

Inspection of The Damara School

The Maltings, Raymond Street, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2EA

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 September 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attending this school receive life changing support, care and attention. They are taught to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Many pupils begin to attend school regularly for the first time in years. Pupils learn different strategies, such as breathing techniques, to calm themselves down when they are upset. This means that they are supported to quickly refocus on learning. The school is calm and pupils work hard.

The school has a family feel, all pupils and staff regularly coming together during the school day to share successes and social times. Pupils are given the chance to share news or interesting things every day. Pupils listen intently to others with interest. They genuinely take care of each other, particularly looking out for those who are new or unwell. This makes pupils happy. Pupils and staff celebrate small changes in pupils' lives, for example complimenting new glasses.

The school also has high expectations for pupils' academic success. Pupils make rapid progress, filling gaps in previous learning. Most pupils are on track to take age-appropriate qualifications, such as GCSEs. They are taught by skilled teachers, who engage pupils' interest in their learning.

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

The school has revised its approaches to teaching, learning and the curriculum over the last few years. The school has a high focus on staff development and training. Recently, this has focused on improving the teaching of English and mathematics. The school's current focus is on further developing staff's expertise in delivering the wider curriculum. Activities that pupils are provided with are carefully chosen and built upon so that learning is secure. In the majority of lessons, the school ensures consistency in how new learning is supported and scaffolded. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and are not overloaded with too much information at once.

The English curriculum is based around quality texts. Lessons in comprehension, composition and grammar are closely linked to these texts. The school has introduced a new phonics programme. However, this is at an early stage of implementation. The spelling and word work provided to pupils is not as well matched. Conversely, the support pupils receive to improve their reading is successful in helping pupils to catch up. Pupils become enthusiastic readers; they read independently and are read to by staff daily.

Pupils that attend the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school ensures that each pupil's individual needs are addressed. This support is regularly reviewed so that interventions used are the right ones at the right time.

The school ensures that secondary pupils receive appropriate careers guidance and education. It is developing its programme of work experience for pupils as they reach this stage for the first time.

Behaviour is excellent. Carefully-thought-out routines support pupils to know how to behave in different situations. They are taught to use their voice to tell others when they need support. Systems of rewards and consequences are used in a highly positive way. These are well understood by pupils. The school works closely with parents and carers to support pupils' behaviour beyond school, so that pupils are helped to be ready for each school day.

The school goes above and beyond to nurture pupils' interests and talents. Pupils benefit from a wide range of visitors and experiences. They are supported to access out-of-school clubs and experiences, such as musical theatre. The school is attuned to pupils' current life ambitions and it organises experiences that nurture these well. For example, by offering subjects beyond the usual offer. Pupils also experience many trips out of school, making full use of all that the local area has to offer.

Fundamental British values, such as respect and tolerance, are woven through everything the school does. Pupils are extremely polite and welcoming. They learn about the wider world through school-specific subjects, such as society and the 'world of work'. The daily 'coming together' sessions promote discussion and tackle difficult questions.

The school is well led and managed. Staff are extremely positive about working in the school. Leaders keep a close eye on the quality of everything they do, so that they can further improve. Trustees have a long-term view, for example ensuring that staffing grows at the right speed to match the growth in pupil numbers. The school is compliant with the Equality Act 2010. The proprietor ensures that the independent school standards ('the standards') are met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In spelling, pupils' knowledge and skills are not as secure as they should be. This is because some improvements to the English and phonics curriculum are more recent. As a result, pupils have had less opportunity to secure some aspects of their spelling learning. The school should ensure that the new phonics programme is embedded and leads into a well-designed spelling curriculum.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	148395
DfE registration number	926/6032
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10391803
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 15
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Lotus Academy Trust
Chair	Kate Hobley
Headteacher	Kate Haley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,000 to £74,000
Telephone number	01842 773673
Website	www.lotustrust.org.uk
Email address	ceo@lotustrust.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 to 24 November 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides an education for pupils with social, emotional and/or mental health needs. Many pupils also have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered for up to 32 pupils, age 5 to 16.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is based at The Maltings, Raymond Street, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2EA.
- The proprietor is the Lotus Academy Trust. The headteacher at the previous inspection (Sandra Govender) is now the chief executive officer.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

- 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the chief executive officer, the head of school and other leaders. They met with trustees of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors checked the premises and documentation linked to the standards.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and 'the world around me'. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- 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 considered the responses to the staff, parent and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nerrissa Bear

His Majesty's Inspector

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