

Pear Tree School

Toy Top Farm, Houghton Bank, Heighington, Darlington, DL2 2UQ

Inspection dates

21–23 January 2014

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

1

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

1

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

1

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

1

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

1

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

2

Leadership and management

Outstanding

1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Students achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress as a result of outstanding teaching and an excellent curriculum that is broad and balanced and fully meets their needs.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Students respond exceptionally well to an excellent environment for learning in school. As a result, they are always interested and fully engaged in lessons.
- Students' personal development is outstanding and the school is outstanding in the ways that it promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students are well cared for and supported and all feel safe at school.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders are highly ambitious and lead a drive for excellence; as a result, teaching is first-rate and students achieve exceptionally well.

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

- The inspection was carried out with a full day's notice.
- The inspector observed 10 lessons taught by five different teachers. The inspector looked at students' work and held meetings with the proprietor/headteacher, teachers, students and parents and carers.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, assessment records and records pertaining to the professional development of staff. He checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed in seven questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pear Tree School is a small independent special day school situated on a working farm. It provides education for up to 18 students aged between eight and 18 years. It caters for students with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties who live in children's homes operated by the Pear Tree Organisation.
- There are currently 16 students on roll; 12 boys and four girls, two of whom are above compulsory school age. Eight students have a statement of special educational needs. The vast majority of students have experienced disruption to their education prior to joining the school.
- The school aims to, 'provide learning experiences in a variety of settings in order to break down barriers to formal education; to help students overcome avoidance strategies and encourage receptiveness and motivation to learn; this process being the first step toward a new future in education. The intention is that, wherever possible, students will be re-integrated into mainstream schools or other educational facilities independent of Pear Tree'.
- The school opened in September 2005 and its last inspection was in September 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase opportunities for students to extend their knowledge of different religions.
- Review policy documents related to welfare, health and safety more frequently to ensure that they are always fully up-to-date with current legislation and national guidance.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Achievement is outstanding due to outstanding teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Students join the school at different stages in their education, many having experienced significant disruptions to their schooling. Taking account of their capabilities and starting points, all students make rapid progress over time in all areas of learning including reading, writing and mathematics. Students make exceptional progress in their communication and social skills. They learn how to apply reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills in a wide range of subjects very effectively. By the time they leave school they are exceptionally well-prepared to further their education. Since the last inspection, almost all students have moved on to attend college and from there to volunteer work or purposeful employment.

The school provides an outstanding environment for learning. Students are interested in learning and are always keen to achieve. They acquire knowledge quickly and develop their understanding of different subjects at a rapid rate. In order to track rates of progress, the school conducts baseline assessments when students join the school. Progress is measured by consistent and regular assessments based on age-related mainstream expectations as well as national guidance for working with students with special educational needs. Assessment data show that standards of attainment in all subjects, including reading, often exceed those of students with similar difficulties in other schools. All students in Key Stage 3 and above achieve a good range of externally awarded accreditations through the AQA Unit Award Scheme, functional skills and Entry Level awards including mathematics, digital photography, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). One student achieved a GCSE in mathematics. These results, coupled with the high-quality work that students produce, indicate that levels of achievement are exceptional.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Lessons always start punctually and proceed without disruption. Students have excellent attitudes towards learning. They are enthusiastic and always fully engaged; they apply themselves to tasks set during lessons. Students work exceptionally well together; for example, during a Year 10 and 11 geography lesson about plate boundaries in the earth's crust, students carefully explained the topic to their peers. During lessons and other activities, students are consistently thoughtful about their behaviour which helps to create an extremely positive school ethos where students thrive. Team work is exceptional. For example, during farm work at the end of the day, students clean stables, groom horses and prepare food and bedding happily together. Bullying is extremely rare and students actively try to prevent it from happening. Students are very aware of how to keep themselves and others safe; all students report that they feel safe at school.

Attendance is excellent and this has a strong impact on students' learning. Staff provide excellent guidance to students and help them to manage their anger and anti-social behaviour; as a result, all students make exceptional progress in these areas. Most students find aspects of farming especially rewarding and staff make every effort to ensure that they take good advantage of the opportunities available. Students celebrate their achievements; as a result, they grow in self-esteem and self-confidence. Students are proud to be part of a working farm. During the inspection, one student exclaimed 'I am proud of my work and what I have done!'

Most elements of the school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are exemplary. Students learn about spirituality through many aspects of farm life and experiencing nature. For example, during lambing season in the spring, students experience the miracle of life as well as death whilst they assist in the birthing process for new lambs. They

learn about morality through personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and frequent discussions with staff. The school stresses the importance of upright moral behaviour. As a result, students make great progress in the ways that they interact with each other; they are respectful, courteous and friendly.

Students gain a well-developed understanding of British culture through geography, history and citizenship. Students learn about political issues in a balanced way; as a result, they learn to make balanced, reasoned judgements and are well-prepared for life in British society. They contribute to the wider community by collecting funds for charity, for example for an African orphanage.

Students learn about different cultures. For example a project on the Holocaust is a major feature of the curriculum. Students celebrate cultures during themed evenings in their places of residence; staff make every effort to ensure that these events promote equality and diversity effectively. Religious Education does not feature on the syllabus aside from infrequent religious services at church; students do not visit places of worship. The school acknowledges that students would benefit from learning about different religions and is taking steps to improve this provision.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

Teaching is outstanding; as a result, students achieve exceedingly well and make rapid and sustained progress in their learning. All teachers have consistently high expectations of all students and convey these expectations so that students are always interested in lessons and fully engaged. Teachers plan and teach lessons well enabling students to learn exceptionally well. During lessons they carefully check students' understanding of the subject matter and adapt teaching methods to best suit the learners; this has a notably positive impact on learning. Reading, writing, mathematics and communication are taught highly effectively. These subjects are cohesively planned and implemented in all subjects for students of all ages; as a result, students gain strong foundations in learning and are well-prepared for their futures.

Teachers have created an environment where students are committed to succeed in their learning. They plan lessons with a thorough understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses; this allows for progression in their learning activities over time so that all students are challenged and enabled to make outstanding progress. Teachers mark all work carefully and provide either written or verbal feedback to help them make rapid gains in their learning. They ensure that students learn exceptionally well by using varied and imaginative teaching strategies and sharply focused support that matches individual needs. Students acknowledge the high levels of support that they receive from teachers; one student said 'all staff give you a hand when you need it!' Teachers use a very good range of resources and lessons are paced well. Often, lessons encompass an excellent range of topics and subjects, for example, a Year 10 and 11 English lesson included general knowledge and reference to current events .

Students enjoy warm, supportive relationships with teachers and staff. Teachers have good links with care workers at students' places of residence and care workers are always present to assist school staff during the school day. Effective working links between the school and the residential setting have a strong impact on students' appreciation of learning.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The curriculum is outstanding. The school is located on a working farm and the curriculum includes a range of farm-based studies. The curriculum provides highly positive, memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high-quality learning. It meets the needs of all students providing them with the opportunity to make exceptional progress in all subjects, particularly in developing their reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills. The curriculum planning gives details

about clear and rapid progression for all subjects and activities appropriate to all year groups; it is supported with detailed schemes of work and lesson planning that suitably challenges students of all abilities.

Students receive sound advice to make important choices and to prepare very well for the next stage in their lives. The curriculum includes a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities. Some of these take place in the evenings and all activities provide students with valuable experiences that have a highly positive impact on their world view and appreciation of education. During the inspection, one carer asserted that students have 'marvellous' experiences in school and cited stocking the fishing lake as an example. Extra-curricular activities include fishing, organising a 'time-capsule' and burying it in the garden; woodland walks and trips to a game fair and the Great Yorkshire Show. Students also enjoy residential and organised school trips to Edinburgh, London and France that complement much of the learning that takes place at school. For example, in Brittany students spend time exploring the trenches and contemplating war, peace and freedom at the war cemeteries and memorials. The impact of the wider curriculum is that students become knowledgeable about a wide range of issues and are enabled to become well-rounded individuals keen to develop and pursue new interests.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good and all of the independent school standards are met. The school has established robust policies and procedures that are in almost all respects in keeping with current legislation and guidance and are implemented effectively; these include a policy to tackle bullying. During this inspection, a small number of very minor omissions in some policies were found; these were brought to the attention of school leaders and were rectified immediately. Although policy documents are reviewed regularly they are not reviewed sufficiently frequently to ensure that they are always fully up-to-date.

Arrangements for safeguarding are robust and regularly reviewed. The school implements its child protection policy effectively. All staff and proprietors have received enhanced clearances through the Disclosure and Barring Service to work with children; these and all other required checks are included in a single central register. The designated person for child protection and all staff have attended the required training at the required levels and intervals. Arrangements for the recruitment of new staff are robust; during induction, new staff receive clear guidance on child protection procedures and on how to keep students safe at all times.

Staff are committed to providing high levels of care and support. Supervision is consistently good and arrangements are in place to ensure that all students are always safe. Staff undertake a good range of training related to health and safety; all staff are trained in first-aid, some in equestrian first-aid. The school has a good level of fire safety; it has prepared a detailed fire risk assessment and all fire equipment is checked regularly. Fire drills are conducted every term and are recorded appropriately. Risk assessments for the premises and trips are comprehensive. The school works well with parents, carers and other agencies to ensure that students are safe. Students all agree that they feel safe and that bullying is extremely rare. Staff promote excellent behaviour in school and on trips; as a result, the atmosphere is always calm and purposeful and the environment is highly conducive to learning. Students learn about nutrition and healthy lifestyles through PSHE, science, farm and agricultural studies. As a result, students develop good attitudes towards their personal health and are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders are extremely successful in their drive to maintain exceptionally high levels of achievement for students of all abilities. Senior

leaders have high ambitions for students; they expect students to attain high standards. As a result, they have successfully created an outstanding learning environment where students achieve exceedingly well. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the needs and abilities of students and the school's strengths and areas to improve. They therefore plan and take actions to improve the provision effectively. Staff and students are courteous to each other; this creates an atmosphere of mutual respect where students thrive.

Senior leaders have produced robust policies to ensure that students achieve high levels of literacy. They support teachers to improve teaching and learning. As a result, teaching is outstanding. Leaders have ensured that students' behaviour and personal development are exceptional through producing an excellent curriculum and outstanding opportunities for high-quality learning. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. As a result, students grow in self-esteem and self-confidence; they become considerate of others and skilled in the ways that they interact with each other.

The premises and accommodation are very well-suited to support the curriculum. All areas of the school, including the stables and farm areas, are well-maintained and the main school building is decorated to a good standard. The school meets all of the requirements with regard to the provision of information to parents and carers, including suitable complaints procedures. Senior leaders work exceptionally well with parents, carers and other agencies to ensure that students thrive in the school environment and achieve very high standards of learning.

School leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

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 the quality of education has serious weaknesses. |

School details

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|--------------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 135113 |
| Inspection number | 422779 |
| DfE registration number | 841/6003 |

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Day special school for students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties |
| School status | Independent School |
| Age range of pupils | 8–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 16 |
| Number of part time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Mr David Bartlett |
| Chair | Mr David Bartlett |
| Headteacher | Mr David Bartlett |
| Date of previous school inspection | 29–30 September 2010 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £16,484 |
| Telephone number | 01388 776799 |
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