

Inspection of APTCOO - A Place to Call Our Own

North Farm House, Worksop Road, Budby, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG22 9EX

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 July 2025

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

APTCOO is a safe and caring environment for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils feel happy and say they are very well cared for. They enjoy attending because of the strong relationships they have with the staff. Pupils are proud of their school.

Staff have a united passion for pupils to achieve their highest potential. This high ambition means that staff go 'above and beyond' to support all pupils to succeed. The school promotes an environment where all pupils are highly valued by staff. Pupils respond to this by showing the same value and care for each other.

Pupils are polite, considerate and welcoming to visitors. When pupils struggle with their emotions, staff provide highly effective strategies that allow pupils to regulate and then return to their learning. The school has been particularly effective in supporting highly anxious pupils to attend school, because of the high-quality nurture and pastoral support it provides.

Pupils benefit greatly from working in the school's outdoor environments. They have developed the school grounds to increase biodiversity. They enjoy looking after the school's animals. Pupils have lots of opportunities to develop their talents and interests.

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

The school has improved in many areas since its last inspection. The curriculum is well structured. It offers a wide variety of subjects and activities that pupils enjoy. Pupils learn subjects from the national curriculum, such as English and mathematics, at a level that is appropriate for them. Pupils look forward to their outdoor lessons. A wide variety of accredited project-based work develops their interests and builds important life skills.

Teachers use their good subject knowledge to present information clearly and engage pupils in interesting learning activities. They check pupils' understanding regularly. In some subjects, they provide lots of opportunities to go back over content to ensure that pupils have secured the key knowledge they need. Pupils receive support to build up their confidence and become more independent in their learning. However, the school has not ensured that precise teaching methods are consistently applied by staff. This means, that in some areas, pupils can struggle to know what the key learning is. As a result, they do not always remember long term the content they have been taught and then build on this knowledge.

The school has made reading a high priority. As one slightly reluctant reader said, 'they make us read here!' There are several opportunities for pupils to engage in independent and group reading. The school has introduced a systematic phonics programme. This means pupils at the early stages of reading are supported with precise help to improve their reading and comprehension.

The school has carefully considered how to meet the different complexities of pupils' needs. Pupils with severe learning disabilities are well supported through expertly designed therapeutic approaches. Staff deliver programmes that develop pupils' communication skills and basic mathematical thinking effectively. However, some of the targets that pupils are set are not precise enough. These targets do not always clearly define what pupils need to achieve to help them reach the outcomes set in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. As a result, some pupils are not supported to learn as well as they could.

The school works closely with parents and carers, and pupils, to highlight the importance of being at school and to address any barriers to good attendance. There has been a significant investment to provide effective support for families, such as arranging transport to avoid pupils' anxieties related to taxis. As a result, those pupils who can, attend well.

High-quality pastoral care and support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs underpin everything the school does. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities they have to talk to a trusted adult. Pupils now benefit from a clearly structured personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum that prepares them well for life in modern Britain. They are helped to learn how to respect those who hold different views to them. Some pupils are involved in charitable activity and many take part in community-based projects. Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to learn about options for future study and careers. Older pupils have visited a large range of colleges to spark their interest in different subjects. They are well prepared for their next steps to adulthood.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, with several saying that it has been transformative for their child. Leaders, including the proprietor, have focused their improvement efforts on the areas that will have the most impact, particularly on improving the quality of education and the PSHE curriculum. They know the school well. They understand their statutory duties and have a good understanding of the independent school standards. The premises are well maintained. Thorough checks ensure that all the health and safety and fire safety regulations are met. Risk assessments are routinely updated. Policies are up to date and reflect the latest national guidance.

Staff feel well supported. They appreciate the effort made to reduce their workload and improve their well-being.

The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The policies for relationships and sex education, and safeguarding, are available on the school's website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school is in the early stages of improving teachers' pedagogical knowledge to enhance the teaching of the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not always benefit from carefully crafted lessons, where the key learning remains the focus. The school should ensure that the agreed pedagogy is securely implemented across the school, so that pupils benefit from lessons that consistently build their knowledge and skills.
- The targets set for pupils do not consistently identify what success for those pupils looks like. This limits staff's ability to check that these pupils are making as much progress towards the larger outcomes stated in their EHC plans as they could. The school should ensure that all pupils' targets have the necessary precision and focus to enable staff to support pupils to achieve as well as they can.

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	145949
DfE registration number	891/6039
Local authority	Nottinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	10374823
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	APTCOO - A Place to Call Our Own
Chair	Lee Piercy
Headteacher	Michaela Ledsham
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,832 to £85,009
Telephone number	01623 629902
Website	www.aptcoo.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@aptcoo.org
Date of previous inspection	4 to 6 July 2023

Information about this school

- APTCOO provides education for pupils with SEND, all of whom have an EHC plan. These pupils' needs include autism, severe learning disabilities and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school operates from four buildings. Two of these buildings are located at North Farm House, Budby, Newark NG22 9EX. The other two are at Chameleon Lodge, Thoresby, Newark NG22 9EW and Tall Trees, Rectory Road, Retford, Nottinghamshire DN22 7AY. The school no longer uses the two buildings in Mansfield Nottinghamshire.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative provision.
- The school received a progress monitoring inspection on 1 February 2024.
- The school provides education for students above the compulsory school age. There is a suitable programme of activities in place, which is appropriate to their needs.

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.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and subject leaders. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the proprietor body and spoke on the telephone to the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, English and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some students about their learning, and looked at a sample of students' work.
- Inspectors also visited lessons and spoke to leaders about the project-based work and the provision based at Tall Trees.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school's policies and risk assessments.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and students; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts students' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's survey of school staff. Inspectors met with students to discuss different aspects of the school's provision.
- Inspectors toured the premises and reviewed the school facilities across all four buildings.

Inspection team

Dave Gilkerson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

George Huthart

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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