

Highcroft School

Highcroft, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL13 5AG

Inspection dates 8–10 December 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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils make good and outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Adults manage behaviour extremely well and pupils quickly learn how to become responsible for their own behaviour.
- Pupils are exceptionally polite and courteous. They say that they feel safe and they enjoy coming to school.
- Much of the teaching is outstanding. Consequently, pupils who were previously reluctant to learn enjoy engaging in lessons.
- Teachers engage pupils in a range of activities which inspire them to want to learn.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and taught well through a range of topics.
- Leaders and managers know their school extremely well. They are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses and address areas for development immediately.
- Learners in the sixth form make good progress, and the school prepares them particularly well for the next stage of their education.
- Leaders and managers have taken all the necessary steps to ensure the independent school standards are consistently met.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching is consistently outstanding.
- Some teachers do not listen or respond appropriately to pupils.
- At times, teachers do not focus on what pupils are going to learn.
- Not all teachers are skilled enough at questioning pupils to help them think for themselves.
- Leaders and managers have not addressed the remaining weaknesses in teaching quickly enough.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of 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 leadership and management by ensuring that school action plans are highly focused on weaknesses and that the impact of actions is reviewed in a specified and appropriate time period.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - listen to and respond appropriately to pupils' answers to show that their work is valued and so that they know how to improve
 - use questioning skills more effectively to encourage deeper thinking and more reflective responses from pupils
 - place more emphasis on pupils' learning rather than practical aspects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers are passionate about re-engaging pupils in learning and helping them to fulfil their potential both academically and socially. This passion is shared by all staff in the school.
- All staff have high expectations about all aspects of school life. These high expectations are communicated to pupils, who consequently learn quickly what is expected of them, and improvements in their behaviour and learning are rapid.
- Senior leaders have rigorous monitoring procedures which encompass both behavioural and academic aspects of school life. Pupils' academic success is tracked well through National Curriculum levels, and assessments are made during and at the end of each term. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and its weaknesses.
- A very clear behaviour strategy with a positive reward system is consistently used by all staff on a daily basis and pupils understand it well. All aspects of behaviours, including major incidents, physical interventions, absconding and attendance, are tracked rigorously on a daily basis and then reviewed on a weekly, monthly and annual basis to check for any trends.
- Senior leaders immediately noted the increase in numbers of absconding pupils in September 2015. They took decisive action due to the risk to pupils' safety, the involvement of the local police and the emotional implications. Due to appropriate action taken, the numbers of incidents fell dramatically.
- Pupils study a range of subjects which helps them to gain a good level of skills and knowledge. Pupils' learning is enriched exceptionally well by a range of different activities and visits, for example they took part in a children's book festival and enjoyed literature from a range of cultures and genres.
- The needs of older pupils are very well met through a highly individualised timetable and their needs being well met in lessons. A programme of study means they receive impartial careers advice as well as experience in a workplace if appropriate. A suitable range of qualifications are available to each pupil. Leaders and managers have therefore taken steps to meet the needs of pupils up to the age of 18 as requested in the material change.
- The headteacher ensures fundamental British values are taught well. Through topics such as sex education pupils learn, among other things, to respect differences and why it is necessary to have laws and abide by them.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. Leaders and managers provide a comprehensive programme of lessons which are well taught and allow pupils to learn about other cultures and consider moral dilemmas. A recent topic on terrorism led to research and discussion surrounding recent global events. The study culminated in lengthy pieces of written work and with thoughtful comments such as 'these people are terrorists, not Muslims'.
- Leaders and managers monitor teaching rigorously. They conduct regular lesson observations and supervision meetings so that strengths and areas of development are discussed and shared. Weaker teachers also have frequent opportunities to observe and learn from outstanding teaching. However, when these systems for improvement have not been effective, leaders and managers have not been quick enough to take further steps to improve the quality of teaching.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Senior leaders know their school very well. They receive weekly information from the headteacher regarding all aspects of pupil welfare and education. They challenge the headteacher and set stringent key performance indicators. The timescales they set are not always specific enough to enable them to measure the impact of performance management.
 - The directors have ensured that all staff are extremely well trained and receive appropriate checks. Systems in place are extremely efficient and monitored well by directors.
 - Risk assessments are thorough and all activities and personal risk assessments are up to date. Consequently, they have actively promoted the well-being of pupils.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All senior leaders ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met and that they will continue to be met should the material change request be approved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Overall, the quality of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. Teachers ensure that pupils are highly engaged in their learning by making lessons stimulating and fun. This means that pupils who would not previously engage in lessons are now eager to do so.
- Pupils make good or better progress when they are engaged in their learning, as was observed in their politics lessons. They wrote their own manifesto which they presented to the class. In addition, while the local Conservative candidate was in the area, pupils eagerly and spontaneously took the opportunity to interview him. Teachers ensured that pupils learnt about law and democracy as well as improving their literacy skills.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics lessons. They learn through a range of practical, real-life activities combined with learning calculation methods. Teachers' explanations are clear and they ensure that pupils are quickly given the support they need.
- Many pupils read fluently and have regular opportunities to practise this skill, such as when completing research on the internet and presenting their work to the class.
- Pupils' independent and collaborative skills are encouraged through a range of activities. Pupils worked extremely well while putting up timelines around the school corridors. Most pupils worked independently in their groups with little or no adult intervention.
- All adults manage behaviour extremely well and promote good relationships. Teaching assistants are highly skilled at giving pupils support at appropriate times so that learning is not disrupted. Adults set clear boundaries and expectations are high. They use the reward system consistently in all lessons and help pupils to become responsible for their own behaviour.
- All teachers and assistants know the pupils well and are aware of their academic and emotional needs. Consequently, teaching is adapted throughout the day if necessary to meet these needs.
- Most teachers are highly skilled at questioning pupils so that they give considered answers. However, some are not so skilled and this limits pupils' learning.
- Pupils' work is mostly well marked and feedback given to pupils is highly valuable. Feedback in English is not as good. In English lessons, teachers do not always listen to pupils' responses and do not respond in a way that helps them to value and improve their work.
- Most teachers are highly tuned in to the learning that is taking place and support pupils immediately to ensure learning is continuous. Occasionally, some teachers are too focused on the activity and not on the learning that pupils are gaining from it. This means that, although pupils are engaged in an activity, learning at an appropriate level is not always taking place.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Teachers ensure that there are lots of opportunities for pupils to develop independent and cooperative learning skills. This helps pupils to become more confident in their abilities and more successful at learning, particularly alongside their peers.
- Pupils receive excellent tuition in personal and social skills and citizenship, which promotes their personal development exceptionally well. For example, pupils took the British citizenship test to help them to understand what it means to live in Britain. They also take part in events in the local community, such as services at the local church. Plans have already been made for pupils to help at the local parent and toddler group and care home.
- Each pupil has an individual education plan which is regularly reviewed. These include targets for their personal development, which helps staff to focus on how to meet very individual needs.
- Pupils are extremely well informed about how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They effectively study a variety of topics such as internet safety, drugs, sex education and child sexual exploitation. Pupils speak knowledgeably about how sexual exploitation and grooming can be instigated by young and older people.
- Leaders from the local pupil referral unit comment on the significant improvement in behaviour and personal development of pupils they send to Highcroft School. They say that pupils who had previously struggled to settle in to other schools do so quickly at Highcroft School.

- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school, and that good relationships have helped them to feel settled and they are motivated to learn.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. While moving around the school, pupils are polite and courteous.
- The behaviour of pupils is rigorously tracked and improvements from their starting points are significant. Incidents of major disruption or physical restraint quickly decline and become increasingly rare.
- Excellent behaviour management from adults and clear rules and boundaries alongside high expectations mean that pupils know exactly what is required of them. They quickly learn what is acceptable and behave accordingly.
- Improvements in attendance are exceptional. Pupils who have previously been permanently absent from school now have high levels of attendance.
- Any occasions of low-level disruption in lessons occur when some teaching is less than good or outstanding.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' starting points are lower than expected for their age as a direct result of extended periods of absence from education. However, from these starting points, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress across a range of subjects.
- In mathematics, the majority of pupils make good or better progress. Teachers are skilled in clarifying learning to each pupil at a level they can understand. In addition, they design activities that engage pupils well in their learning.
- Pupils also make good progress in other subjects, such as art and geography. In geography, they acquire more complex skills and information when learning about topics such as land erosion.
- In English, progress made by pupils is good, but not as strong as in other subjects. Pupils are taught literacy skills but have little opportunity during lessons to apply those skills.
- Pupils' dramatic change in their learning attitudes and behaviours has a very positive effect on their progress. This, together with opportunities to work in the community, means that they are much better prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Sixth form learners benefit from a highly individualised timetable along with other pupils in the school. Work experience is arranged by the headteacher for pupils who are ready for this type of experience. Learners make excellent progress in a range of skills, for example health and safety while working in a local garage. For other sixth form learners, individual support in lessons enables them to achieve well academically.
- Learners gain accredited qualifications in English and mathematics at an appropriate level. They make good or better progress from starting points that are lower than other learners of the same age nationally.
- Learners enjoy learning about a range of interesting topics which are taught very well. Teachers also go to great lengths to enhance the range of subjects on offer with a variety of trips and events, for example six-mile hikes and trips to the Beamish Museum.
- Keys Childcare have developed their own independent skills learning package. This is particularly well used for sixth form learners so that they can be well prepared for the next stage of their education, training, employment and living circumstances. Along with staff in the care setting, education staff support learners while they complete a range of tasks, for example completing application forms and calculating weekly and monthly budgets.
- As with other pupils in the school, the behaviour and learning attitudes of learners in the sixth form are outstanding. Pupils make exceptional progress in their personal development.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the independent school standards are consistently met and that the subjects on offer are suitable to meet the needs of learners in the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	136748
Inspection number	10006328
DfE registration number	840/6012

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.

Type of school	Special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Keys Group Ltd
Chair	Heather Laffin
Headteacher	David Laheney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,100
Telephone number	01388 710753/710968
Website	www.keyschildcare.co.uk
Email address	davidlaheney@keyschildcare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	May 2012

Information about this school

- Highcroft School is a small independent special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is currently registered for up to 16 boys and girls aged from 11 to 16 years.
- The school was previously inspected in May 2012.
- The school is part of the Keys Childcare Group, which is a national provider of special education and residential accommodation.
- There are currently eight pupils on roll, all of whom reside in the residential setting. Two of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Pupils generally attend the school for a relatively short period of time, usually between two and twelve months.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities and local pupil referral units. Pupils also take part in work experience with local businesses.
- The company's mission statement is 'working in partnership to unlock each individual's true potential'. Its aims include 'to provide a safe, secure, positive and supportive environment in which each individual can contribute and feel valued, knowing that his/her achievements are recognised'.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out over two and a half days.
- The Department for Education also commissioned the inspector to consider a material change request from the school to increase the registered age range of pupils from 16 to 18 years.
- The inspector would recommend approval of the material change as leaders and managers have ensured that the independent school standards are consistently met and that the curriculum is suitable to meet the needs of learners in the sixth form.
- The inspector observed learning in lessons throughout the morning and afternoon in a range of subjects. She also studied the work in books across all subjects for all pupils.
- The inspector spoke to pupils and staff during the inspection and took their responses into account. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. Seven staff questionnaires were taken into account.
- The inspector held regular meetings with the headteacher and directors throughout the inspection.
- The inspector examined school documentation, such as admission and attendance registers, and a number of policies, including those for behaviour, safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, and all documents required as part of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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