

# Learn 4 Life School

Quarry Bank Community Centre, 364 Ormskirk Road, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 9AL

## Inspection dates

18–20 October 2016

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Expectations of many pupils are too low. Although pupils appear to make good progress, they do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Not all teachers use the information about pupils' current abilities to plan activities matched to their diverse learning needs. Work set is too hard for some and not challenging enough for others. When this happens, pupils' concentration wanes and they do not make sufficient progress.
- Leaders do not routinely monitor the effectiveness of the school's work. They have been slow to introduce arrangements to systematically evaluate teaching and assessment.
- Leaders have not reviewed the school's strengths and weaknesses since the previous headteacher left. Nor have they updated the plans for improvement. Governors and leaders do not have accurate information to evaluate the impact of the school's work.
- Arrangements to review the performance of leaders and other staff are not stringent enough. Governors have been slow to ensure that teachers, including the headteacher, have a process to help them improve their work.

### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' social and moral development is supported effectively by the school's strong focus on positive behaviour and good attitudes to learning. Pupils learn about Britain's cultural heritage and the diversity of cultures in the communities where they live. This helps them to prepare well for the next stage of their lives.
- The headteacher works very hard to ensure that pupils attend school every day. The attendance of many pupils has improved significantly.
- A strong team commitment from all staff means that pupils are well supported and feel safe. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are rigorous, and effective training for safeguarding is firmly embedded.
- Staff are skilled at helping pupils to manage their behaviour. Staff build positive relationships with pupils and this contributes to their enjoyment of school and the progress they make.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standard 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 raise the achievement of pupils further by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations and use assessment information to plan learning activities that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
  - ensuring that teachers check whether pupils are making fast enough progress in lessons, including whether they need new or more challenging work or extra help to consolidate their learning.
- Strengthen leadership and governance by:
  - ensuring that self-evaluation is based on an up-to-date review of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
  - sharpening the school's plan for improvement so that it focuses on relevant information that allows leaders to assess the impact of their actions
  - making sure that leaders regularly and robustly check the progress made by all pupils and tackle any unidentified underachievement
  - ensuring that leaders monitor the quality of teaching more regularly and use the information gathered to focus on improvements that are needed
  - increasing the robustness of performance management procedures to hold teachers and leaders to account for pupils' achievement and the impact of their work
  - arranging appropriate training for leaders and staff to help them improve their practice.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The school meets all of the independent schools standards.
- While the previously identified strengths in pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare have been maintained, there has been a decline in the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils. These now require improvement in order to be good.
- School staff say that it is often difficult to obtain prior information about pupils' attainment when they start school. This is because pupils have frequently been out of school for long periods or have not settled in any school for long enough to enable accurate assessments to take place. The school's own assessments of pupils on entry are often very low. This was exemplified by comparing samples of the work pupils had completed on entering the school with the assessments that teachers had made of them. The result of these inaccuracies means that teachers sometimes have low expectations of what pupils can do and the targets they set are not always challenging enough.
- Leaders routinely monitor some aspects of the school's work, for example checking that teachers have completed assessments. However, they do not use this information well enough to ensure that they have an accurate or fully rounded view of the school's strengths and areas needing further work. Self-evaluation information is out of date.
- Similarly, leaders do not use the information they collect to identify the priorities for the future work of the school. The school's improvement plan is obsolete and therefore performance targets are not linked or based on an accurate view of what needs improving.
- Since taking up her post a year ago, the headteacher has worked hard to build a strong and committed team. Despite high staff turnover, she has the support and commitment of all her staff.
- High staff turnover has slowed down performance management arrangements. The headteacher has set systems in place to drive the school forward, but these are not yet sufficiently embedded to demonstrate a positive impact.
- The headteacher ensures that safeguarding is rigorous. She ensures that training for safeguarding takes place frequently and that it features strongly in the induction of staff. All new staff are required to undergo comprehensive training.
- Leaders have embedded clear systems for tracking all aspects of the achievement of individual pupils, including their engagement in lessons, attendance, homework and progress towards meeting their behavioural and learning targets. However, this information is not always used well enough to inform planning or to hold teachers to account for the outcomes of their pupils.
- The headteacher and staff have established a culture of positive behaviour and good attitudes to learning. This culture is underpinned by a reward system that is applied robustly. In this area, senior leaders have secured the strong support of staff who say that they feel proud to work at Learn 4 Life.

- The curriculum provides good breath and balance in a range of academic and vocational subjects. There are opportunities for pupils to learn beyond the basic curriculum, including music technology, motor mechanics, equine skills, land-based studies and hair and beauty therapy. This demonstrates well the school's efforts to do whatever is needed to engage pupils in learning.
- School staff ensure that pupils receive independent careers advice from a local college and have the opportunity to attend a careers fair at a nearby retail park. Support includes advice on college applications and apprenticeships. In addition, the school has established good links with local businesses to provide work-experience opportunities. These preparations for life beyond school have a positive impact on raising pupils' aspirations.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively. Personal development lessons help to promote British values and include modules on: how the government carries out its business; drug use and misuse; the local community and how it works; coping in an emergency; citizenship; and the meaning of culture and cultural differences. This work is supplemented by visits to the Imperial War Museum, the law courts, the fire station and medical centre. As a result, pupils have a growing understanding of their local community and the wider world. This helps them to prepare for their future lives as independent citizens.
- All the required checks on the suitability of staff and proprietors are completed rigorously. Details of all these checks are maintained in a suitable single central register.

## **Governance**

- While managers are committed to the school and care very much about the pupils, they have not done enough to check the accuracy and reliability of the information they receive about what the school is doing well and how it needs to improve. Some of the information they have received is out of date. Similarly, they have not used performance management well enough to hold the headteacher robustly to account for the school's effectiveness.
- Managers' oversight of safeguarding is good. They regularly hold supervision meetings with the headteacher and discuss in detail how well the placements for individual pupils are working.
- Managers have created flexible and imaginative opportunities to support very vulnerable pupils in having access to education, including the provision of a narrowboat for pupils likely to abscond and a mobile caravan for pupils at risk.
- Managers have rescinded the temporary application they made to cater for the educational needs of an individual pupil, whose date of birth was changed following admission to the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong and firmly embedded culture of keeping children safe at Learn 4 Life. Leaders and staff know pupils well and are alert to the things that make them vulnerable.

- Records show that concerns are reported quickly and action is taken promptly to protect pupils. The school works closely and effectively with other professionals and services to provide help and support for the needs of the most vulnerable children.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Requires improvement**

- Teachers' assessment of pupils is not always accurate. This shows in lessons when adults' questions do not probe deeply enough to find out what pupils know and can do and, therefore, what needs to be done to help them move on.
- There are too few opportunities for the most able pupils to consolidate their learning by using and applying their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Some teaching is lacklustre and unimaginative and resources are limited. This impacts on the level of engagement that pupils demonstrate occasionally, when they refuse to work or become distracted.
- Teachers encourage pupils to work hard and to do their best. However, teachers do not always pitch work at the right level for pupils, and sometimes expectations of what pupils will learn are not sufficiently clear. As a result, some pupils do not make fast enough progress.
- Teachers use learning and behaviour targets routinely to help pupils understand what they are expected to achieve and to reflect on their own progress. This strategy is linked to the school's reward system and helps to promote positive attitudes to learning.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers' good subject knowledge keeps pupils interested. They are inspired by the work set and make good progress in their learning and skills as a result. For example, one pupil was keen to have additional science homework in order to improve further and earn extra reward points.
- There are good relationships between pupils and their teachers. Pupils say that they value the support of adults and the individual attention that means that they can have help when they need it. Pupils with hearing impairment benefit from the extra support of a signing assistant to ensure that they are fully included.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Attendance is improving over time and has increased from 65% two years ago to 79% last year. This is a positive achievement for many pupils who, before arriving at Learn 4 Life, had refused to attend school altogether. The change in attitude for some is encouraged by the rewards that the school offers to encourage them to try hard.
- Pupils appreciate the weekly individual briefing meetings that they have with key staff. This is an opportunity for pupils to reflect on their achievements and set their future targets. It helps them to understand how to improve their learning and behaviour. They also have the opportunity to discuss their feelings and are given guidance and support to manage their emotions.

- Pupils value their education and are keen to do their best. In class, pupils usually work hard and are keen to do well. They are proud of their success and achievements. Occasionally, when work set is dull, too hard or too easy, pupils can become distracted.
- Pupils report that they are well looked after and that adults care about them. Their views are endorsed by feedback from social workers and placement officers whose comments are highly positive.
- There are good examples of how staff have enabled young people to influence the environment in which they learn, including responding to requests to improve internal decoration and asking staff not to stand too close during lessons. This respect for pupils' views permeates all aspects of the school's work.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity. Positive images of vocations and careers that challenge stereotypes are displayed and discussed with pupils, for example, female motor mechanics and soldiers, and male nurses. There is also material to support pupils' communication in sign language to enable them to engage more effectively with their hearing-impaired friends in school. This inclusive approach helps pupils to develop tolerance and respect for others.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils were excluded or at risk of exclusion from their previous schools. Staff are skilled at supporting pupils to learn how to manage their own behaviour. The good relationships that staff build with pupils mean that most pupils enjoy coming to school and trying their best.
- Pupils are warmly welcomed by staff on arrival to school and 'sign in' using an 'emotions board'. Staff quickly assess how pupils are feeling using a well-established routine. This attention to detail gives adults the opportunity to adjust learning accordingly to maximise time and prevent disruption from pupils who are agitated. A well-rehearsed handover by care staff means that important information is shared to help pupils feel safe.
- An analysis of the number of incidents of disruptive behaviour shows that since the introduction of the weekly briefings with individual pupils, these have significantly decreased. The meetings are well supported by a positive reward scheme, which is applied consistently and is effective in promoting good behaviour.
- Pupils show respect to each other. This is also promoted by the school environment. Posters and notices encourage pupils to show good manners and keep themselves safe online. They know how to report incidents of bullying.
- Pupils who pose a risk to themselves or others are supported through bespoke programmes on alternative sites to better prepare them for learning. The use of a narrowboat, a mobile caravan and a separate building means that pupils are more able to benefit from these sessions and enjoy the success they achieve.
- Punctuality is inconsistent as it is reliant on escort staff bringing pupils in on time. This can have a negative impact upon the learning of pupils who sometimes have to wait for the arrival of their classmates for lessons to begin.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The quality of assessment information shows some weaknesses. The school is not always able to gather sufficient information about pupils' prior attainment. The measures staff use to gauge attainment on entry are unreliable and pupils are often assessed as having very low achievement even when their work contradicts these results. Therefore, leaders cannot confidently say whether individual pupils or groups of pupils make fast enough progress in all subjects.
- Work in pupils' folders and information about pupils' achievement show that progress is not consistently good. The work shows that most pupils apply themselves diligently and generally complete their tasks. However, work set is sometimes too hard for some pupils and too easy for others, which means that progress in lessons is not always brisk enough.
- Pupils are supported effectively through the school's personal, social, health and citizenship programme and through careers guidance, work experience, work-related learning and enterprise activities. This gives them confidence for the next stage of their education and training.
- Improvements in the key stage 4 curriculum are ensuring that those pupils who are capable, leave school with some qualifications. These include vocational skills and GCSE qualifications. In July 2016, some pupils attained GCSEs in mathematics, English, science and Spanish at grade D, which represented good progress from their low starting points on entry to the school.
- Pupils benefit from the high levels of staffing and small numbers in each class. Managers are committed to maintaining these levels because they regard them as being crucial to pupils' well-being and their ability to make progress.

## School details

Unique reference number	129571
DfE registration number	888/6089
Inspection number	10006076

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Mr Danny Curran (Care Afloat)
Chair	Mr Mike Fletcher
Headteacher	Ms C Briggs
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,700
Telephone number	01695 768960
Website	N/A
Email address	<a href="mailto:learn4life@careafloat.co.uk">learn4life@careafloat.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	4–5 December 2012

## Information about this school

- Learn 4 Life School is a non-maintained special school and is registered to provide education for up to 16 pupils aged between 11 and 16 years with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- Most pupils are in the care of local authorities.
- The school has two main sites in Skelmersdale, a shared-use community centre called Quarry Bank, and a sea cadet centre called Elmstead.



- Both sites are within walking distance of each other. The school also has use of a mobile caravan and a narrowboat for pupils in crisis.
- The school opened in July 2005 and was last inspected in December 2012.
- There are nine pupils on roll at present, one of which is part time and dual registered. Three pupils have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans.
- Most pupils attend on short-term placements until suitable permanent arrangements are made.

## Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the managing director and the proprietor.
- The inspector observed learning in lessons and around the school and scrutinised pupils' work in files.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and staff to gather their views of the school.
- The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised information about achievement, behaviour and attendance, and looked at a wide range of school documents and records relating to self-evaluation and the monitoring of teaching and learning.
- The inspector took account of feedback from staff surveys, Parent View and from records kept by the school.

## Inspection team

Cathy Parkinson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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