

Ashmeads School

Buccleuch Farm, Haigham Hill, Kettering NN15 5PH

Inspection dates

10–12 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Safeguarding is ineffective. Leaders have not taken appropriate action in response to safeguarding concerns. The records kept for safeguarding incidents are incomplete and inaccurate.
- Staff do not fully understand their duties in relation to safeguarding. They are not fully alert to all the signs that young people may be at risk of abuse.
- Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are consistently met. There are unmet standards in relation to the quality of education provided, and the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- Leaders are unclear about all their responsibilities and are not able to carry out their roles effectively.
- Teaching is not always effective in ensuring that pupils make consistently strong progress. At times, pupils complete activities that lack challenge.
- The assessments that pupils complete when they join the school do not give an accurate picture of their true abilities. As a result, the targets set for some pupils are too low.
- Pupils' individual education plans do not accurately reflect their needs and abilities. As a result, teachers do not always plan appropriate learning tasks.
- Staff do not implement the behaviour policy effectively. They do not consistently apply the sanctions for breaches of the behaviour code.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is successful in re-engaging pupils who have missed significant periods of schooling.
- Leaders have taken appropriate and decisive action in relation to previously unmet standards. The school has improved systems for recording absence.
- A well-planned programme of careers education ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Pupils make good progress in improving their behaviour. They feel safe in school and appreciate the supportive, encouraging relationships they have with their teachers.
- The school's provision for personal, social, health and economic education is effective in teaching pupils how to stay safe from risks.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all staff fully understand their duties in relation to the safeguarding of pupils and take appropriate action in response to safeguarding concerns
 - keeping a detailed and accurate log of all safeguarding concerns, along with the actions taken and the outcome
 - clarifying leaders' roles and responsibilities so that leaders can carry out their duties more effectively and make a better contribution to multi-agency working
 - improving the quality of individual education plans so that they more accurately reflect pupils' learning and pastoral needs
 - implementing the behaviour policy effectively and ensuring that sanctions are consistently applied.
- Improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make by:
 - improving the accuracy of assessment when pupils first join the school so that appropriately challenging targets can be set for all pupils
 - using information about pupils to plan learning that challenges pupils to make consistently strong progress.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
 - Ensure that teaching enables all pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraphs 3 and 3(a)).
 - Ensure that teaching involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time (paragraphs 3 and 3(c)).
 - Ensure that teaching shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraphs 3 and 3(d)).
 - Ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraphs 7, 7(a) and 7(b)).
 - Ensure that the written behaviour policy is implemented effectively (paragraphs 9, 9(b) and 9(c)).
 - Ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school standards are met consistently, and the well-being of pupils is actively promoted (paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders have not ensured that safeguarding is effective. They have not taken appropriate action in response to, and have not kept appropriate records of, safeguarding concerns raised by staff. Consequently, pupils are exposed to unnecessary risks in relation to welfare, health and safety.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff fully understand their duties in relation to safeguarding. Staff are not alert to the possible signs of child sexual exploitation or the actions that should be taken in relation to female genital mutilation. They are not sufficiently familiar with the latest statutory guidance.
- Leaders have not followed up pupils' absence with due diligence. They have not informed the appropriate authorities when pupils have had significant periods of absence from school.
- There are a number of unmet independent school standards relating to the quality of education provided, and the health, welfare and safety of pupils. Consequently, the standards for leadership and management are unmet.
- Currently, too much rests with the headteacher. She is also the special educational needs coordinator, the school's designated safeguarding lead, and has a teaching commitment. She is not able to fulfil these roles effectively, and consequently there is insufficient oversight of the school's safeguarding procedures, and the school is not always able to make an effective contribution to multi-agency working.
- Leaders have not ensured that the behaviour policy is implemented effectively. For example, while it is clear in the policy that the use of derogatory and abusive language is not tolerated, staff only sometimes record and sanction this breach of the rules.
- Pupils' individual education plans are of varying quality. For too many pupils the targets set are generic and do not reflect their specific learning and behaviour needs. This means that teachers are not able to plan learning that accurately meets their needs. The most recent examples of such plans for pupils who have just joined the school are of much better quality, but this good practice is far from consistent.
- Despite these failings, the school has strengths, and leaders have responded swiftly to put right previous failings. There is a collective zeal among leaders from the school and the proprietors to ensure that they improve the school.
- Senior leaders from the company have put in place effective support for the headteacher and other staff. There are much improved systems to record pupils' absence and progress. Consequently, leaders have a better overview of these aspects of the school's work.
- During the inspection, one pupil chose to bake cakes for the headteacher, telling the inspector that this was because 'she's kind, and keeps things nice and tidy'. This was typical of the views expressed by many pupils, who appreciate the kindness and support that the headteacher and other staff show them.
- The school's staff are highly committed, dedicated and loyal. Together, they are a unified and cohesive team who help each other to manage the many challenges that life at the school can bring.
- Leaders have put in place effective measures to monitor and improve the quality of teaching. The headteacher carries out regular observations of staff, and discusses with them their learning and development needs. She sets appropriate targets for their improvement. Staff who spoke with inspectors confirmed that the headteacher and other leaders from the company help them to develop their practice.
- A well-planned curriculum allows pupils to make progress in their academic learning, as well as improve their behaviour and their social and emotional well-being. Pupils can choose from work-related courses such as bicycle maintenance, hairdressing and barbering, and music technology, as well as following the national curriculum. In addition, pupils can undertake therapeutic sessions that help them to understand and manage their behaviour. The variety of options on offer means that pupils re-engage more readily with their education and make the most of the opportunities that the school provides.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is a strength. Respect for self and others underpins the school's ethos and ensures that pupils develop confidence and the ability to manage challenging situations more effectively. Pupils have opportunities to visit local places of worship and learn about a variety of faiths and cultures. Their colourful displays and artwork are testament to their enjoyment of and pride in this work.
- There is good communication with staff from the residential homes where the pupils live. This ensures that staff are able to share and address any issues that arise, and put the right support in place.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The proprietors have not ensured that the school's safeguarding practices meet requirements. They have not ensured that all staff know and understand their duties as laid out in the relevant guidance.

- There are systems in place for senior leaders from the company to check on the school's work. They visit the school regularly, identify any issues and put in place a time-measured action plan to ensure that leaders quickly put right any failings. Despite these good systems, the proprietors have not paid sufficient attention to how well leaders are implementing the company's safeguarding policy.
- Senior leaders ensure that good practice is shared among school leaders, so that they support each other to improve their knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards.
- The proprietors hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of the school through the self-auditing tool and regular supervision.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. Staff do not distinguish between incidents that concern pupils' behaviour and those that give rise to serious safeguarding concerns. They do not routinely record safeguarding incidents, and as a result, leaders do not have sufficient oversight of safeguarding in the school. The home-school communication logs are useful in ensuring that staff keep parents and carers informed of any issues. However, leaders do not follow up concerns with due rigour. They do not check that parents have read the log or responded to the concerns. They do not always refer concerns to the local authority. This places pupils at unnecessary risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Not all teaching leads to pupils making consistent progress. Sometimes, pupils complete activities that lack challenge. On occasion, the tasks they do are not linked to their learning, but instead are intended to keep them occupied.
- On entry to the school, pupils complete a series of tests to establish their ability level. These tests are too simplistic and do not give a true picture of pupils' ability. The targets set for pupils following these assessments are therefore sometimes too low. There are plans in place to change the way pupils are initially assessed, but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these.
- Individual education plans are of inconsistent quality. Some do not give specific information about the pupils' educational and learning needs. As a result, teachers are not always able to plan appropriate learning tasks that meet the pupils' needs, and learning slows.
- Teachers' use of questioning is not consistently effective. Sometimes, questioning is used well to probe pupils' understanding and challenge them to improve their work. At other times, questioning does not go beyond getting pupils to recall basic facts, and limits the progress that pupils are able to make.
- Where learning is most effective, it is because teaching gives pupils the small steps they need to build their confidence and be successful. For example, in GCSE English, pupils learn how to practise and perfect the techniques they need to answer examination questions.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work seamlessly together to support pupils and adapt the learning according to pupils' social and emotional needs. Their flexible approach ensures that even when challenges arise, pupils are able to continue learning.
- Pupils enjoy positive and supportive relationships with their teachers. Several pupils spoke to the inspectors about how much they appreciate the support and encouragement their teachers give them. Pupils feel that this has given them the chance to succeed that mainstream education was not able to provide.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Staff have not been alert to potential signs that pupils may be at risk. They have not taken appropriate actions in response to these signs.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors explained how their confidence had improved since they joined the school. As one said, 'I have the space to be myself here, and I feel understood. The teachers don't just teach us, they listen to us and make us feel better'.

- The school's programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is particularly effective in preparing pupils for the challenges of adult life. During the inspection, a teacher successfully led a session with key stage 4 pupils on child sexual exploitation. Her high expectations and insistence on the correct use of language enabled a mature and sensitive discussion to take place.
- A wide-ranging programme of careers education prepares pupils well for the next stage of their lives. This ensures that almost all pupils are successful in securing a college place, an apprenticeship, or employment.
- Pupils are confident that, while there are difficult times when they fall out with each other and conflict ensues, there is no bullying in the school. This is because the school consistently promotes a clear anti-bullying message and a culture of respect.
- Staff carry out thorough risk assessments when each pupil joins the school and for each activity they undertake. They update these risk assessments when new risks become apparent, ensuring that this aspect of their work is constantly under review and is effective in managing known risks.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Many pupils improve their attendance once they join the school. However, some pupils continue to be frequently absent from school, and leaders do not make sufficient checks on their safety. Staff do not always follow up absence with the necessary rigour.
- The school has a clear behaviour policy that sets out the sanctions for any breaches that occur. However, staff do not consistently apply the sanctions code, for example, in response to abusive language. This limits pupils' ability to understand the consequences of their actions fully and avoid future slip-ups.
- Pupils respond well to the school's nurturing and caring environment. One pupil explained that she was able to manage her behaviour better because staff had helped her to understand it. The vast majority of pupils, many of whom have been excluded from mainstream settings, are successful in staying at the school and completing their education.
- The school uses effective strategies to manage the crises that sometimes occur. Staff take appropriate action, quickly restore calm and re-focus pupils on their learning.
- Staff always accompany those pupils who attend off-site provision, ensuring good liaison between the school and other providers. These pupils engage well with their chosen courses, and as a result, their behaviour improves.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Teaching does not lead to consistently good rates of progress. When the learning tasks are too easy, pupils do not make enough progress.
- Inaccurate initial assessments sometimes mean that the targets set for pupils are too low. This is most evident in key stage 3, where some pupils are more able than the baseline tests suggest and consequently do work that is beneath their ability level.
- Many pupils have missed considerable periods of schooling and have much lost ground to make up. Their progress is most rapid at key stage 4, where the emphasis on gaining good qualifications and a place at college focuses teachers and pupils alike on ensuring that learning is effective.
- Emphasis on the key skills that pupils lack ensures that pupils in both key stages quickly improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Inspectors noted a fluent and moving piece of writing from one pupil who had missed a lot of time from school, but had re-found the confidence she needed to do well.
- Over a number of years, pupils have been successful in GCSE examinations, particularly in English and mathematics. Some pupils gain C grades in these subjects, as well as gaining other qualifications such as entry-level unit awards in science and a range of other subjects.
- Pupils achieve good success in their chosen areas of personal interest such as music, hairdressing and barbering, and bicycle maintenance.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next steps, not only because they gain the qualifications they need, but also because staff help them to develop the confidence and skills to apply for and be successful at college. As one pupil put it, 'They have made me believe I can do it, and I will'.

School details

Unique reference number	133515
Inspection number	10012956
DfE registration number	928/6069

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	Day special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of parttime pupils	None
Proprietor	Keys Child Care Ltd
Chair	Not applicable
Headteacher	Joyce Kuwazo
Annual fees (day pupils)	£25,000-£35,000
Telephone number	01536 725998
Website	www.keychildcare.co.uk/services/education/ashmead
Email address	ashmeadsschool@keychildcare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–24 May 2013

Information about this school

- Ashmeads School opened in 2007 and is situated in a rural setting near Kettering in Northamptonshire.
- The school's proprietor is Keys Child Care Ltd, which owns a number of independent special schools and children's homes.
- The school is registered for up to 14 pupils. There are currently 12 pupils aged 11 to 17 years on roll.
- The school provides full-time and part-time education for pupils who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Currently, six pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The majority of the pupils are looked after by the local authority, and 11 local authorities provide funding for pupils to attend the school.
- A few pupils attend off-site provision at the William Knibb Centre and U-neek Learning.
- The school summarises its aims as, 'providing a positive and nurturing environment to support the growth and achievement of every child'.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in both key stages and looked at the work in pupils' books. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at records of their assessments.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the company's operations manager and with one of its principals. In addition, inspectors spoke by telephone to representatives from the local authority, virtual headteachers from two placing authorities and the providers of off-site alternative education used by the school.
- Inspectors looked at attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding records, pupils' individual learning plans and curriculum plans. They viewed the school's website and a range of school policies. The school's self-evaluation and action plans were taken into account.
- Inspectors took into account four completed staff questionnaires and the few responses from parents and carers that were available to view.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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