

Avonside School

23 Clothier Road, Bristol BS4 5PS

Inspection dates

16 October 2025

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g) to 2A(1), 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2) and 3 to 4

- The proprietor body has prepared an appropriate curriculum policy. This determines that pupils will experience a wide range of subjects. These include linguistic, mathematical, technical and vocational education. The school's ambitious curriculum aims to equip pupils with the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage with their learning and be ready for the next stage of education, training or employment.
- Whole-school policies detail support strategies and adaptations that staff will be required to implement to support pupils' learning and personal development. The special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) coordinator will organise appropriate academic and therapeutic support. They will use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, alongside the knowledge of pupils, their families and staff. The school will regularly review its work to help teaching and support staff accurately meet pupils' needs and aspirations.
- The school's curriculum policy sets out the scope of pupils' learning and how this will be organised. This is underpinned by schemes of work which anticipate pupils' SEND. The curriculum provides for pupils who have been absent from education for extended or repeated periods. For example, there is an appropriate focus on pupils securing their knowledge in early reading, writing, and mathematics. The school will also consider the support needed for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The long-term plans and schemes of work are coherent and sequenced towards clear end points. The school's plans for using assessment information indicate that staff will be aware of what pupils can do and know on entry. Academic and therapeutic staff will regularly review pupils' progress. They will use this to inform ongoing adaptations to the curriculum design, teaching and support programmes.
- In Year 9, pupils will be introduced to a wide range of vocational subjects. For example, pupils may choose to study hair and beauty, hospitality, construction or computing. In key stage 4, pupils will be given opportunities to complete functional skills, entry-level, GCSE and vocational qualifications as appropriate. Post-16 studies

will ensure students leave the school with relevant and useful employability skills, as well as qualifications in their chosen vocation.

- The proposed school's careers policy is likely to be implemented well. Pupils will benefit from regular access to impartial and up-to-date careers information, advice and guidance. Virtual and hands-on work experience will be available, alongside the school's vocational offer, to help prepare pupils for the world of work.
- Each subject curriculum identifies its contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Links between important curriculum knowledge are identified where appropriate, alongside opportunities for enrichment activities such as educational visits. Class and library books have been carefully selected to develop pupils' cultural capital and knowledge of neurodiversity. The curriculum includes ample opportunities to learn about the fundamental British values and equality.
- The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum covers a broad range of issues. This is likely to help pupils learn how to keep themselves safe as they prepare for adulthood. Leaders recognise that they may need to take an individualised approach to PSHE with some pupils to ensure that key messages are fully understood.
- The school's proposed relationship and sex education programme covers all the required areas of statutory guidance. Leaders plan to consult with parents and carers when the school opens. The proposed policy provides clear guidance to parents about the possibility of withdrawing their children from sex education.
- The proprietor will appoint appropriately qualified teachers and support staff. All new staff will complete a thorough induction programme. For example, professional development sessions focused on safeguarding, behaviour management, curriculum subject knowledge and adaptative teaching are planned to be included. Leaders will ensure that staff have a sufficient understanding of the proprietor's expectations before they begin working with pupils. Therefore, staff will have a secure knowledge of how to meet pupils' aptitudes and needs.
- The independent school standards (the standards) in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 5-5(d)(iii)

- Through the school's curriculum, personal development and behaviour policies, it aims to equip pupils with the self-esteem, confidence and knowledge to live a healthy life and make a positive contribution to life in modern Britain.
- Pupils will learn about peer pressure, consent and how to respond appropriately to these. They will learn about faiths and cultures that are different to their own and the significance of the protected characteristics. A dedicated faith room and discussions during tutor time will encourage pupils to discuss and understand the importance of the fundamental British values.
- The school plans to introduce a school council. Pupils will learn about democratic processes and the importance of sharing and responding to other people's opinions in a tolerant and respectful manner. Following an incident, staff will help pupils to understand what happened and how they might respond differently next time.

- The proprietor recognises the importance of protecting pupils from exposure to imbalanced or partisan views in school. There is an appropriate balance in the curriculum. Resources will be chosen from reputable sources.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b) and 9 to 16(b)

- The proposed school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance and will be available online. Leaders understand how to create an effective safeguarding culture. The designated safeguarding leaders and staff have received the necessary training to know and understand how to keep pupils safe.
- There is an appropriate electronic system in place for staff to record any concerns regarding pupils' welfare. Staff will receive regular updates about the issues pupils may face in their local communities.
- The proprietor has developed suitable behaviour and anti-bullying policies. These will help to ensure that pupils are rewarded for their positive behaviour choices, attend frequently and understand the different types of bullying. These will also help pupils to understand the harmful impact of bullying and how to access support if needed. The policies recognise that the school will cater for pupils with SEND.
- Leaders intend to admit pupils in phases to support the development of strong working relationships between staff, pupils and their parents.
- Appropriate health and safety policies are in place. For example, the first aid policy states that staff will complete relevant first aid training. Records will be kept of any accidents. Leaders will use this information to continually update the school's health and safety practices.
- The proprietor will ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Frequent checks on the suitability of fire extinguishers, call points, emergency lighting and exits, for example, are planned and will be recorded electronically. School leaders and the proprietor's central team will have access to these records. This is to ensure that any defects are detected and rectified swiftly.
- Leaders have appropriate plans and experience to ensure that admission and attendance records are likely to be accurately maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. This will include recording pupils' onward destinations after they leave school. The school will use its attendance information to identify pupils who need additional support to attend school regularly.
- A written risk assessment policy is in place. The risk assessments already completed show that leaders are taking appropriate actions to minimise risks to pupils. This includes appropriate arrangements to ensure the school's computer network has suitable monitoring and filtering systems. These will help to ensure pupils' safety when they are working online. Leaders will ensure that pupils are appropriately supervised during the school day.
- Risk assessments will be implemented for various activities, such as learning off site. In addition to these, every pupil will have an individual risk assessment, matched to

their EHC plan. Regular reviews will help ensure staff know how to support pupils in arriving and learning safely in a range of activities.

- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 18(1) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(5) to 21(5)(a)(ii) and 21(5)(c) to 21(7)(b)

- The school has an appropriate electronic single central record in place. This provides an accurate record of the safer recruitment checks completed on the proprietor, those with responsibility for governance and school leaders and staff who have already been employed. The Outcomes First Group's central team is supporting the proposed school in recruiting new staff. This provides reassurance that appropriate safeguards are in place.
- The school does not intend to use supply staff. However, the safer recruitment policy defines the checks that would be made and recorded by the school, including the assurances required from the agency. Leaders know and understand these requirements.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(1)(b) and 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The school has undergone a full refurbishment. This includes asbestos removal and the installation of a high fence to ensure safe boundaries. The building now houses a purpose-built teaching kitchen, gymnasium, art room, gaming room, health and beauty room and construction room in addition to the classrooms, therapy spaces and meeting rooms. The work has been completed to a high standard, meeting all relevant health and safety regulations.
- Pupils will have access to clearly labelled, fresh drinking water throughout the school day.
- Toilet facilities consist of individual, floor-to-ceiling cubicles that can be locked from the inside. Each cubicle has a sink with hot and cold water for hand washing. The toilets have an adequate supply of cold water. Staff and visitors will use separate accessible toilet facilities.
- The temperature of hot water does not pose a scalding risk to users. Regular checks on water temperature and quality will be completed to ensure compliance with health and safety expectations.
- Pupils have access to a shower and changing rooms on site. They are located near the gym and medical room. In addition to the hall and gym, pupils may access sporting facilities in the local area to meet specific sporting requirements and interests.
- The purpose-built first aid room is well equipped, with a bed, lockable medicine cabinet and hand washing-facility. There are toilets located nearby.
- The acoustic conditions are suitable for the needs of pupils and staff. For example, acoustic panels have been installed in the main hall to reduce noise.

- The building has been thoughtfully decorated with appropriate furnishings and fittings to meet pupils' needs. Rooms are well lit with adjustable lighting. Windows have anti-glare film to help control temperature and remove the need for blinds. All windows on the first and second floors have restrictors. Windows can be partially opened, and each room is fitted with air conditioning to aid ventilation.
- Appropriate external lighting has been installed around the school, including in the car park.
- The school has suitable outdoor space for pupils' recreation and as part of the curriculum. This includes a multi-use games area for physical education lessons. As the number of pupils on roll increases, lunchtimes will be staggered to ensure pupils have sufficient space inside and outside of the building.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1) to 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f) to 32(2)(b) and 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(3)(g)

- The school's website will publish a statement of the school's ethos and aims. It will provide parents with access to all necessary information and policies. This includes documents relating to admissions, the curriculum, behaviour, safeguarding, health and safety and copies of published inspection reports. Paper copies of this information will be made available on request.
- The school intends to provide parents with termly and annual reports on pupils' progress and academic attainment. It will also report on pupils' personal development, emotional health and well-being.
- The proprietor knows it must provide information, when requested, about pupils who are wholly or partly funded by a local authority. The school will work with local authorities to review pupils' EHC plans and the personal education plans for looked-after children.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33 to 33(k)

- The proprietor has developed a complaints policy that meets the requirements of the standards. The detailed policy provides information about the nature of different complaints. It outlines how complaints may be resolved on either an informal or formal basis, as required.
- The proprietor has ensured that there is a process to hear any appeals through an independent panel.
- It is likely that leaders would take all complaints seriously, respond within appropriate timescales and diligently store and share these written records as necessary.
- The policy will be available on the school's website and on request.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor and governing body know and understand the requirements of the independent school standards well. They know what they must do to ensure that these standards are met securely and consistently over time.
- The proprietor has a clear vision of the type of setting it wants to provide for pupils with SEND. The school's policies and procedures are appropriate and pay due regard to the equality duty. Well-established plans are in place across the Outcomes First Group of schools to keep pupils safe and promote their well-being. Leaders and staff are mindful to apply these processes based on pupils' individual needs and circumstances.
- Staff already employed at the school benefit from support from colleagues who work at other schools in the group. This collaboration helps to secure and embed the proprietor's vision and ethos.
- The proprietor has made provision to support staff with their workload and well-being.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proposed school's accessibility plan includes suitable actions to improve accessibility to the premises, curriculum and written information. It will be available on the school's website.
- This requirement is likely to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	151881
DfE registration number	801/6044
Inspection number	10411355

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Christina Darkes
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,000
Telephone number	01174 529789
Website	www.avonsideschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@avonsideschool.co.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	13 to 19	13 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	72	72

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	72
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	72
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	72
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	72

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	17
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0

Information about this proposed school

- The Outcomes First Group operates Avonside School.
- The proposed school will be based at 23 Clothier Road, Brislington, Bristol BS4 5PS in recently refurbished and repurposed accommodation.
- The school will cater for pupils aged 13 to 19. Pupils will have autism, moderate or specific learning difficulties and social, emotional, and mental health needs. Most pupils are likely to have been away from formal education for a sustained period and have significant anxiety.
- All pupils will have an EHC plan, and their places will be funded by a local authority.
- The proposed school will not have any religious character.
- It is not intended that the school will use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in response to the proprietor's application to open an independent school.
- This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the proprietor and governing body, the regional director, headteacher and other senior members of staff. The inspector also met with some newly appointed members of staff.
- Prior to the site visit, the lead inspector reviewed several documents provided to the Department for Education as part of the school's registration application.
- The inspector had a tour of the school's premises and grounds with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and building project manager. She held discussions with the regional director and the headteacher throughout.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the school's single central record, policies and curriculum and assessment information.

Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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