

Groveside School

Address: 40 Christchurch Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 7AY

Unique reference number (URN): 150898

Inspection report: 10 February 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils generally make effective progress across the curriculum. Many pupils arrive at the school with considerable gaps in their knowledge and skills due to a disrupted experience of education. Staff work proactively to identify gaps in pupils' learning, using their understanding of pupils' needs. Staff generally address gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills well through appropriately targeted teaching and support. As a result, most pupils meet their individual learning targets.

Pupils, including pupils who are disadvantaged, generally build knowledge securely in each subject. Pupils typically achieve well from their individual starting points and become increasingly well prepared for their next steps in education. However, some pupils do not develop basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as they could. Other pupils, sometimes do not acquire the depth of learning of which they are capable.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Many pupils join the school with a history of very low attendance and long periods away from education. Some pupils are anxious about returning to a school setting. Leaders work successfully with pupils and their families to rebuild pupils' confidence and establish positive routines. This work secures significant improvement in attendance for some pupils over time. Where attendance remains low, leaders maintain a thorough focus on reducing persistent absence. Leaders use every opportunity to promote the importance of regular attendance, particularly through sustained engagement with parents.

The school provides a calm, orderly and respectful environment. Staff and pupils develop effective relationships with each other. Pupils show improving attitudes to learning and feel safe and well supported. Staff understand the school's expectations of pupils' behaviour. They apply those expectations with consistency. Staff adapt approaches to managing behaviour effectively, where necessary, for pupils with particular individual needs. The school does not tolerate bullying. Leaders and staff address any concerns about bullying quickly and consistently. While behaviour is improving overall, some pupils do not show sustained improvement in managing their own behaviour over time. This includes some pupils who have been at the school for the longest time.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate and well-informed understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They secure this understanding through planned reviews, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. This oversight of the curriculum and teaching enables leaders to identify strengths and target improvements with precision.

Leaders have developed a coherent and ambitious curriculum. The curriculum identifies the essential knowledge pupils need for their next steps. The curriculum is logically sequenced, so that learning builds progressively over time. Subject plans outline clear pathways with

aspirational end points, enabling pupils to work towards qualifications that match their needs, interests and future destinations.

The school prioritises reading. Staff use structured approaches to help pupils develop essential reading skills. Staff receive training to strengthen their subject knowledge. Typically, staff follow curriculum plans effectively. They provide clear explanations and modelling for pupils and this helps to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Staff know pupils well and use information about pupils' needs to inform their teaching. However, sometimes staff do not check pupils' understanding precisely enough. Occasionally, lesson activities do not fully reflect pupils' differing starting points. This limits how well some pupils access new learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have strengthened the school's inclusive practice so that pupils' needs are identified accurately and swiftly. Leaders have recently introduced a strategy that brings together work on vulnerability, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding into one coherent approach. Leaders draw on a wide range of information, including about pupils' attendance and engagement, to identify barriers early. They track the impact of support for pupils carefully and work effectively with therapists and external agencies to secure timely changes to support when required.

Staff receive training that enables them to understand pupils' needs well. As a result, pupils benefit from effective pastoral support and targeted interventions that help them follow the curriculum. Regular meetings with a range of professionals ensure a coordinated approach to the planning and evaluation of provision for pupils. Staff use pupils' education, health and care plans well to structure support that is linked to pupils' personal learning goals. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of this support with appropriate rigour.

Leaders engage positively with families, professionals and commissioning local authorities. The school deploys teaching assistants strategically to provide consistent advocacy and support for pupils. The use of alternative provision is rare. Leaders ensure that placements at alternative provision are in pupils' best interests. They oversee alternative provision carefully and with appropriate diligence.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders articulate a clear and purposeful vision for the school. They place pupils' needs and wellbeing at the centre of their decisions. Leaders act in the best interests of pupils, including pupils who are disadvantaged or who face additional vulnerabilities. Leaders have managed the school's growth with careful planning. They ensure that premises and resources align well with the school's ambitious curriculum. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas requiring further improvement. They are now moving from establishing routines and expectations to embedding these securely.

The school has developed its leadership capacity. For example, newly appointed leaders have strengthened the school's work on inclusion and family engagement. Support staff take

increased ownership of key areas of provision. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning effectively and check how well their actions improve outcomes for pupils.

Governance is effective. The proprietor provides structured oversight through regional directors, who fulfil governance functions and hold leaders to account. Governors offer rigorous challenge, including with regard to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and in evaluating how well pupils' needs are met. The proprietor's central team provides effective support for resource management and premises. As a result, the proprietor's systems for monitoring compliance with the independent school standards are robust.

Staff feel valued, supported and developed through appropriate professional learning. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing carefully. Parents and pupils express strong confidence in the school's direction and leadership.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school's provision for character development is embedded across the curriculum and contributes positively to pupils' wider development. The school promotes fundamental British values. Staff teach pupils about age-appropriate relationships and sex education and about physical and mental health. Pupils learn to reflect on their beliefs, understand right from wrong and engage thoughtfully with differing viewpoints. The school consistently develops pupils' social skills, cooperation and respect. The school promotes an inclusive culture in which all pupils feel respected and accepted. Teaching enables pupils to recognise and celebrate individual and cultural diversity.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is thoughtfully structured and informed by relevant expertise. A specialist teacher leads much of this work, ensuring that content is well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils generally recall their learning well. However, staff who teach PSHE outside their specialism have not received specific training. In addition, sometimes staff do not check sufficiently that pupils have learned and remembered vital elements of the PSHE curriculum.

Pupils take part in a range of clubs, enrichment activities and community experiences that enhance their social confidence and independence. Pupils value residential visits highly, such as a recent skiing trip to Italy. These visits contribute positively to pupils' personal growth.

Leaders continue to develop the school's careers education programme to ensure that it is both coherent and ambitious. Pupils benefit from impartial careers advice and take part in helpful discussions about their next steps. They have opportunities to engage with different employers, training providers and colleges. Pupils also use online career planning tools to support their exploration of future career pathways. The school's careers education programme enables pupils to make informed decisions about their next steps.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils at Groveside School enjoy learning and benefit from a calm, nurturing environment in which they feel safe and valued. They describe the school as a second chance for them. Staff listen to pupils' views and genuinely care for them. Warm, trusting relationships with adults help pupils to settle quickly. Pupils take an active part in the life of the school and benefit from a range of activities beyond the academic curriculum. At playtimes and lunchtimes, they enjoy both physical activities, such as football, and social opportunities, such as board games. These activities and opportunities help pupils build confidence, teamwork and social skills.

Many pupils arrive at the school having experienced significant disruption to their education, including long periods of low attendance. Staff use their well-informed knowledge of pupils' interests and motivations to engage them successfully in learning. Disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils known to social care receive the targeted support they need. This support helps pupils to re-engage positively with education and prepare for their next steps. Staff quickly identify barriers to learning and wellbeing, using pupils' starting points to plan a curriculum that meets their individual needs. Adaptations, particularly those that help pupils to manage their emotions, are effective. As a result, most pupils are attentive in lessons, generally remain on task and make steady progress through the curriculum.

Pupils learn the importance of self-respect and mutual respect, which contributes positively to pupils developing positive character traits. Pupils generally behave well and meet leaders' expectations of them. Staff take time to understand the reasons behind less positive behaviour and respond with empathy and support. Pupils attend more regularly than they did at previous schools. Leaders ensure that pupils' concerns, including about bullying, are dealt with promptly. Through the curriculum and wider opportunities, pupils learn how to contribute positively to their school, preparing them well for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers check pupils' understanding with consistency and rigour, so that they can adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs and improve pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills.
 - Leaders should continue to support pupils who have made initial improvements to their behaviour so that these changes can be sustained over time.
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About this inspection

The name of the proprietor is Acorn Care and Education Limited and the chair of the proprietor body is Richard Power.

The fees currently charge are £62,000 to £92,000

The school currently operates from 40 Christchurch Road, Reading, Berkshire RG2 7AY

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and 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 renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with headteacher, senior leaders and a range of other staff. The inspector also met with representatives of the proprietor body during the inspection. They visited lessons and spoke with pupils and staff. They also reviewed documents in relation to the curriculum, teaching and learning, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, recruitment, safeguarding, health and safety, fire safety and risk assessment.

The inspector 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 inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The school currently uses one registered alternative provision and one unregistered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Mary Rome

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided	Standards met
All standards have been met.	
2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	Standards met
All standards have been met.	

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools	Standards met
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All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Laura James, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Linda Culling, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 10 February 2026

Total pupils

37

School capacity

60

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

37

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

N/A

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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