reflect the different ages of pupils. There is a rolling programme of topics to ensure that pupils at the very earliest stage of learning have different books and contexts to practise those skills in. This curriculum development will continue, ready for next academic year.

The related standards remain unmet.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Safeguarding

Pupils are kept safe. Thorough systems of safeguarding mean that all staff understand their role in this important work. Leaders have increased the frequency of safeguarding meetings so that they are further assured that all appropriate actions are undertaken.

There are occasions where staff have to use appropriate physical interventions to ensure pupils are safe and not endangering themselves or others. Staff are aware that there was an unusually high number of these incidents in November 2025. They have undertaken detailed analysis of situations and reflected on how they could reduce the number of these moving forward. The number of these interventions has reduced significantly since, but leaders are aware of the need to keep closely monitoring this and ensure staff remain trained to a high standard.

The standards in paragraphs 7(a) and (b) remain met.

Behaviour and supervision of pupils

Pupils generally behave well. Staff are well trained in the different approaches to dealing with behaviours that challenge. In most situations, they are able to re-engage pupils who are finding things difficult by providing a short break or a different activity. They have a wide range of sensory strategies they can use to help pupils regulate their emotions.

There are occasionally times, due to the high level of pupils' needs, where pupils become distressed and angry, resulting in damage to property or harm to others. When this happens, there is a comprehensive follow up of what happened and what to change moving forward to aim to prevent serious incidents recurring.

The school prioritises pupil safety and wellbeing. They ensure that all pupils are appropriately supervised at all times.

However, due to high staff absence rates and staff turnover, the staff team are stretched for time. They do not always have enough time to undertake some aspects of their roles as they are busy with pupils. Cover for breaks can be unpredictable and not well timed around key teaching moments. The number of enrichment opportunities beyond the core curriculum is also slightly reduced because of having to cover for absent colleagues. Leaders are actively recruiting staff and focusing on ways to increase staff attendance.

The standards in paragraphs 9 and 14 remain met.

Admissions and attendance

Overall attendance at the school is slightly below the national average for pupils in special schools.

Leaders are focused on increasing attendance. It is part of fortnightly dedicated meetings on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. They work closely with parents and carers on supporting pupils back to school. There are no significant themes in terms of the reasons for pupils' absence. When in school, pupils are generally happy to be there and pleased to see members of staff in the morning.

The standard in paragraph 15 remains met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils

Early in the academic year, there were a small number of incidents where pupils absconded from the school site. The records of these incidents show that pupils did not go far, and staff were always aware of their whereabouts and supported their safe re-entry to the school site. The number of these incidents has significantly reduced over time.

The school policy on pupils leaving the site without permission is detailed and thorough, with clear responsibilities outlined and how the school will ensure pupils remain as safe as possible.

Along with other staff changes, there have been changes to the site team. While there have been key roles not yet filled, those in post have prioritised cleaning pupil areas and making sure that toilets and key touch points such as tables and chairs are clean. They have ensured that paths are clear for movement around the site. Leaders place high importance on road safety around the school site. Leaders are aware that some other areas of the grounds and buildings have not been as well cared for recently. There are no current risks to pupils, but leaders know that there needs to be a renewed focus to ensure the site does not deteriorate further.

The standard in paragraph 25 remains met.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under sections 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, at the request of the registration authority for independent schools.

Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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.

The inspection was conducted without notice.

Inspectors spoke with members of the leadership team, teachers and support staff, pupils and the chief executive officer as the proprietor's representative.

Inspectors also considered the school’s safeguarding arrangements, including the single central record of pre-employment checks and whether the school’s safeguarding policy is available to parents and carers.

The previous standard inspection, at which the school was judged to not comply with the independent school standards, took place in February 2025. The standards were also not met at the progress monitoring inspection in September 2025. The action plan submitted to the DfE in December 2025 was considered acceptable with some modifications.

The inspector confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered for 3- to 19-year-olds.

Lead inspector

Tessa Holledge

His Majesty’s Inspector

About this school

Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Headteacher	Mr Daniel Lawrence
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
Capacity	100
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	87
Number of part-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	1
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Annual fees for day pupils	£65,607 to £95,610
Email address	doucecroft@autism-anglia.org.uk

Annex. Independent school standards and national minimum standards

Independent school standards that the school does not meet

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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