

Appletree School

Natland, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 7QS

Inspection dates

7–9 March 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's nurturing ethos ensures that pupils feel valued and well cared for.
- Highly effective therapy and support enable pupils to overcome significant barriers to learning to improve strongly their conduct and attitudes to learning.
- Pupils make good progress from their different starting points in a wide range of subjects, particularly in reading writing and mathematics. However, their progress in art, music, and computing is less evident in their work and the school's records.
- Pupils are intensely proud of their school and rarely miss a day. They say that they feel safe and well cared for.
- The proprietor and leaders ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards.
- Teachers precisely assess the progress that pupils make in English, mathematics and social development. However, in art, music and computing assessment, strategies are not yet fully developed.
- Leaders and proprietors share a common vision to provide educational excellence. They have high aspirations for pupils.
- Excellent partnerships with the community and other schools provide varied opportunities and promote pupils' personal development.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan includes appropriate priorities. However, on occasions, expectations are not sufficiently detailed to allow leaders to evaluate precisely how well their actions are working.
- The proprietor has ensured that all staff follow procedures to keep pupils safe.
- Teaching across the school is good. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding effectively because teachers make learning fun and match activities well to pupils' abilities. However, in computing and phonics, some teachers and teaching assistants have more limited subject knowledge.
- Middle leaders demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to continued improvement.

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?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - refining school development planning to identify more precisely the expected outcomes of actions, in order to more effectively evaluate their impact on school improvement.
- Improve teaching and learning and thereby improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - ensuring that all staff have secure knowledge of phonics to support pupils' spelling and reading
 - developing teachers' knowledge and understanding of strategies to teach the computing curriculum
 - improving the quality of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress in computing, music and art to better inform teachers' planning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders have a clear vision and strong passion to provide excellence in education for their pupils. All members of staff share this vision. Leaders' high expectations of pupils and staff are rooted firmly in the school's ethos of mutual respect, care and nurture.
- The school does not have a website. Leaders however, ensure that they meet the requirement to provide information for parents, carers and others on request. They promote many aspects of the school, including those required by the standards on the proprietor company's website.
- Leaders effectively report to parents about their children's learning and school life. Each high-quality report celebrates a pupil's achievements in a photographic record of their activities and focuses sharply on their learning. Reports clearly identify the next steps for development. Annual reviews of education, health and care plans are comprehensive and completed in line with statutory requirements. They demonstrate leaders' and teachers' deep understanding of pupils' needs and the strategies that they use to meet them.
- Headteachers of partner schools and social workers of pupils who attend or who have attended the school strongly support its work and the positive impact it has on pupils' education and well-being.
- Middle leadership provided by the school's senior teachers, is a strength of the school. Middle leaders have a strong commitment to drive continual improvement and secure understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school. Middle leaders make a significant contribution to school improvement.
- This is a caring school, which strongly promotes fundamental British values. Pupils develop strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They learn about a range of faiths, cultures and human relationships through a well-planned religious education and personal, social health and economic education curriculum that prepares them well for life within British society. Pupils have many opportunities to visit and participate in different cultural activities, including visiting a Buddhist monastery and joining in with local remembrance and harvest festival services in the village church. Visits further afield, including to parliament, help develop their understanding of diversity and British institutions.
- Teachers' professional development links closely to the school's priorities, particularly its responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Staff receive frequent and appropriate training to help them meet statutory requirements and do their job well. For example, all staff have received up-to-date training in safeguarding and safe ways to restrain a pupil for their own and others' safety. Leaders ensure that staff keep their skills up to date through appropriate training focused on the curriculum. Teachers work with colleagues from other schools to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work.
- The school follows the national curriculum and modifies good-quality subject schemes of work to meet pupils' needs. A wide range of additional activities and therapies greatly enrich pupils' opportunities to learn. These include play and drama therapy provided by professional therapists, outdoor learning and a range of after-school clubs.

- Leaders do not receive any additional pupil premium or special educational needs funding from local authorities placing children in the school. This funding is an intrinsic part of the school fees charged to local authorities, and it is used well to provide carefully considered provision that meets pupils' social, academic and welfare needs.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the rigour of their monitoring. Frequent observations of teaching and the checking of teachers' planning and pupils' work in books keeps leaders well informed about how pupils are progressing, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Leaders keep accurate records and logs of events within the school, including those that record incidents of bullying and any use of physical restraint by staff. These records are detailed, meticulously maintained and include pupils' reflections and comments on the incidents. Leaders evaluate the information that they collect during their monitoring activities and use this to inform their judgments of staff performance and the identification of school-development priorities. Leaders report the findings of their self-evaluation regularly to the school's board. However, on occasions these written self-evaluation reports lack precision.
- Leaders identify appropriate priorities for development, but their plans do not always contain sufficient detail about the expected outcomes of their actions. Consequently, they cannot always easily check that their actions are having the desired impact.

Governance

- The governance of the school is effective and ensures that all the independent school standards are met.
- The school's board of directors undertakes the governance functions of the two schools in the company. The board shares the headteacher's vision and commitment to improvement and holds them stringently to account. They receive and make effective use of detailed information and advice from a variety of sources, including an external school advisor with expertise in school leadership and development. They attend many school functions, including the school's end-of-year awards ceremony, and seek the views of staff, pupils and parents.
- The principal undertakes the role of the chair of the board and is equivalent to a chair of governors of both schools in the company. She knows Appletree School well and is a familiar face to pupils because she visits daily. She has a detailed understanding of the school and individual pupils' needs. The principal frequently seeks the views of pupils at special luncheon meetings with pupils and consequently has an in-depth understanding of the impact of leaders' actions.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and the board have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and followed meticulously. The school's policy for safeguarding is suitable and shared with parents. Statutory checks ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff have current knowledge of safeguarding requirements and are vigilant about the risks posed to pupils.

- Any concerns regarding the safety or welfare of children are acted upon quickly and appropriately. Consequently, the school has a culture of safety where pupils' welfare is a priority.
- The school has appropriate monitoring and filtering of its internet connection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers' high expectations and good subject knowledge in nearly all subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science, contribute well to the planning of effective learning. Teachers plan activities carefully to capture pupils' interests. This allows them to make good progress. For example, most-able pupils quickly grasped a good understanding of metaphors during a study of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. The work in pupils' books shows that lessons planned in sequence, particularly in English, mathematics and science, build well upon pupils' prior learning.
- Pupils, many of whom have education, health and care plans or a statement of special educational needs, develop a rich vocabulary and communicate well because of the effective teaching they receive in English. For example, a group of pupils were able to discuss articulately how an author's use of language makes texts vivid. Teachers help pupils to develop their writing prowess by making good use of links to learning in other subjects, such as science. Educational visits and participation in competitions and community events provide pupils with additional opportunities to apply their writing and reading skills in different contexts.
- Teachers effectively use pupils' experiences to enhance learning in mathematics and English. For example, pupils working on calculations quickly developed and then consolidated their skills in rapid mental addition of larger numbers through role play of shopping to a budget in a bookshop, while others practised their measuring skills during cookery lessons.
- Teachers, particularly those teaching the least able, quickly adapt their teaching styles and the curriculum on offer to closely meet the needs of this group. Teachers seize upon pupils' interests so that they overcome very short attention spans and challenging behaviours and make good progress.
- Teachers have improved the quality and consistency of the guidance they give to pupils, an area for improvement at the school's last inspection, though concerted training and reviews of practice. Consequently, pupils receive consistently high-quality guidance about how to improve their work and appropriate opportunities to act upon their teachers' feedback, in line with the school's policy.
- Some teaching assistants do not demonstrate a secure understanding of phonics and associated strategies to help pupils make the best progress in spelling.
- Teachers continually assess pupils' progress, particularly in reading, writing, mathematics and social development. They use well-thought-out criteria to evaluate precisely pupils' progress in most subjects. Teachers use their assessments effectively to amend their planning to address pupils' misconceptions. However, assessment practice in art, music and computing is less well developed.
- Some teachers have limited knowledge and skills in the teaching of computing. As a result, the opportunities for pupils to study computer science at greater depth are fewer.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils overcome many obstacles to their learning, including those relating to their mental health and self-esteem, because of the school's nurturing ethos. The school provides pupils with a calm, safe and stable environment in which to thrive. The carefully considered curriculum and excellent use of professional therapeutic support and guidance ensures that pupils feel valued and make good progress. Pupils say that teachers are an inspiration to them and develop their aspirations well; for example, some pupils expressed their desire to become teachers in the future.
- Pupils become committed learners who actively engage visitors in conversations about their learning and interests. For example, a group of pupils eagerly and maturely shared the contents of displays of their work about the artist Turner, the role of lifeguards and lifeboats and the history of shipping from Viking times to the modern day.
- Exemplary partnerships with near and wider communities provide pupils with excellent opportunities to participate and engage in wider opportunities to develop their learning and social skills. These include undertaking, alongside their partners from the village school, key roles in many village events, including the customary light parade, harvest festival and remembrance commemorations.
- Personal, social, health and economic education lessons ensure that pupils know how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The effective use of educational visits, such as those to a variety of museums and places of historical and cultural interest, complements and enhances further the lessons taught in school.
- A strong, well-established and highly successful partnership with the local primary school ensures that pupils develop their social skills, resilience and readiness for their next stages of education, including their return, where appropriate, to mainstream education.
- Regular meetings of the whole school community, including pupils, held weekly with the headteacher, provide all pupils with effective opportunities to develop their social skills further. These discussions allow pupils to contribute positively to democratic processes that help inform leaders' decisions about school improvement and the impact of their actions.
- Pupils frequently learn about a wide variety of different jobs and careers from the many visitors that come to the school, including members of the emergency services.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' manners around the school are exemplary. Pupils typically show respect for each other and adults because staff consistently and calmly demonstrate respect and manners to them. They have positive attitudes to learning and concentrate well in class.
- The school's behaviour policy is highly effective in modifying any challenging behaviour. The effective and consistent use of the behaviour policy nurtures, reinforces and rewards positive behaviour, while also making clear what is and is not acceptable. Occasionally

pupils' behaviour can slip; when this happens, skilled staff do intervene quickly and appropriately to help bring behaviour back on track. Consequently, pupils make strong progress and rapidly improve their behaviour, so much so that many pupils successfully return to mainstream education.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Pupils are aware of different types of bullying and say that if any does occur, teachers and other adults swiftly and successfully act to address it. Pupils say that staff are very approachable and always willing to help if they are worried or have concerns.
- Pupils typically like coming to school and rarely miss a day. Consequently, rates of attendance are well above those seen nationally for all groups of pupils. The school does not exclude pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils currently attending the school are disadvantaged in some way. Most have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Pupils make strong progress from their starting points in a wide variety of subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science, because of the teaching, support and guidance they receive. As a result, pupils are quickly diminishing the differences in attainment with other pupils nationally.
- All pupils have good basic skills in literacy and are able to communicate effectively and with confidence. Many pupils develop levels of literacy and vocabulary close to those expected for their age because of the quality of teaching they receive.
- Pupils have good basic number skills and are able to apply these confidently, for example in calculating amounts of ingredients to use during cookery activities.
- Pupils benefit from the therapy sessions provided by the school, including the use of play and drama therapy. These complement the high levels of effective support in the classrooms. Pupils participate in activities including outdoor education, horse-herding skills and forest-based education that link to their personal interests and promote social development and self-discipline.
- Pupils are entered for end of key stage assessments where appropriate and leave the school well equipped for their next stages of education. No pupils were entered for key stage 2 statutory assessments in 2016.
- The school's assessments and work in pupils' books show that pupils' progress since joining the school is rapid, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. Consequently, although their attainment is often below that of their peers nationally, nearly all pupils are making up ground.
- Pupils make good progress in reading and quickly improve their reading skills. They become proficient readers because of effective support and appropriate resources provided for them. However, some less-able pupils do not yet have a fully secure understanding of phonics.
- The strength of pupils' progress and attainment in computing, art and music is less evident in books and teachers' assessment records.

School details

Unique reference number	130367
DfE registration number	909/6048
Inspection number	10033386

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	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Appletree Treatment Centre Ltd
Chair	Clair Davies
Headteacher	Rob Davies
Annual fees	£141,545–161,298
Telephone number	01539 560253
Website	None
Email address	clair.davies@appletreeschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–9 October 2014

Information about this school

- Appletree School is a small independent special school with associated residential accommodation home for young people who require residential provision for up to 52 weeks a year.
- The school caters for girls and boys aged between six and 12 years. There are 16 pupils on roll. It aims to meet the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Most of those on roll have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plans.
- The school has a well-established partnership with a local school, St Mark's Church of England Primary School.

- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school was previously inspected in October 2014.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice to the school.
- The inspector observed learning throughout the school, checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards and looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, a representative of the proprietor company and the school's external professional advisor. The inspector held meetings and telephone calls with headteachers of other schools that work in partnership with Appletree. The inspector held meetings and telephone calls with the social workers of some pupils who attend the school. The inspector spoke with teachers and pupils around the school and listened to some pupils read.
- The inspector scrutinised an extensive range of school documentation, including policies, planning, information provided to board members, documentation relating to training and information about the progress, behaviour and attendance of pupils in the school. He looked at the school's single central record of employment checks and the detailed records relating to pupils' safeguarding and safety.
- The inspector considered the two responses to the online parent questionnaire, Parent View.
- The inspector considered the 12 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the online pupils' questionnaire.
- The inspector made a thorough tour of the school.

Inspection team

John Nixon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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