

# Inspection of Dawn House School

Helmsley Road, Rainworth, Nr Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG21 0DQ

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 July 2025

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Outstanding**

Sixth-form provision **Outstanding**

Previous inspection grade Outstanding

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils receive an exceptional education at this transformative school. Staff maintain consistently high expectations and are dedicated to helping every pupil achieve them. With precision, skilled staff identify pupils' individual learning targets and tailor activities to develop essential skills and knowledge. As a result, pupils are highly engaged and enthusiastic about their learning and make strong progress from their starting points. Staff are highly proficient in modelling and teaching effective communication and interaction strategies. This helps pupils to thrive in school and beyond.

Staff build warm and caring relationships with pupils. Pupils know staff will manage any concerns they have. As they journey through the school, pupils develop strong friendships with their peers. The school fosters a strong ethos of respect for others. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe in school. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Skilled staff support pupils to manage their emotions well.

Pupils have extensive opportunities to develop their skills and talents, for example the Makaton choir, skiing and abseiling. The wide range of clubs support pupils to develop essential skills of communication and social interaction. Students in the sixth form further strengthen these skills through their work in the school café, 'Dawn's Diner', which is based in the local community.

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

The curriculum at Dawn House School is ambitious and carefully structured across all phases, from the primary stage to the sixth form. It is highly responsive to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school's multidisciplinary approach, involving speech and language therapists and occupational therapy practitioners, ensures that the curriculum is expertly adapted to meet individual needs. Pupils benefit from a personalised curriculum that includes a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. This tailored provision reflects pupils' interests and prepares them well for their next steps in education, training or employment.

Staff are highly dedicated and skilled in meeting pupils' SEND with care and precision. Education, health and care (EHC) plans are rigorously reviewed and updated to ensure that they accurately reflect pupils' evolving needs. Individual learning targets are clearly defined, achievable and regularly reviewed, enabling pupils to make meaningful progress. Pupils develop confidence in using a range of communication methods, including signing, symbols and assistive technology.

The school places a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils learn to read well. Staff demonstrate expert knowledge in the teaching of phonics. The phonics programme is further enhanced by effective collaboration with speech and language therapists, ensuring that pupils receive the support they need. As a result, pupils develop into confident, fluent readers.

The school's work to promote positive behaviour and attitudes to learning is highly

effective. Pupils behave with maturity and respect, consistently demonstrating a strong commitment to their learning. Staff are proactive in promoting good attendance. As a result, the vast majority of pupils show improved attendance compared to their previous settings.

Pupils benefit from a rich and varied personal development programme. Values such as respect and tolerance are embedded throughout the curriculum. Pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of these values in their interactions. The life skills curriculum equips pupils with essential skills for independent living, including money management, timekeeping and healthy living. Sixth-form students gain recognised qualifications in health-related topics.

A broad and enriching programme of extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' personal development. These include residential trips, clubs and meaningful leadership opportunities. The pupil leadership group plays an active role in school life, contributing to initiatives such as the 'Dawn House Way Behaviour Charter'. Sixth-form students act as buddies to younger pupils, supporting their well-being and modelling positive behaviour.

Pupils engage in community-based activities, including litter picking and Makaton choir performances at local care homes for the elderly and schools. Creative and enterprise activities further support pupils' confidence and communication skills. Pupils produce creative work such as film adaptations of Shakespeare plays and develop products to sell at local markets.

Pupils benefit from a comprehensive and personalised careers education, information and guidance programme. Staff are committed to exploring a wide range of future pathways, ensuring that pupils are well informed and aspirational. As a result, pupils, including those in the sixth form, are well prepared to make thoughtful and informed decisions about their next steps.

Leadership at Dawn House School is exceptional. The school, the advisory board and the education committee share a clear and ambitious vision for inclusive, high-quality education. Governance is both supportive and strategic, ensuring continuous improvement. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They recognise the dedication of staff, frequently highlighting the significant positive impact the school has on their children and families.

## **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.

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	122956
<b>Local authority</b>	Nottinghamshire County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	10347490
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	109
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	20
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Susan Gregory (Chair of education committee)
<b>Principal</b>	Jenny McConnell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.dawnhouseschool.org.uk">www.dawnhouseschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	27 to 29 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the Speech and Language UK communication charity.
- Dawn House provides for pupils with speech, language and communication needs. Many pupils also have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have an EHC plan. The school employs teams of therapists as well as education staff to support pupils.
- The school's pupil admission number increased in July 2024 from 95 to 120.
- The school uses three unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership

and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Dawn House offers boarding residential provision to pupils. For this inspection, the inspectors inspected the education provision only at this school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education and the life skills curriculum. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To further explore the effectiveness of the quality of education, inspectors reviewed the curriculum in one other subject and sampled pupils' work.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with a range of leaders, including the director of education for Speech and Language UK, the principal, the deputy head of therapies and other members of the senior leadership group.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the pupil leadership group.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils and students in the sixth form about their experiences of life in school. Inspectors also spent time with pupils at social times to observe behaviour.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with those responsible for governance, which included the chair of the school advisory board and the chair of the education committee.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff and considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors considered the responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including the free-text responses.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents and records linked to attendance and behaviour, as well as school improvement documentation and minutes of the advisory board and education committee meetings.

## **Inspection team**

Anne Maingay, lead inspector

Jon Brown

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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