

# Halton School

31 Main Street, Halton, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2AN

## Inspection dates

25–26 November 2015

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in a wide range of subjects including English and mathematics.
- The school's broad and balanced curriculum meets pupils' needs and provides them with a wide range of opportunities to gain knowledge and skills. Pupils are prepared well for life in their community and in modern Britain.
- Leaders and managers share a common vision for excellence which they work passionately to achieve. They care deeply about the welfare and personal development of all pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe and are well prepared for the next stages of their education.
- The school meets all of the independent school standards.
- Teaching across the school is good. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding effectively because teachers match activities well to pupils' abilities and interests.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is exemplary; they are welcoming and proud of their school and keen to share their interests and learning with visitors. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning; they have eager and inquisitive natures that often result in their leading their own learning through the questions they pose of teachers.
- The systems in place to ensure that pupils stay safe and protected from risks, including those of radicalisation and extremism, are strong.
- Pupils know how to adopt healthy lifestyles and stay safe, including while they are online, because of the effective guidance they receive.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is consistently of the highest quality because teachers have limited experience of outstanding practice elsewhere. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities presented by pupils' questions to help pupils deepen their learning.
- In a minority of lessons, most-able pupils do not always receive the level of challenge they deserve from the work they are given. Therefore, too few pupils make outstanding progress.
- Leaders' plans for school development do not always contain sufficiently detailed success criteria to allow the proprietor to check easily that planned actions are working. Not all the school's logs reflect the highest standards of detail seen in the majority of school records.
- Teachers do not always make the best use of phonics (the sounds letter make) to help pupils develop strategies to accurately spell more complex words.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding so that standards rise still higher and pupils make outstanding progress overall by:
  - ensuring that teachers make best use of their assessments to plan and deliver sufficient challenge for the most able, in all lessons
  - ensuring that teachers receive appropriate opportunities to enhance further their subject knowledge in areas where they feel less secure, including in the teaching of phonics
  - developing further the use of phonics as a strategy to help pupils increase their confidence and accuracy in spelling
  - ensuring that teachers consistently make best use of the learning opportunities presented by pupils' questions to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management of the school by:
  - ensuring that leaders, teachers and teaching assistants benefit from the sharing of outstanding practice with other effective schools
  - ensuring that all records and logs meet the highest standards seen in the best practice across the school
  - ensuring that school development planning is further refined to allow leaders and the proprietor to more easily check that actions are having the desired impact and that developments are on schedule.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school's leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders and managers have a clear vision and passion to provide the best care and education for their pupils. This is shared by all members of staff. Leaders' high expectations of both pupils and staff, based around the school's ethos of mutual respect and tolerance, leads to pupils developing excellent behaviour and consequently making good progress in their learning.
- The school's broad and balanced curriculum promotes the development and application of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school offers a wide range of subjects in addition to English and mathematics. The careful planning of the content of each topic ensures that pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils have well-developed links to their local community and often take part in charitable fundraising events. They learn about democracy and other British institutions, often at first hand, from visitors such as the local MP, the local mayor and police officers. Pupils study a number of different faiths including Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Leaders' promotion of fundamental British values is strong.
- Leaders ensure that they meet the requirements for the provision of information for parents, carers and others. The school's policies for the handling of complaints adhere to the regulations and are implemented effectively. The school has good systems to share information with parents, carers and local authorities regarding pupils' progress for those with education, health and care plans. Regular contact with the care homes in which the majority of its pupils reside and with social workers, the effective use of reports, 'home to school communication sheets' and annual reviews mean that parents and carers are well informed about pupils' achievements.
- Comments received by the inspector from parents, local authority placement officers and teachers from other schools who work in partnership with Halton School praise the positive impact the school has on its pupils. One parent was pleased to say that since starting Halton School her child had started to take an interest in doing homework for the first time.
- Leaders have ensured that a suitable system is in place to evaluate the performance of staff that links directly to pay awards. Leaders recognise that due to the size of the school, teachers do not have many opportunities to visit other classrooms and learn from other practitioners, but appropriate plans are in place to tackle this. For example, leaders are improving opportunities to do this through regular training conferences within the company, Keys Childcare Limited, which owns the school.
- Teachers' and teaching assistants' professional development is linked closely to the school's priorities, particularly its responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. For example, staff have all received up-to-date training in safeguarding and recognised restraint techniques. All staff are able to explain how they would identify and respond to concerns regarding extremism and the possible radicalisation of pupils because leaders ensure that all staff have appropriate training.
- Leaders pay close attention to those pupils who are educated away from the school site to ensure that alternative provision is helping pupils to achieve. Before any placement begins, leaders undertake a visit and conduct a risk assessment to check that the pupil will be safe while attending. During the placement, leaders carry out frequent visits to ensure that pupils are attending, are engaged in their programme of study and are making progress.
- Leaders at all levels, including the proprietor's representatives, have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching, because of their frequent and accurate monitoring. Leaders keep up-to-date records and logs of events within the school, including those that record complaints, incidents of bullying and any use of physical intervention by staff. These records are generally detailed and well maintained but in a minority of cases, particularly in the recording of incidents of bullying, they do not always evaluate the outcomes and impact of any actions taken by the schools.
- Leaders plan appropriate priorities for development, but their plans do not always contain sufficient detail about what is expected. Consequently, they cannot always easily check that their actions are having the desired impact.

### ■ The governance of the school

- The company's officers, including the director of education and the regional executive headteacher frequently visit the school and have a good and detailed understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The company has established systems that frequently monitor the outcomes for pupils at the school and analyse these weekly reports carefully to hold leaders to account.
  - The company has taken effective action to ensure that the school's leadership has sustained its capacity to improve during a period of leadership transition.
  - The company has ensured that the fabric of the school, including its grounds, is well maintained.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe. The company has well-established and effective procedures to deal with concerns. Company officers have not hesitated to take immediate, robust and effective actions to protect children when any issues have arisen.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers generally plan lessons effectively so that pupils make good progress. Lessons are interesting, and activities carefully matched to pupils' interests wherever possible. As a result, activities generally hold pupils' attention and focus and allow them to make good progress. For example, pupils demonstrated well-developed skills by writing formal letters of thanks to the curators at a local museum they had visited as part of a history topic. The work in pupils' books demonstrates that lessons planned in sequence, particularly in English and mathematics, build well upon pupils' prior learning.
- Pupils succeed and their confidence and self-esteem blossom in their classes because of the strong relationships between adults and pupils. Adults care deeply for their pupils and ensure that the atmosphere in and out of class is one that nurtures pupils' trust and respect. As a result of this, pupils, many of whom have experienced problems of low self-esteem, are confident to contribute to class discussions, and ask and answer questions. For example, in a science lesson, pupils developed their own hypotheses about how flowers take up water, and designed their own experiments to test them out.
- Teachers continually assess pupils' progress. Leaders' accurate analyses of teachers' assessments show that pupils' progress since joining the school is generally rapid so that gaps are closing quickly and securely. Consequently, although their attainment is well below that of their peers nationally, pupils are making up ground and quickly closing the gap between their attainment and what would typically be expected for their age.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and used effectively to promote learning. Teachers are highly self-evaluative and have identified where they feel less secure in their subject knowledge, including the use of phonics to help pupils improve their spelling. Leaders are aware of this and have planned additional training. The school's use of external experts to deliver specific subjects further bolsters subject knowledge in teaching staff. For example, a local artist's work in school has resulted in some high-quality artwork by pupils, including the production of a life-size model of a dragon that was displayed on the local village green, and the creation of impressive super-hero costumes.
- In a small number of lessons, teachers do not always make the best use of their detailed knowledge of pupils' prior learning to ensure that the activities planned provide enough challenge for the most able. On occasion, teachers do not always make the best use of the opportunities that arise from pupils' questions to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils overcome many obstacles to their learning, especially those relating to their self-esteem and shyness because of the school's robust actions and supportive ethos. Consequently, pupils become enthusiastic and committed learners who are confident to talk with visitors about their learning and interests. One pupil proudly showed his rugby trophies to the inspector and talked confidently about the team he played for, while another specifically requested an interview with the inspector at which he confidently articulated his pride in the school and the difference it was making to him. He said: 'This is the only school I have ever been to that I really like... Now I am so much better now!'

- Pupils value the excellent relationships with staff and the effective care and guidance they receive. As a result, pupils become well-rounded individuals who are well prepared for life in modern Britain and ready for their next stages of education. Pupils feel part of their community and take part in many local events such as the village remembrance parade where they observed two minutes' silence before laying a poppy wreath they had made in school.
- Opportunities for pupils to enhance their spiritual, moral and cultural understanding are abundant throughout the school. Pupils participate in religious education in which they study a variety of faiths as well as Christianity. Personal, social, health and economic education lessons ensure that pupils know how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The effective use of educational visits, such as to the different Christian cathedrals in Liverpool and a Sikh gurdwara, enhance further the lessons taught in class.
- Leaders effectively promote fundamental British values such as the rule of law and British institutions through lessons and carefully chosen visits and visitors. Pupils have visited the local police museum, and receive regular visits from police and fire officers, the local mayor and their MP.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is exemplary. Pupils are polite, welcoming and respectful of adults and each other. They show genuine care for each other, exemplified by the actions of an older pupil who, at a breaktime, of his own volition helped a younger pupil participate in a game children were playing so that he did not feel excluded or disadvantaged. Pupils demonstrate eagerness to learn in their lessons. They concentrate hard, at times extending their learning further because of their inquisitive natures and their confidence in asking questions, sharing thoughts and exploring the application of their skills.
- All pupils say they feel safe in the school and that there is no bullying. They have a good understanding of all aspects of bullying, including online bullying, and know the difference between bullying and merely falling out with each other. Pupils say that when bullying has occurred teachers have been quick and effective in dealing with it.
- The school's behaviour policy is very effective in modifying many pupils' previously challenging and, at times, aggressive and violent behaviour to that which you would expect to see in the best of schools. The effective and consistent implementation of the recently reviewed behaviour policy reinforces and rewards positive behaviour while also making clear what is and is not acceptable. This has resulted in significant reductions in any pupils' inclination to behave aggressively or violently. As a result, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of physical interventions performed by staff in line with the school's policy.
- Attendance is in line with the national average. Pupils generally attend well. Occasionally pupils are absent due to well-founded reasons relating to their special needs or residential placements: for example, therapy appointments or contacts with social workers from outside the local area. A small minority of pupils have at times refused to go to school from their care home. When this happens, school leaders take effective action to ensure that pupils do not miss out on learning by visiting the care home to 'take the school to them'. Consequently, those pupils who are absent from school continue to make good progress.

## Outcomes for pupils

## are good

- All pupils currently attending the school are disadvantaged in some way. Three quarters of pupils have a statement of special educational needs while the others are undergoing assessment for education, health and care plans. Nearly all pupils make strong progress from their starting points in a wide variety of subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science because of the teaching, support and guidance they receive. As a result, pupils are quickly closing the gaps in attainment with other pupils nationally. Pupils have good basic skills in literacy and are able to communicate effectively and with confidence. Spelling is improving but pupils' lack of knowledge of phonics hinders their progress in being able to spell words that are more complex. Pupils have good basic number skills and are able to apply them confidently, for example in answering questions requiring them to analyse information represented in graphs.
- Pupils benefit from additional therapeutic support provided by company experts, which complements the high levels of effective support in the classrooms. As a consequence of this support, they have much improved concentration and behaviour and are highly motivated to learn.

- All pupils have gained external accreditation for many aspects of their work in the last year including writing, mathematics, science and personal skills. Other pupils have made such good progress that they have successfully transferred into mainstream education.
- Pupils read widely and often because leaders prioritise the development of a love of books and ensure that books used in class link closely to the themes and topics being studied. Pupils read frequently with teachers and teaching assistants on a one-to-one basis and regularly attend the local library. Pupils are well prepared for the future because of the breadth of the school's curriculum. They receive regular independent information, advice and guidance commissioned from the local authority, and benefit from the school's links with local colleges that provide vocational experiences and training.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133485
<b>Inspection number</b>	10009033
<b>DfE registration number</b>	876/6000

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special school
<b>School status</b>	Independent
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–14
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	8
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Keys Childcare Limited
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Bruce Murdin
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£35,900
<b>Telephone number</b>	01928 589810
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.keyschildcare.co.uk/services/education/halton">www.keyschildcare.co.uk/services/education/halton</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:ht.haltonschool@keyschildcare.co.uk">ht.haltonschool@keyschildcare.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6–8 November 2013

## Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2000. It is a small independent special school which caters for residential and day pupils. It is registered for up to 14 boys and girls aged from seven to 14 who have significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school is owned by Keys Childcare Limited, which also owns a number of other schools in England.
- Currently there are eight pupils on roll. All pupils are of White British heritage, nearly all have a statement of special educational needs, and around three quarters are in the care of their local authority.
- All pupils currently at the school are boys.
- The school aims to provide 'a positive and safe environment where pupils are nurtured educationally, socially and spiritually'.
- The school has no religious affiliation.
- The school was last inspected in November 2013 when it was judged to be good.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed pupils' learning in several lessons, most of which were jointly visited with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work and at the school's records of their progress.
- The inspector held meetings with, or was in contact by telephone with, senior leaders, staff, pupils, parents and a range of other professionals.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school.
- The inspectors checked the school's compliance with the appropriate regulations for independent schools.

## Inspection team

John Nixon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector



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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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