

Pear Tree School

Toy Top Farm, Houghton Bank, Heighington, Darlington, County Durham DL2 2UQ

Inspection dates

7–9 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher communicates his vision and ambition for pupils to flourish in the school's care in his every action. His tireless efforts are shared and replicated by staff in the school. The school continues to improve.
- The headteacher ensures that the independent school standards are met, using them as a framework to translate his vision into effective practice and outstanding outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders ensure that the arrangements to keep pupils safe and safeguarded are comprehensive. They meet the particular needs of pupils. Staff work unstintingly to develop pupils' understanding of risks and dangers, and how to deal with them.
- Refined, personalised learning programmes that interweave activities to promote pupils' personal development and academic learning are highly effective. Pupils thrive and make rapid progress in their learning.
- Leaders and teachers have highly developed skills that support and challenge individual pupils' learning and development. Excellent knowledge of pupils' personal and learning needs characterises their planning and teaching activities.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. They quickly adopt and espouse the high expectations of the school and develop extremely effective techniques to manage themselves.
- Pupils enjoy and value their learning highly. They make rapid progress in a full range of subjects as a result. They are self-assured and understand and value differences in other's backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles.
- Pupils thrive on the opportunities the rich curriculum provides. They include pupils' experiences at the working farm, the equestrian centre and the engaging range of educational visits.
- Teachers do not challenge pupils to use all their rapidly improving language or mathematical skills to the same degree in some areas of their learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that pupils are challenged to practise and develop their writing and numeracy skills further across all areas of the curriculum, focusing on their individual, specific areas for development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The extremely strong leadership of the headteacher ensures absolute clarity about the key values of the school and what it stands for. As a result, school leaders and staff work with purpose. They ensure that everything possible is done to sustain and improve the highest outcomes in achievement and personal development for the pupils in their care.
- School leaders are firm in their belief that pupils need to feel safe and be well cared for in order to make significant gains in their development and achievement. Leaders make sure that parents and carers have ready access to the school's safeguarding policy and practices. Leaders have ensured that the policy is updated regularly and reflects the current advice of the Secretary of State. They have taken care to contextualise the policy and the school's practices to best meet pupils' particular needs.
- Leaders make sure that there are frequent opportunities throughout the curriculum for pupils to learn about different types of danger and risk. Teaching staff help each pupil develop an understanding of risks that helps them keep safe. By doing so, leaders have created a culture of safeguarding that is readily transferable into pupils' lives at home.
- Each pupil is provided with a personalised curriculum that best meets their development and learning needs. Leaders use finely honed and incisive evaluation of pupils' progress and development to check that the plans they make for each pupil are effective. Pupils have a rich range of learning opportunities that provides them with a rounded educational experience that is enhanced by well-chosen opportunities for individual development. They adjust and adapt them continuously so that pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Leaders contact parents and carers regularly to ensure that pupils have additional opportunities for learning and development out of school, for example, in working with animals at the equestrian centre at weekends.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is a particular strength. Pupils settle to life in the school quickly. They rapidly develop the skills and understanding that enable them to become highly effective learners. The personal, health and social education programme, alongside other aspects of the wider curriculum, ensures that pupils have ample opportunities to reflect on and express their individual response to their learning and the world around them.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn about how the country is governed and the rights of others. School-based learning is supplemented by frequent educational visits. Consequently, pupils are developing a clear sense of right and wrong. They display mature understanding and tolerance of difference, be it in lifestyle, background or religious belief. Such work prepares pupils very well for life in modern Britain and supports the school's work to promote equality.
- Leaders at all levels ensure that the culture of learning they engender for pupils is modelled and led by staff. Staff plan their teaching in day-to-day consultations with each other. They share best practice and use this forum to reflect on and refine their teaching. The headteacher reviews teachers' work regularly and ensures that well-targeted professional development is provided to widen and sharpen teachers' skills.

Governance

- Governance of the school is highly effective.
- Arrangements for performance management are effective. Linked with professional development, targets support teachers in keeping their practice sharp and enable them to contribute to the school's development priorities.
- The detailed monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the school on pupils' learning and personal development underpin the accuracy of the school's development priorities. As a consequence, all staff and pupils are working towards the same end.
- Leaders ensure that they keep up to date with changes in legislation or other requirements. This enables them to respond in timely and considered ways that best benefit pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff know and understand the school's policy and practices on safeguarding. They are well trained, vigilant and know exactly what needs to be done if there is cause for concern. The school ensures that it maintains effective working relationships with a range of external teams and services to ensure that pupils receive the correct support and help when they need it.
- Pupils feel safe and develop good knowledge and effective skills that help keep them safe, including when they use mobile technology or social networking sites. Pupils have every confidence that staff will support them if they need help.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers are highly skilled and sensitive to the specific needs of pupils when they enter the school. As a result, they are able to rapidly establish highly positive and fruitful relationships with their pupils. They establish boundaries and set high expectations of pupils.
- Teachers are careful to develop the skills and techniques pupils need to be able to respond very positively to instructions and accept learning challenges. The strong bonds between staff and pupils and the strong sense of collaborative endeavour set the scene for accelerated learning and personal growth.
- Planning carefully, teachers skilfully interweave the learning linked with a particular theme or topic to individual opportunities to address pupils' individual development needs. On the very rare occasion when the highest levels of pupils' conduct and commitment to learning slip momentarily, staff skilfully challenge any derogatory language and pupils respond most positively.
- Teachers have in-depth knowledge of their subjects. This supports them in asking questions during lessons to check pupils' understanding and correct any misconceptions. They are adept at using this form of assessment alongside periodic checks on progress to plan learning to promote rapid progress across a full range of subjects.

- Refined use of information from assessment personalises pupils' learning over time and step by step. Teachers provide specific support when pupils are stuck. They provide well-judged challenge to move pupils on more quickly when they are ready, including the most able pupils. Pupils are keen to respond to teachers' advice and guidance and rapidly improve their learning as a result.
- Teachers ensure that they give pupils enough time to assimilate knowledge and develop the skills they need that enable them to demonstrate their understanding. As a consequence, pupils make great strides in their achievement over time.
- Teachers' strong relationships with pupils mean that they can give skilled, well-focused advice and guidance to pupils on how to improve their work in a safe and positive way that sustains pupils' interest and progress. Learning at home, including pupils' reflective journals, complements their work in school.
- Across the curriculum, teachers plan a wide variety of opportunities for pupils to use their reading skills. This enriches pupils' learning and complements their reading for pleasure. Pupils read fluently given their starting points and use their skills to deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils' reading about the causes of the population boom during the industrial revolution led to lively debate about the birth rate in today's society. However, on occasions, opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in writing or mathematics are missed.
- Teachers are skilled in enabling pupils to see the links between different aspects of their learning. They successfully encourage, support and challenge pupils to achieve their best at all times. As a consequence, pupils learn to deal with difficulties, developing a 'can't yet' approach, which stands them in good stead for future challenges. Pupils become self-managing learners who extend their own knowledge and understanding through reflection, discussion and deep thinking.
- Pupils seize opportunities to strengthen their learning through a range of extra-curricular activities such as visits to the theatre.
- Teachers provide highly detailed, perceptive reports to parents and guardians to ensure that they are very well informed about the range of pupils' learning and the progress they are making. Teachers ensure that reports provide a holistic picture of how well pupils are thriving in the care of the school, encompassing both their academic and personal achievements.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The highly skilled and focused work of the school to meet pupils' individual needs, aligned to comprehensive packages of external support, enables all pupils to grow rapidly into self-confident learners. Pupils exude pride in their learning experiences and value them very highly. Pupils recognise how special their experiences are and glow with pride at their achievements. Many feel valued as young people for the first time.

- Pupils' quick period of settling into the school's life is built upon with skill to enable them to discuss and debate often personally challenging topics with a degree of maturity that belies their age and disrupted histories of education.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy their day-to-day learning and show remarkable insight into how it helps them prepare for the next steps in education or training. Those pupils ready to move on value the support that teachers provide in visiting careers fairs, and in accompanying pupils to meetings with careers advisers and on familiarisation visits to local colleges. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for their next steps, to which they look forward with enthusiasm, confidence and a very understandable degree of nervous excitement.
- Almost always, pupils conduct themselves throughout the day in an exemplary fashion. Very occasionally, their particular emotional needs lead to a short period of poor behaviour. However, pupils recognise when they are having a difficult time, use the techniques they have been taught to mitigate this, and respond quickly to the help offered by staff.
- Pupils have a refined understanding of bullying and the harm it causes. They have detailed knowledge of how they can avoid and manage risks to their well-being.
- The school ensures that pupils have an enhanced understanding of how to keep healthy, physically and emotionally. Great attention is paid to help pupils understand about healthy relationships. As a consequence, pupils are confident that they will cope very well when they leave school.
- The rounded, well-structured personal, health and social education programme is taught successfully. It focuses on pupils' needs and leads them to a sensitive and personal response to the world around them.
- Pupils learn to appreciate their environment, especially the equestrian centre and working farm, using art, language, science, history and technology to reflect their personal responses. As result, pupils develop a sharply focused sense of right and wrong and complement this with an open-minded curiosity about other's lifestyles, background and beliefs. Pupils know about their society, its diverse nature and how the country is governed. As they grow in maturity, they begin to understand their place in society. They are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils feel safe and very well cared for in school. As a result, they contribute significantly to the harmonious, shared life of the school community.
- Pupils attend very well. The attendance rate is well above the average for all schools nationally. No pupils are persistently absent and very few arrive late for school.
- The well-established routines on arrival set the scene for learning throughout the day. Pupils take responsibility for checking their morning tasks with staff and set about them enthusiastically. For example, they demonstrate both high levels of skill and deep care for the horses or farm animals they look after.

- Pupils quickly learn how to manage their behaviours and reflect on how they can best develop and move forward. As a consequence, pupils' relationships with each other and with staff are open, honest and supportive. In these ways, pupils contribute greatly to the school community and to the prevention of bullying. Staff are skilled and ready to help, but rarely need to do more than remind pupils of the ways things should be done.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Irrespective of their starting points, all pupils make rapid progress across the full range of subjects they study. They rapidly engage in learning because it meets their individual needs with accuracy. Accurate checks on their achievement on entry to the school and close reference to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are used to underpin the challenging targets that pupils are set.
- The personalised curriculum and high-quality teaching mean that pupils are very well challenged to make all the progress of which they are capable. As a result, pupils are able to articulate their learning, operating at increasingly demanding levels. Recent work on the Holocaust, for example, provided a wealth of evidence across a range of subjects of the quality of pupils' learning. Pupils illustrated their understanding of the issues involved and were able to express their personal, insightful responses in a range of ways.
- Pupils and teachers use the detailed records of daily learning to fine tune learning activities to generate rapid progress through small steps for success. As a consequence, the learning targets in pupils' education, health and care plans and their up-to-date personal educational plans become goals, which pupils reach and exceed.
- Reading standards are varied. Some pupils read fluently and with good intonation and enunciation. Others are at an early stage of reading, operating at levels associated with primary school pupils. However, records show that highly effective teaching enables pupils to improve their reading ages rapidly, in some cases from reading age 11 to reading age 15 over two and half years. This supports pupils' access to other aspects of the curriculum effectively and provides pupils with the skills to read for enjoyment.
- Pupils make similarly rapid progress in their numeracy skills, using them in other subject areas such as history and design technology. For example, pupils make high-quality products such as bird-feeder tables and scale models of electric motor powered ships.
- Progress in mathematics is outstanding for all pupils. Exceptionally high-quality teaching ensures that pupils both learn key mathematical skills very quickly and have many opportunities in their mathematics lessons to see how these can be applied in real life. As a result, pupils develop a secure understanding of important concepts.
- Attainment is well below the national average at the end of key stage 4. However, all pupils are successful in achieving a wide range of qualifications at entry level and a vast array of unit awards. These are used to chart pupils' achievement in developing the knowledge and skills they need for independent living and for the next steps in their education and training.

- Teachers challenge pupils, especially the most able within the school, to build up their portfolio of awards so they can be recognised, where possible, as having a level 1 or level 2 vocational award. Pupils' successes in these types of qualification contribute to their success in finding suitable places in a range of further education colleges, including the Northern Racing College, which specialises in equine studies.
- Teachers ensure that there are always recognised routes to the next level of attainment for each pupil. The school helps pupils achieve GCSE-level accreditation where this is appropriate.
- The rapid progress demonstrated by pupils, reflected in their formal qualifications, is complemented very effectively by focused work to support pupils when they apply for training or education courses and employment. Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps. As a consequence, there were no pupils without a secure pathway into further education or training in the last academic year.

School details

Unique reference number	135113
DfE registration number	841/6003
Inspection number	10025958

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 special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Pear Tree Projects Ltd
Chair	Not applicable
Headteacher	David Bartlett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,000
Telephone number	01388 776799
Website	www.peartreeprojects.co.uk
Email address	info@peartreeprojects.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 January 2014

Information about this school

- Pear Tree School is a small, independent special school catering for the needs of 14 pupils, boys and girls, who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Pupils who attend are aged between eight and 18 years. Currently, all pupils are aged between 11 and 18.
- All pupils have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities and the majority are supported with an education, health and care plan.
- The school provides a therapeutic approach to recovery education to re-engage pupils in learning and prepare them for independent living.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in lessons in the classroom and at the equestrian centre and horticulture facilities.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher and a range of other leaders and staff.
- The inspector also held discussions with pupils informally during lessons and social time and in a more formal meeting. A wide range of documents was examined, including important documents such as health and safety arrangements, arrangements to safeguard pupils and the school's plans for further development.
- The inspector reviewed the school's records of pupils' achievement and scrutinised the quality of pupils' work in their books and journals.
- The inspector took into account the views of parents and guardians and of staff at the school.

Inspection team

Chris Campbell, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017