

Advanced Education-Walnut Tree Lodge School

Wilden Road, Wilden, Bedford, MK44 2PY

Inspection dates

3–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Adequate	3
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- In lessons, pupils make adequate progress. It is not always clear what they were intended to learn during some activities. Projects undertaken and records do not always fully show the gains they have made.
- There are missed opportunities for pupils to say how they can improve in their work and their behaviour to reach targets.
- The use of the school's system of awarding points for good behaviour is not always systematically applied by staff.
- The headteacher has been instrumental in the development of the 'new' school but has not formally monitored the quality of teaching or the impact of the new curriculum on pupils' achievement.
- Although the revamped school has improved, the development plan does not reflect the current priorities for improvement.
- Residential staff who are present in lessons do not have a role in supporting pupils' learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have made a good start in providing a relevant curriculum, based on projects and activities which include a range of subjects. This is beginning to interest and engage pupils who are very hard to reach.
- Thorough policies and rigorous procedures ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety.
- Staff are adept at encouraging pupils to take part in activities and complete work which they find hard. Relationships are strong and the successful use of non-confrontational approaches has resulted in a calm learning environment and very few incidences of challenging behaviour.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England)

(Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place at one day's notice.
- Two hours of observation was undertaken and five lessons taught by two staff were seen.
- School policies and other documentation, such as pupils' records and their work were examined. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the lead teacher and the teaching assistant. Discussions were undertaken with pupils individually.
- No information was able to be gathered from Parent View as no responses had been made by parents. Pupils were not present in the school when the Ofsted online survey was carried out.

Inspection team

George Derby, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school was last fully inspected in May 2010 when it was judged to be good. In June 2012 an emergency inspection was carried because of concerns raised about the pupils' behaviour and the management of the school. Numerous regulations were not met at that time. In December 2012 a progress monitoring inspection was carried out when just two regulations were unmet.
- The company reviewed the school's position and decided to close it on a temporary basis in May 2013. Staff and pupils left the school. In September 2013 it re-opened admitting pupils from different backgrounds than previously, although still exhibiting severe behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The staff working with pupils were also new.
- The school now admits boys and girls who have experienced extreme trauma in their lives, often over a sustained period of time. The school started educating pupils in its refurbished premises just six weeks ago. It has two pupils on roll, one in Key Stage 2 and one in Key Stage 3; one has a statement of special educational needs. The first was admitted mid-October 2013 and the second pupil seven days ago. The school is registered for up to 15 pupils, aged seven to 16 years.
- The school is located in the grounds of a small newly registered residential provision and all pupils attending the school live in that provision.
- The headteacher leads four schools over a large geographical area.
- The school's aim is to provide 'a wide range and integrated curriculum' which prepares pupils for future life.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - fully plan the specific aspects of the subjects to be studied and identify what pupils are to learn during the activities and projects undertaken each week
 - fully record the gains made by pupils and ensure that this information contributes to the assessments made in all subjects.
 - make pupils aware of the targets they are working towards, both educationally and behaviourally
 - utilise the school's behaviour approach more systematically so that pupils are regularly reminded of what they need to do to achieve their goals and during any review of lessons, behaviour or work are given opportunities to say how they could improve.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - residential staff actively support pupils' learning in lessons
 - leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching, the curriculum and the impact of these on pupils' achievement and behaviour so that there is a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and an accurate view of the school's effectiveness
 - the school development plan reflects the school's current priorities for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Although the school's own records show that pupils' achievement in the past has been inadequate, the current pupils' achievement is adequate. Since entering the school, the work in their folders, the assessments undertaken and their responses to learning all indicate that they make reasonable progress. Pupils are clearly building, in small steps, on what they have learned previously in lessons. The biggest change for them is they feel they are listened to by staff and their interests are taken into account.

Teachers use their increasing knowledge of pupils' levels and abilities to pitch the work at the right level which helps pupils reach the next stage. However, a lack of precise learning objectives in some lessons, especially about subject specific skills and what they need to do to attain them, means that the pace of learning is steady rather than rapid.

Adequate progress is being made in literacy and numeracy. There is a clear focus on improving pupils' skills and analysing their strengths and weaknesses. Their phonic knowledge (the sounds that letters make) is being systematically developed so that their word recognition and spelling skills are supported well. In mathematics, pupils' basic number knowledge is a priority and pupils are practising their skills through a variety of activities. They are improving their understanding of place value of large numbers in order to order numbers in a sequence correctly.

Already pupils have embarked on accredited courses, such as in equine studies, and are working towards completion of the award; very quickly pupils have successfully achieved units towards the certificate.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including their personal development, is adequate. In just six weeks of re-opening, the school is a calm, orderly place and pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. The pupils respond largely positively to the school's demands and expectations. All this is in contrast to the times when past pupils' attendance at the school was poor, behaviour was out of control and staff found it difficult to manage the pupils. New pupils respond well to the non-conformational approaches and the great encouragement they are given. This helps them to feel positive about their capabilities, the work they produce and their achievements. They enjoy receiving awards for good work and behaviour, although feedback from staff about how they are doing or what they need to achieve to improve is not always consistent.

Occasionally, there are times when pupils find it hard to comply and say that some of the work is too difficult, so they wish to give up without trying. Sometimes, they do not want to join in with lessons. Pupils are given time to explain their feelings and take a break if needed. Usually, they return quickly to work but the timetable is sufficiently flexible and, if needed, pupils can make the time up later and complete their work. This has also led to some pupils coming back to school after the end of the school day to continue activities. Records show that the pupils' attendance in their previous schools has been particularly problematic, with pupils regularly refusing to attend. Some have had very low attendance, often unwilling to go to school for many years. To date, their attendance is close to the national average. This shows the confidence that pupils have in the staff, their increased feelings of safety and security and the good, trusting relationships with adults. Reasonable relationships are developing between pupils.

Pupils are developing a good understanding of tolerance and harmony, and of difference in society. This is through their projects, where there is often a focus on humanities and through links with groups and activities in the locality. The school has made it clear in its teaching and learning policy

that no partisan political views will be shared with pupils and that, where political discussions take place, a balanced view will always be presented.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate and leads to pupils making adequate gains in learning and achievement. Staff have quickly developed positive relationships with pupils. In turn, pupils value the school's approach to teaching them which is individualised and based on their interests. They say it is in a marked contrast to how they were taught in their previous schools, when education failed to interest them. Pupils enjoy the project-based and other practical activities. They are willing to take part in more formal lessons, such as in English and mathematics to develop their basic skills.

Detailed medium-term planning is in place and written evaluations about pupils' responses in lessons are thoroughly completed each day. However, some of the daily/weekly planning does not outline precisely what each pupil will learn. Objectives are often linked to pupils' engagement in learning but do not go far enough to identify or record the skills, knowledge and understanding gained across the different subjects. Pupils are told what they will do, although there is less emphasis about what they will learn. They are not always reminded on what they must do to reach their targets or to achieve their points, for example when pupils are distracted or unwilling to respond.

Staff questioning is challenging and probing. It is used well to check pupils' understanding and stretch pupils further. Staff effectively help pupils when they see they have difficulty and explain things in small, careful steps. They do all they can to make learning successful and to develop in pupils a sense of achievement. Occasionally in mathematics, specific mathematical language is not used precisely enough. Similarly, diagrams to explain ideas are poorly drawn and cause confusion rather than aid learning.

Residential staff are present in most lessons and their role is to manage behaviour. They often encourage pupils to try harder, although most of the time they have little to do and are not actively involved in pupils' learning.

Teachers are developing a reasonable knowledge of the pupils' academic needs and capabilities through the assessments they are making of their new pupils. This is also recorded electronically and enables staff to have a picture of performance against national levels. Staff use this when planning lessons and when setting challenges and targets for pupils. This information is supplemented well by the assessments about pupils' personal, social and emotional development provided by the residential staff and company's therapists. For some pupils the assessment period and, occasionally, the repetitive worksheet-based assessment activity is taking too long and they lose interest. The school has clear plans to re-design this alongside the 28-day residential assessment.

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The revised curriculum is adequate. There are many strengths and the new approach is having a positive impact on helping pupils to be involved in school and learning, often for the first time in years. Medium-term planning is detailed, although weekly planning requires improvement. Subject policies, with the exception of the English/literacy policy, are undergoing revision to reflect the new approach to planning; this has not yet been completed. All areas of learning are covered and the school provides the full National Curriculum, as required by some pupils' statement of special educational needs. Careers guidance is in place, as is independent advice through Connexions.

Improving pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy is central to the school's work. Much effort goes into ensuring the staff are clear about pupils' strengths and weakness so a tailored programme can be developed. Information is being gathered and personalised programmes produced.

A major change is in the way the school organises other aspects of pupils' learning. Physical education is timetabled weekly and relates to sport, health and fitness but also has an element of choice. One pupil was effusive about her interest in horse riding and about working towards formal qualifications in aspects of horse care. Life skills encompass personal, health and social education and citizenship, and some pupils are keen to follow practical courses such as the Jamie Oliver Home Cooking BTEC course.

Instead of learning about separate subjects, such as in science, design and technology and humanities, subject learning occurs in an integrated way through topics and projects undertaken and through outdoor activities. Some of the projects planned utilise well the school's rural location but there are a wide range of activities planned so that other interests can be catered for.

Schemes of work are comprehensive. The school has carefully mapped in the termly planning most of the subject content to be covered in the projects planned; it still has to complete this for religious education. Week-to-week planning provides an outline of each activity but it is not always easy to identify what subject aspects are to be studied daily in each of the projects.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The school takes good care of its pupils and welfare, health and safety are good. All the independent school regulations are met. Comprehensive guidance is in place to safeguard pupils from harm such as for child protection, behaviour, anti-bullying, first aid, fire risk assessment. Documentation is in place to record the checks made, such as those made on fire alarms, emergency lighting and when evacuations occur. These are systematically completed. Records to log any accidents, incidents or physical restraint are also in place. There has been only one incident since the school opened (on admission of a pupil) and this is detailed well.

Training regimes are systematically arranged by the company so that designated staff are up-to-date with procedures, for instance with fire safety, first aid and safeguarding. All staff are appropriately trained in child protection and the lead teacher, who is also the designated person, is trained at the appropriate higher level.

Thorough safe recruitment procedures result in the school having all the required information about staff which are summarised on the single central register. The school now includes the company's residential staff who also work in the school on the single central register. The admissions registers contain all the required information and the daily attendance register is correctly completed.

Leadership and management

Adequate

The leadership and management of the school are adequate. The new approach to working with pupils and the revised curriculum are having a positive effect on pupils' interest in school and the progress they make. In 2012, considerable turbulence led to the school becoming dysfunctional, with numerous regulations unmet. The proprietor and headteacher have reorganised the school and have ensured that all the independent school regulations are now met. The accommodation fully meets requirements and is a secure, comfortable place to learn. Significant investment has taken place with regard to the fabric of the building, decoration and resources. Information for local authorities, parents and others is clear and the complaints procedure meets requirements.

Through close working with the lead teacher, a clear vision about what the school should achieve with its new pupil population and how it is to move forward has been firmly established. This is clearly reflected in the way staff work. Most policies and procedures have been revised to reflect the new approach, although subject guides and some of the ways of linking curriculum, planning and assessment procedures are still being fully adapted. The headteacher is very clear about where the school needs to improve, although the written development plan still reflects the priorities for the past year rather than for the year ahead.

Through regular visits to the school, the headteacher is informally aware of the quality of teaching and pupils' responses. However, because there is no formal observation or checks made, there is a lack of rigorous systematic analysis or evaluation of how teaching and the curriculum is helping pupils learn and make progress and what could be done to improve these further. School self-evaluation is over generous and is based on the actions taken rather than the impact of these. It does, however, reflect the need to formally monitor the school's work, including teaching.

Residential staff work in the school so that there is continuity between residence and school. This is also to help residential staff to be aware of pupils' targets and projects so they can continue them at home. The role of the residential staff is limited, however; they are a valuable resource but are underutilised as they have little involvement in pupils' learning.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135990
Inspection number	430054
DfE registration number	822/6014
Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2
Number of part time pupils	None
Proprietor	Advanced Childcare Limited
Headteacher	Mick Coleman
Date of previous school inspection	May 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£210,931
Telephone number	01234 772081
Fax number	N/A
Email address	mick.coleman@advancedchildcare.co.uk

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