

Access School

Holbrook Villa Farm, Harmer Hill, Shrewsbury SY4 3EW

Inspection dates

13–15 September 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has improved the school considerably. There is a clear sense of direction and the school is developing well. Staff have very positive views about the leadership and management of the school and effective teamwork has secured improvements quickly.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They enjoy lessons and all aspects of school. Their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute to their good social, emotional and academic progress. One pupil commented, 'This school has changed my life' and many other pupils echoed this positive view of the school.
- Teaching is good. Teachers know pupils well and the strong, positive relationships make a big difference to how well pupils engage in lessons.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. As soon as they join the school, they start to flourish socially and academically. They make good gains in English, including reading, which for many has been a source of failure in the past. Pupils also make impressive progress in mathematics.
- Effective therapeutic input helps pupils to become more emotionally resilient, improving their behaviour and helping their readiness for learning.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The positive school culture promotes equality for all very effectively.
- Staff actively promote British values through the curriculum and themed events. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school does not use and analyse assessment information at a whole-school level well enough to identify trends. This does not help the management committee to monitor how well pupils are achieving.
- On occasions, the most able pupils are not stretched enough in their learning. Questioning by adults does not extend their thinking sufficiently. Sometimes, pupils complete work very quickly and more demanding challenges are not provided. Limitations in information technology, software and hardware mean that this resource is not used to its potential. Pupils are not always clear about how they can improve aspects of their work.

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?

- Further accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring that pupils, especially the most able, are challenged through targeted questioning and work that is closely matched to their abilities
 - ensuring that pupils know how to improve their work through clear and consistent verbal or written feedback
 - improving the use of information technology to support teaching and pupils' learning more effectively.

- Ensure that assessment information is concise and analysed in a way that allows the management committee to understand strengths and areas for improvement more readily.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards. The school meets the independent school standards relevant to the requested material change. The material change has already been implemented.
- The headteacher has improved the school quickly, having set the school on a clear path of rapid improvement. She enjoys the confidence of the staff, who are generous in their praise of the leadership and management of the school and the positive changes implemented. For example, key stage 2 pupils have been located to more suitable accommodation on-site, so that pupils are educated in their own primary base and have separate breaktimes from older pupils.
- There is a clear direction and ambition by leaders and managers to secure future improvements. Consequently, staff aspirations have risen and pupils' outcomes have improved. The school's improvement plan focuses on appropriate areas for further development, such as improving the quality of information technology hardware and software and further raising literacy standards across the school.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils very effectively and allows them to achieve success. The vocational land-based and small animal care activities enable pupils to gain accreditation and boost their self-esteem.
- The school actively teaches British values both through the curriculum and through events, such as British-themed days, where aspects of British culture are celebrated with food and music. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They understand how democracy works through voting for positions on the school council and readily exhibit tolerance and respect for people of different backgrounds and lifestyles. The school is vigilant to ensure that all pupils have equality of opportunity and that no one is subject to any form of discrimination.
- The school's self-evaluation of its performance is an accurate summary of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It provides a blueprint for the management committee to focus their efforts on.
- There are good systems to track individual pupils' progress, to spot where pupils are not making good progress and intervene accordingly. However, the school does not use and analyse this information at a whole-school level well enough to identify trends.
- The school makes use of an external school improvement partner, and this has helped to bring about increased rigour and challenge to all aspects of its work.
- The local authority places the majority of the pupils at the school. It views the school positively and recognises its success in helping challenging children with complex needs to find stability and flourish.
- Senior leaders regularly check teaching and learning in a supportive and constructive way, so that staff can improve their practice. They are encouraged to reflect regularly upon aspects of their work and how improvements can be made. Underperformance is tackled when necessary and teachers participate in peer observations to share good practice.
- Additional funding in the form of the pupil premium is spent effectively. This has enabled identified pupils to perform at least as well as their peers and to provide intensive literacy or therapeutic support for pupils where needed.

- Pupils benefit from impartial careers education guidance from the local authority and meaningful work-related experiences are provided, for example in a local garage, pet store and equestrian centre, to help prepare them for their next phase of life.
- Middle leadership is effective. Leaders have clear roles and accountability measures and drive improvements forward with enthusiasm.
- The school has strong links with families, foster carers and other agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are met well and potential problems affecting pupils outside of school are minimised. Parents typically commented on how much the school had helped their children.

Governance

- A management committee provides suitable governance arrangements. This consists of staff members, the proprietor, a school director, the school improvement partner and representative from other schools. The committee knows that the quality of teaching is good and understands where improvements are still needed. They are appropriately involved in the performance management of staff and in strategic decision-making.
- The management committee is becoming increasingly effective and is supportive of the headteacher. However, they do not have enough clear information to help them to provide enough challenge on pupils' progress. They are provided with information about pupils' progress. Nevertheless, because the analysis of assessments is not comprehensive and concise they are not in a position to check fully on the work of the school.
- A member of the management committee is appropriately trained in safeguarding and acts as the deputy designated safeguarding lead to the school, in the absence of the headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school works closely with parents, carers and other stakeholders to ensure that pupils are safe and supported. Appropriate risk assessments are in place.
- High priority is given to the safeguarding and protection of pupils. This strong culture of safeguarding helps to ensure that pupils are safe and protected.
- The safeguarding policy reflects the latest guidance. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they are aware and alert to signs of potential abuse.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching encourages pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning. All pupils spoken to by the inspector said how much they liked lessons and mathematics in particular. Pupils respond readily to the increasing academic expectations as they become more settled in the school. This contributes to the overall good progress they make.
- The informal, relaxed atmosphere that teachers establish is helpful for pupils in putting them at their ease, so that they are more receptive to learning.
- Learning is increasingly becoming more practical and active, which suits many of the needs of pupils. For example, pupils consolidated their learning in mathematics when they practised bisecting lateral lines and worked out different types of angles using chalk out on the playground. Similarly, the use of land-based activities and care of

small animals is effective in developing pupils' vocational skills. There has been a concerted drive to make learning interesting and to avoid mundane tasks, which can lead to boredom.

- Teaching is effective in enabling pupils to gain qualifications in a range of academic and vocational courses that boost pupils' self-confidence.
- The school places a strong emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy skills. Regular opportunities for all pupils to read have had a significant impact on pupils' achievements in reading and writing.
- Staff manage the behaviour of pupils skilfully and sensitively. Warm and supportive relationships allow learning to happen successfully.
- All pupils have clear individual education plans, which are regularly reviewed, with specific targets for them to achieve. These are effective in supporting improvements in their behaviour and academic performance. Staff know their pupils well and use flexible approaches to meet individual needs very effectively.
- Sometimes the most able pupils are not stretched enough in their learning. For example, questioning is not precise enough to extend their thinking and work is not always challenging enough. They complete work quickly, without further work set to either consolidate learning or introduce new concepts. However, as expectations of staff have risen, pupils are increasingly on track to undertake higher-level examinations.
- The use of the school's chosen method of marking or verbal feedback to pupils is inconsistent, so they do not know how to improve their work. Although the use of information technology has improved substantially since the last inspection, connectivity problems restrict the effectiveness of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils' behaviour in and around school is good. They make vast improvements over time, and pupils are eager to please. They are polite and courteous to visitors.
- Pupils' self-confidence improves well. Individual pupils benefit from therapeutic support to help them cope with emotional and mental health issues.
- The needs of girls, who are in a minority at the school, are carefully met. This enables them to feel confident and achieve equally as well as the boys.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is rare, but would be acted upon quickly by staff should it happen. The school is characterised by harmonious and tolerant relationships and is a calm environment.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. They are well informed about the dangers of alcohol misuse, drugs and other substances through a programme of personal, social, health and education lessons.
- All staff have a shared commitment to the welfare and well-being of the pupils. The school works closely with other agencies, families, and carers to ensure that the pupils' needs are met.
- Pupils enjoy working towards rewards and pupils' achievements are celebrated in weekly assemblies.

- Through visits and events, pupils develop an understanding of British values and enjoy the British themed days organised by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Physical interventions are minimal and have reduced over time. Any such incidents that do occur are recorded in detail.
- Pupils get on well with one another. They are very tolerant of different needs, backgrounds and lifestyles.
- The school council makes suggestions for improvement, for example the introduction of a 'reflection room'. This has proved to be very successful, allowing pupils to regulate and self-manage their behaviour more effectively.
- Some pupils exhibit a reluctance to 'join in' during lessons, especially when they have had upsets outside of school. However, they are successfully coaxed back into classes by staff.
- Attendance is broadly average. Many pupils make substantial improvements, indicating how much they enjoy school. Unexplained absences are followed up quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils have previously experienced a disrupted education, and many have had significant time out of school. Their attainment is often below average on entry. However, pupils make good progress over time. Pupils make good progress in English, reading and mathematics from their individual starting points. Pupils do particularly well in mathematics.
- Pupils' work in their books and individual assessment information show that they make good progress over a sustained period of time in a range of subjects.
- In mathematics, younger pupils become more confident in knowing their number bonds, telling the time and handling money. In English, they learn basic punctuation and start to extend their writing by using complex sentences. By the end of Year 6, those pupils who have been at the school for some time have made good gains in their English and mathematics. Even so, most are still at standards below the national average.
- By the end of Year 11, pupils gain a suitable range of qualifications and awards. Most achieve higher entry-level awards and lower GCSE grades. Some of the most able disadvantaged pupils achieve higher-level functional skills and GCSE grades. Currently in mathematics, the most able pupils are on track to achieve GCSE grade C. For some pupils, however, their results in examinations are adversely affected by external factors, such as health or home circumstances.
- Pupils gain a wide range of vocational qualifications and certificates of competency linked to outdoor education, land-based activities and small-animal care.
- Assessment information shows that nearly all the disadvantaged pupils in receipt of the pupil premium make better progress in English and mathematics than their peers. Consequently, attainment differences between the two groups diminish over time.
- In reading, pupils are taught phonics skills to help initial readers to tackle unfamiliar words. The most able pupils read widely and frequently and read texts that are more complex with confidence and fluency.

- Older pupils enliven their essays by the use of literary techniques such as metaphors and alliteration. The most able pupils devise their own poetry, with one pupil publishing her own poetry book.
- When pupils leave school, they transition to positive destinations. All leavers over the last three years have moved on to college or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	132772
DfE registration number	893/6096
Inspection number	10006013

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 for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	25
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Andrew and Phil Williamson
Chair	Andrew Williamson
Headteacher	Sarah Whatling
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,515
Telephone number	01939 220797
Website	www.family-care.co.uk
Email address	sarah.whatling@family-care.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2012

Information about this school

- Access School is a small independent special school set within the grounds of a farm, on the outskirts of Wem in North Shropshire.
- It normally admits up to 20 pupils aged five to 16 years with social, emotional and associated mental health difficulties. However, the Department for Education granted temporary permission for the school to exceed this number to a maximum of 25.
- Pupils often join the school after a history of exclusion or long-term absence from mainstream or other special school provision.
- The school was first registered in 2000. It was last inspected in February 2012. The school subsequently submitted an action plan setting out how it would address the identified unmet regulations, which were deemed satisfactory.

- Although the proprietor is an individual, the school is part of a broader organisation, Family Care Associates Limited, which provides residential care and fostering services.
- At the time of this inspection, there were 25 pupils on roll aged seven to 16 years. All pupils have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. Just under half of pupils receive additional funding in the form of the pupil premium.
- Pupils come from different local authorities across the country, but most attend from Shropshire. Nearly half of pupils are looked after children in foster care or resident in a Family Care Associates home or those of other independent providers.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about how well pupils achieve at the end of key stages 2 and 4. Some other key policies and information are also missing from the website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed 10 parts of lessons, most of which were joint lesson observations with senior leaders.
- Pupils' work, surveys, annual reports and other records were scrutinised.
- The school's documentation was examined, including planning for subjects, records of pupils' progress and paperwork relating to the welfare and safeguarding of pupils.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector gathered pupils' views through discussions with a group of seven pupils as well as informal discussions with pupils during the course of the inspection.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to elicit an analysis, but parents' comments through annual reviews and written submissions were taken into account.

Inspection team

Frank Price, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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