

## What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils feel happy in school. Pupils often come to the school having missed significant periods of their education and with previously poor attendance. Many pupils appreciate the support that they receive. Pupils reported that there is an adult in school that they can talk to if they have any concerns.

Pupils reported that they feel safe in school. However, leaders' lack of oversight means that the systems to keep pupils safe are not effective. Leaders do not gather enough information about poor behaviour, including bullying, to deal with such incidents effectively.

Leaders' expectations for pupils' behaviour are low. Some pupils misbehave during lessons, and this is not challenged by teachers. That said, pupils are generally polite to adults. Too many pupils are regularly absent from school.

### Our Response

*SLT and staff have clear and realistic expectations for behavior. We have a cohort which consists of children with very complex needs which demands a positive approach to behaviour management. We have school wide Positive Behaviour Strategy which underpins all procedures and practices.. This is embedded in the school and has been for many years and has never been raised as a concern in previous Ofsted inspections. For teachers to challenge behaviour in a classroom setting with other peers present can act as a trigger hence teachers focus on positive behaviour and praise students to promote good behaviour. This model is supported by research and is commonly used to manage challenging behaviour. Our pupils have made significant progress with their behaviour using this approach.*

The curriculum is narrow and lacks ambition. Pupils are only able to study English, mathematics and science. This puts them at a considerable disadvantage when considering their next steps in education, employment or training. The proprietor and leaders do not have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), underachieve considerably.

### Our Response

*The timetabled curriculum offer may appear limited, however is as such so that students who are with us for such a short time and who have missed so much education can actually work towards and achieve some qualifications. We explained to inspectors and presented evidence of other cross curricular subjects that are taught to enhance soft skills such as ICT, Art, Food Tech. The core subjects are taught to specific qualifications so as to ensure students can take the next steps in their education which is in complete contrast to your statement that we are disadvantaging students, on the contrary we are giving them the skills to move on to their chosen further education pathway. The SLT from Assess have high realistic expectations for students who may have been out of education for, on occasion, several years. I refute the fact that students with SEND underachieve considerably - last academic year ALL pupils with SEND achieved targets and moved onto Post 16 placements*

Pupils do not benefit from an effective programme of personal development. Pupils do not study relationships and sex education (RSE), nor do they learn about fundamental British values or different religions. Pupils do not receive an appropriate programme of impartial careers education, advice and guidance. This prevents them from being fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

### **Our Response**

*We have implemented a new PHSE scheme of work which covers all of these areas in depth. However we have always taught PSHE as a discrete subject. Unfortunately prior to the inspection the PSHE coordinator had been absent and as such the subject was being taught cross curricular and with topics such as fundamental British values and tolerance being taught through activities such as school council, pupil voice and community events. To say that PSHE, Personal Development, Online Safety etc were are not taught at all is absolutely untrue. A copy of the scheme of work was shown to inspectors and was and is available to view upon request at any time.*

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

While leaders have a genuine desire to nurture pupils, they lack ambition for what these pupils might achieve. Pupils do not experience a broad curriculum. Pupils do not study the full curriculum as required by the independent school standards ('the standards'). The only subjects on offer are English, mathematics and science. Pupils typically follow an entry level or functional skills level qualification in these subjects. Very few pupils follow a GCSE route. The only GCSE science course offered is iGCSE human biology. Consequently, pupils are ill-prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Leaders have not designed suitable curriculums for the subjects that are taught. Too little thought has been given to the different needs of pupils, including those with SEND. For example, all pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 are taught the same content while they work together in one class.

### **Our Response**

*When students arrive they are given thorough assessments in the core subjects to ascertain where they are up to and what qualifications will be achievable in the often short amount of time we have them. They are then given a bespoke education plan which is created based on the outcome of their assessment and is tailored specifically to their needs. This allows the pupils to make good and measurable progress towards their qualifications. All pupils leave with the qualifications necessary for them to access the next steps in their education.*

Pupils do not receive the support that they need to achieve well. Most teachers are inexperienced and are not subject specialists. They do not devise appropriate activities to help pupils make sense of new learning. Teachers do not routinely check whether pupils have made any errors or have misconceptions. Pupils do not achieve well.

### **Our Response**

*Teachers at Assess are experienced to say the least with over 40 years of working with children with additional needs. They are all qualified teachers with degrees in their respective subjects. Furthermore, 4 members of the teaching staff have completed University courses in SEN so are experienced and knowledgeable in various aspects of SEND teaching. In addition to this we work closely with external specialist SEN agencies who provide various training courses (which all staff have attended) on areas such as TEACCH, Precision teaching, DNAV, SEMH, PBS, Autism Awareness to name but a few. To say that the staff are inexperienced is not only factually inaccurate but undermines the level of experience and expertise afforded to the staff.*

Reading is not prioritised. Leaders do not identify pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read when they join the school. Pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge are not supported to catch up with their peers. This hinders how well these pupils learn across the curriculum. Across the school, pupils do not have opportunities to read widely and often.

There is no oversight of SEND provision. It is left to inexperienced teachers. In practice, this means that no one has identified and assessed the needs of pupils with SEND. Moreover, the quality of the information that teachers have for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans is poor. This means that teachers do not receive the guidance that they need to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. These pupils underachieve significantly.

### **Our Response**

*SEND provision at Assess is embedded into all practice. We prioritise inclusion and ensure that all students needs are met. All students are assessed on entry and provided with specific support through the use of various agencies. We also have an external consultant specialising in SEND attend on a weekly basis to oversee, support and ensure all SEND provision and interventions are in place.*

Leaders' behaviour policy does not set out clear expectations for pupils' conduct and the consequences for any unacceptable behaviour. Teachers do not use effective strategies to manage pupils' behaviour. Low-level behaviours which are not dealt with effectively by staff can escalate into serious incidents. Teachers told inspectors that some pupils' behaviour has, sometimes, become violent. Pupils' poor behaviour frequently disrupts lessons. Leaders do not keep records of behaviour or bullying incidents. It is not clear how consequences, such as 'time out', are monitored by leaders to check for any patterns and trends in behaviour, including bullying. As a result, pupils' learning, welfare and safety suffer.

### **Our Response**

*To state that the behaviour policy does not set out clear expectations is factual inaccuracy, our policy does set out clear expectations. Pupils low level behaviour is dealt with as per our policy in line with PBS. As stated previously, our students have complex needs which can*

*mean that they become dysregulated. Adopting a positive approach allows the lessons to continue and for teachers to focus on positive behaviours.*

*Leaders do keep records of behaviour and bullying incidents and these were used to influence the decision to introduce PBS. Teachers have always kept their own logs of behaviour and shared this as and when necessary. In January we introduced the digital behaviour logs which are built into the SMS. Inspectors were made aware of this and were shown this.*

*Pupils learning, welfare and safety do not suffer because of this, to the contrary - analysing school wide patterns in behaviour from previous years informed the change in our approach/strategies and has proven to be successful in reducing negative behaviours.*

Leaders' systems and processes for monitoring attendance are poor. Many pupils, including those with SEND, are routinely absent from school. Leaders do not take effective action to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils who do attend are frequently late. This is not challenged by leaders.

### **Our Response**

*All attendance systems and processes are overseen by the local authority via IRIS and schools, so to state that systems and processes for monitoring attendance are poor is a factual inaccuracy. Sessional attendance data is sent on a daily basis to both schools and the local authority in line with their specific policies. Due to the nature of our students, attendance can often be sporadic however this is not without good reason. We have clear procedures in place to ascertain reasons for absences and follow up any unauthorised absences or CME in accordance with LA requirements.*

Leaders, including the proprietor, have not ensured that pupils' personal development is promoted effectively. Pupils are not taught RSE. Personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) education was not taught between October 2022 and early March 2023. Leaders have recently introduced a new programme to deliver PHSE education. Pupils have only just started to learn about online safety in the last few weeks. This means that pupils have missed important learning to support their knowledge of the world and their safety.

Pupils were not taught about the fundamental British values of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance until very recently. Pupils are not taught about different cultures and faiths. They do not have opportunities to participate in physical education (PE) or extra-curricular activities. The school's outdoor space is unsuitable for any organised physical activity or for pupils to play. Pupils do not access a range of experiences and activities that prepare them well for life in modern Britain.

Careers provision is weak. An independent careers adviser provides one-to-one support for some pupils. However, this support is not well constructed. Year 11 pupils only receive information about careers options a few weeks prior to leaving school. This is too late. Pupils have no opportunities to visit local colleges or employers. Leaders do not organise work experience for pupils. Pupils lack the information that they need to make the important decisions about their next steps in education, employment or training.

### **Our Response**

*Careers provision is overseen by the local authority and also home schools. The careers advisor is not independent, so this is a factual inaccuracy. For LA students the advisor comes into school every Wednesday and meets with year 11 pupils to support with careers advice, applications, interviews etc. They support Year 11 throughout their entire school year in all aspects of planning and preparing for their next steps. She also supports non LA pupils upon our request but they also receive further support from their home schools. The fact that we can produce data to evidence that all of our students have been placed in a post 16 setting for the next academic year and in the past. This is testament to the fact that careers provision is not weak, on the contrary it is fit for purpose and has a proven track record of success.*

The proprietor and leaders have not demonstrated that they have the knowledge and skills to improve the school. There is a lack of capacity for improvement in the school's leadership team. It is unclear how the school can improve without significant external support. The proprietor of the school does not ensure that the standards are met securely and consistently.

### **Our Response**

*To state that the proprietor and leaders do not have the capacity to improve the school is unfounded, slanderous and subjective. I refer to the Ofsted report of Assess Education in 2016, in which there were several inadequacies, and as is the procedure, we had to produce an action plan which demonstrated that we had the capability to remedy failings. We did so, the action plan was accepted (without any modification) and we did remedy the failings. This was confirmed by a PMI and then we moved on to be judged Good at the next inspection. We still have the same SLT - my point being we have demonstrated previously that we do have the capacity to improve and within a short period of time. Since the inspection, the steering group is now in place to over see and advise on continuous improvements. We have also employed the support of external consultants. Subsequently, I would appreciate the specific evidence upon which this statement has been based as it is seriously damaging to our reputation.*

The premises that the school has moved to are entirely unsuitable and, even if improved, would certainly not accommodate the 60 pupils that the school is registered for. The building is unfinished, cold and recent water damage has made parts of it unusable. The outdoor space is in a poor state of repair. The surface of the playground is uneven, and the area is unkempt. There is no evidence that leaders have carried out robust risk assessments for these new premises. For example, leaders have completed no risk assessments for the area to the front of the school. This area is shared with a used-car sales garage and provides access for vehicles to an adjacent premises belonging to a scaffolding company. Leaders' fire risk assessment is cursory. There is no designated assembly point. Pupils reported that there have been no fire evacuation drills since moving to the new site. All of these failings pose a significant risk to pupils' welfare, health and safety.

## **Our Response**

*When inspectors came they only saw half of the building as the rest was partitioned off so it is conceivable that they would believe we could not accommodate 60 pupils. The figure of 60 was inherited from the previous premises however, we did keep this as a upper limit to ensure that if we had an influx of online pupils for blended learning, we would not exceed our legal quota. We have never actually had more than 40 students on roll at any given time but we would rather have the capacity to offer the blended learning package. The parts of the building that the students have access to is finished and was at the time of the inspection.*

*The cold and 'unfinished' area was unfortunately due to a leak which is totally out of our control. After conducting a thorough risk assessment, we determined it was necessary to lift carpets and turn off electrics in this area until they were repaired because of water damage. The rest of the building was carpeted, furnished, heated, functional and safe. We have a separate, walled and fenced area, not shared with anyone, which the pupils currently use for play and relaxation. The plan is to resurface the tarmac as it is worn, but after completing a risk assessment, not considered dangerous and as such do not pose a risk to pupils welfare, health and safety.*

The school's admissions and attendance registers do not meet statutory requirements. The admissions register does not contain details of two emergency contacts for each pupil. Attendance registers are completed in pencil and some pupils' attendance records for the whole of this academic year have been erased. The requirement to report the details of any pupil who has not attended school for 10 days to the local authority has not been adhered to. This is because leaders do not understand their statutory responsibilities for children missing education. The proprietor has not developed a RSE policy. The proprietor has not consulted with parents and carers as required.

## **Our Response**

*The schools admissions policy does meet statutory requirements.*

*Attendance registers are completed in pencil for internal use only as a log for when the children come in as these then have to be separated and digitalised so that they can be sent in accordance with statutory attendance requirements. To be clear this 'register' that is being referred to here is not the pupils attendance record. Their attendance record is stored digitally and shared with relevant stakeholders daily - this would be impossible to 'erase'.*

*With regards to the point made about reporting children who have not attended to the LA, this is incorrect - we provided evidence to show active referrals. Leaders most definitely understand their statutory responsibilities for CME as can be evidenced by the referrals made to the LA and schools.*

Many policies do not reflect what is happening in this school. For example, there is a health and safety policy dated September 2022. However, this policy has not been updated since the school moved premises. Consequently, the policy is not relevant to this school. Moreover, it includes reference to staff wearing appropriate clothing in art and design lessons and design technology lessons, even though these lessons are not part of the school's curriculum. It also references the role of a school council, which the school does not have, and gardening activities, which do not take place.

The proprietor did not provide inspectors with an accessibility plan. Therefore, the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are not met.

### **Our Response**

*In relation to the health and safety policy, this has been written to cover all lessons which may take place at any given point throughout the academic year. For example focus weeks such as DT week mean that this part of the health and safety policy would be relevant and necessary to carry out these activities and any risk assessments needed. We do have a school council and evidence during the inspection to show this. Whilst gardening activities has not taken place prior to the inspection because of the weather, this was planned for the summer term and has now taken place.*

*The accessibility plan sits within our equality and diversity policy and was presented to inspectors.*

Staff feel well supported by leaders in the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

The safeguarding policy is not up to date. There is a lack of safeguarding oversight by leaders. Moreover, despite receiving training, leaders and staff do not understand and carry out their statutory responsibilities.

### **Our Response**

*The Safeguarding policy is reviewed and updated annually. Staff receive annual training that is delivered by the DSL as well as external providers. Through this staff are aware of their responsibilities and duties with regards to Safeguarding in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education so to say otherwise is a factual inaccuracy.*

Staff are unclear about their roles and responsibilities to report and record any concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm.

### **Our Response**

*The wording of this statement implies that all staff do not understand their responsibilities in regards to Safeguarding when this is untrue, as multiple members of staff have Safeguarding qualifications at a minimum of level 2 and this was discussed with inspectors. Certificates were also available.*

There were no safeguarding records that inspectors could check. There have been no referrals made to safeguarding leaders for any concern about a pupil since September 2022. This is despite pupils' multiple vulnerabilities.

Leaders have not referred concerns about any pupils to local agencies, despite school safeguarding leaders agreeing with inspectors that some pupils present a significant cause for concern.

### **Our Response**

*Our records are accurate and up to date, there are no records of referrals to Safeguarding simply because there have been no concerns and to assume that because our pupils are vulnerable there should be Safeguarding concerns is discriminatory. Previously referrals have been made to the appropriate channels such as the local authority or the channel process, but fortunately during this cohort this has not been the case. To look at our history, this shows we are aware how to follow Safeguarding processes and how to make appropriate referrals.*

For example, some pupils have been absent from school for weeks on end without checks on these pupils' safety and well-being and any notifications to the local authority.

### **Our Response**

*Attendance records have been shared with pupils' schools, the local authority and the education welfare officer. The responsibility of home visits and checks is shared and we do carry out our own checks and log them on the system.*

Pupils have only very recently started to learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

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*In conclusion we feel that the inspection and subsequent report is an unfair and inaccurate reflection of us as a setting. Many of the judgments made are based on general comments rather than specific issues. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the nature of our students, the support we provide and ultimately the progress that they DO make. The general statement that our pupils 'do not achieve well' is detrimental and undermines all of their hard work and success. It totally disregards the holistic progress that these students have made.*