

High Well School

Rook Hill Road, Pontefract, West Yorkshire WF8 2DD

Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The acting headteacher and executive headteacher have a clear vision for the future of the school. As a result, they have brought about improvement to the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils at a fast pace.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the needs of the school. They take an active role in improving the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils.
- Middle leaders are able and willing. They are, however, relatively new to their posts. As a result they are not yet fully monitoring pupils' progress within their subject areas.
- Teachers and support staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic performance. Staff work closely as a team and support pupils to achieve as much as possible from a wide range of starting points, and this ensures that pupils make good progress overall.
- Pupils often arrive in school at times other than the start of the academic year. Many arrive in key stage 4 and some arrive close to the end of their school career. Staff work exceptionally hard to ensure pupils all leave with as wide a range of qualifications and accreditations as possible in the time available.
- Pupils often demonstrate very difficult behaviour when they first arrive in school. School records show that, for most, their behaviour quickly improves as they settle into school routines and they re-engage with learning.
- Pupils' previous attendance has often been very low. Some have not previously attended school for protracted periods of time, often because of behavioural or mental health issues. The greater majority increase their levels of attendance, sometimes dramatically, after starting at the school.
- School leaders are aware that there remains a small group of pupils whose attendance is lower than it should be despite a wide range of different approaches. School leaders recognise they need to do more in order to engage with the families of these pupils to gain their support in sending their children to school.
- More than two thirds of pupils are supported by pupil premium funding. Overall, disadvantaged pupils make equally good progress to others as a result of carefully targeted support.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - increasing training opportunities for middle leaders in order that they may increase the role they play in improving the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils
 - develop more effective systems to enable staff to work more closely with harder-to-reach families in order to increase the attendance of their children.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The effective and focused leadership of the acting headteacher and executive headteacher has moved the school forward at a fast pace. Their vision for the future is well set out and demonstrates clearly their good levels of understanding of the needs of the pupils in their care.
- Senior leaders work closely with governors to improve the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils. The success of this partnership was demonstrated clearly by the increase in the number of qualifications and accreditations gained by Year 11 pupils since the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders have recently introduced a tier of middle leadership to the school. Subject coordinators and the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) are all relatively new to post. While they are increasing the role they undertake at a fast pace, they do not yet fully support senior leaders through, for example, monitoring the progress of pupils within their subject areas.
- The recent move to a new site presented many problems which have taken time to overcome. For example, the behaviour of pupils dipped, particularly for pupils for whom a fixed and steady routine is essential for their health and welfare. However, clear routines have been re-established and pupils are now proud of their new school as was clear from their comments during the inspection and evidenced by the spotless condition of corridors and classrooms.
- More than a third of pupils who attend the school have additional needs. Senior leaders understand the complex needs of pupils well and ensure staff receive extra training in order to support pupils effectively. For example, all staff have recently undertaken training designed to increase their understanding of the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This heightened level of knowledge has contributed to the improvement in pupils' academic achievement and behaviour over time.
- The school receives funding for each pupil to meet their special educational needs. This funding is a direct part of the school's budget. It is used to support all pupils to make good progress overall from their differing starting points.
- Effective performance management systems enable senior leaders to evaluate the performance of staff across the school. The targets set link directly to the school's plan for improvement. This enables school leaders to reward staff for their work and to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Leaders are justifiably proud of the bespoke approach they take to individual pupils' curriculum choice. Their focus on developing pupils' interests when they first start school is one of the reasons pupils engage with school at a faster pace. Leaders' very clear focus on English and mathematics ensures that pupils develop basic skills and make progress quickly. Trips away from the classroom to, for example, a local riding stables enable pupils to develop a more positive attitude to school and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- School leaders have recently developed a new system for recording pupils' progress

from their starting points. The system enables staff to plot pupils' progress with accuracy and to set challenging future targets for pupils. While staff have received appropriate training in using the system, occasional inaccuracies were noted during the inspection which suggested that pupils' levels of achievement were lower than they should have been. Senior leaders were aware of these and further work has already been undertaken to improve the accuracy overall.

- Pupils attend a variety of different alternative providers who provide an alternative curriculum. For example, pupils attend courses which develop building and tiling skills at the local high school. One student described working in this environment and on non-academic skills as follows: 'Coming here makes learning seem real for me.' School staff have a very clear oversight of all external provision and apply the same stringent levels of monitoring as seen in school.
- Senior leaders and governors have a very close focus on pupils' attendance. Overall it is improving. However, there remains a small group of pupils whose attendance is improving too slowly. Sometimes their absence is condoned by their families. Senior leaders recognise that there is more work to be done to engage these particular families.

Governance of the school

- The reformed governing body has taken on board the areas for improvement outlined in the recent external review and the recommendations made during the last Ofsted monitoring visit. As a result, governors are now more closely involved with the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and regularly challenge senior leaders on the attendance of pupils.
- The appointments of a new deputy chair of the governing body and a parent to the governing body are viewed in a highly positive light by other members. Their appointments have already led to fresh views and creative solutions to improving pupils' attendance. These include the appointment of an attendance officer whose appointment is to be partly funded by a local housing association.
- The governing body, alongside senior leaders, use pupil premium funding carefully and judiciously to support disadvantaged pupils to re-engage with education. Through incentives such as the Wilderness Project, which enables pupils to learn self-reliance, pupils begin to recognise their own potential and improve their self-esteem. Intensive support offered in mathematics and English enables them to make accelerated progress. As a result, they make good and better progress from their starting points.
- The governing body has worked hard and successfully to eradicate a budget deficit. Through effective, prudent use of funding they are now very close to their goal.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding pupils is a key priority for all members of staff who work in the school. Regular training sessions ensure that they are aware of current legislation and are clear about what to do for a child in need.

- Staff know pupils well. They have a good understanding of pupils' behaviour. This enables them to pick up any changes which might signify distress or unhappiness and take prompt action.
- New staff spoken to during the inspection said they felt safeguarding had been a key focus in the work they had undertaken during their induction period. They believed this had prepared them well for working in school.
- The acting headteacher takes a lead in safeguarding, assisted by the safeguarding officer. They have put in place a clear and logical system for referrals which enables staff to share their concerns effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and support staff work closely together. Recent training has increased their understanding of, and empathy with, pupils' needs. This enables staff to deliver a curriculum which accurately matches pupils' requirements and enables them to make good progress overall.
- The close relationships staff form with pupils are a strength of the school. The high expectations staff have for pupils are clearly reflected in the way most pupils try their best to complete tasks set. Often pupils have low resilience to failure, and are very critical of their own work, sometimes attempting to destroy it because they feel it is not good enough. When this happens staff piece together work so it remains in books. Analysis of books shows that this is not often repeated as pupils' confidence in their own ability grows stronger.
- Teachers have high expectations of the amount of work pupils can achieve in the time available. Work in books shows that pupils nearly always complete the tasks set and as confidence grows they tackle harder pieces of work. As a pupil explained, 'I can write so much more now than I could when I started here.'
- Pupils also make strong progress when attending off-site provision. A visit to Featherstone academy during the inspection showed pupils demonstrating their recently acquired carpentry skills when making wooden planters. The calm atmosphere and purposeful way in which pupils worked clearly showed the enjoyment they gained from learning. Discussions held with the tutor leading the learning provided the information that pupils have a real chance of gaining an apprenticeship if they show commitment and interest in their work.
- The school has a cohort of exceptionally vulnerable pupils. These pupils, often owing to their mental health needs, were educated in their home setting or in public spaces such as libraries. The school has developed an off-site unit where effective teaching meets the specific needs of this group. It is based at an adventure playground with classroom facilities. This has led to an increase in the attendance and progress of this group.
- Staff, overall, make accurate assessments of pupils' abilities when they arrive in school. However the introduction of a new system to measure pupils' progress has reduced the accuracy for a small group of pupils. Senior leaders are aware of this and have put in place further training for staff.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' care and welfare are a high priority for all staff. Training has helped them to develop a very clear understanding of pupils' needs and staff work hard to ensure these needs are met in all that they do. As a result, pupils' self-esteem and self-worth increase as they settle into school routines. The views of one pupil represented others when he commented: 'I feel for the first time ever people understand me and listen to me' both in school and when they visit work placements.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection echoed this view clearly, describing staff as often going the 'extra mile' by taking time to talk to them and by offering direct support both during and outside the school day.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and when they visit work placements. They also say they understand who to talk to should they have a problem. They feel school prepares them well for transfer to the next phase in their education or the workplace through regular visits and 'taster sessions'. The success of this can be seen in the increase in numbers of pupils remaining in education, training or employment six months after leaving school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Incidents of difficult behaviour have significantly reduced across the school since the previous inspection. Use of physical restraint has correspondingly reduced, as has the use of the 'chill out' room. This is clear evidence of the impact of the consistent use of the behaviour policy by all staff.
- Despite their high level of need, pupils respond well to staff and develop, often for the first time, strategies to enable them to control their own behaviour.
- Positive behaviour is rewarded at every opportunity and a 'restorative' approach has reduced the incidence of damage to school property. At the time of the inspection the school was clean, tidy and free of any evidence of graffiti in both corridors and classrooms.
- Staff also reported to the inspection team that the philosophy that all damage has to be 'paid for' through, for example, losing time at break and lunchtime was now accepted by all pupils.
- Pupils show mature attitudes to and empathy with others. Those spoken to recognise that everyone may at some time have a crisis. However, they also reported that difficult behaviour rarely stops learning as staff minimise incidents by concentrating on teaching attentive pupils. 'That way', they commented, 'we all get on with our work and the pupil in crisis doesn't stop us from learning.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils often arrive in school having missed long periods in their schooling. Frequently this is due to their social, emotional and mental health needs. While recognising this, staff in school have high expectations for pupils, and treat joining school as a new start. As a result, pupils make good and better progress from a range of different starting points.
- A large proportion of pupils are supported by pupil premium funding. The school uses this funding in a variety of effective ways to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, pupils are given intensive one-to-one support with basic skills and in those areas where initial checks show they have a weakness. This enables them to catch up quickly and diminish any difference between themselves and others.
- The newly appointed English leader carried out an audit of school provision and recognised that an inability to read well was often the key to pupils' previous problems. This term she has made improving reading skills across the school a key focus for improvement. Pupils' reading ages have all been calculated and age-appropriate books have been purchased for each classroom. Pupils spoken to described how they were beginning to enjoy reading, sometimes for the first time.
- Overall pupils make slightly better progress in mathematics than English. However, this changes from year group to year group and the very small numbers of pupils make comparisons difficult.
- Pupils' progress in science is good. The enthusiasm with which the science coordinator plans her lessons is infectious and work in pupils' books confirms their high levels of engagement and enthusiasm for the subject.
- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and are supported by a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan which outlines their primary and secondary needs. A significant number have associated learning difficulties. Teaching staff, supported by the SENCo, recognise this and ensure the curriculum meets their needs effectively and enables them to make good progress overall.
- In 2016 all pupils left with a range of different qualifications and accreditations including mathematics, English, science, geography, history, employability and a certificate of personal effectiveness (COPE). All pupils transferred to further education to study a wide range of courses leading to accreditations including animal care, welding, construction and a foundation course. Recent checks carried out by the school show that more than 75% remain on course.

School details

Unique reference number	131526
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10031034

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special school
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Laws
Headteacher	Louise Quinn
Telephone number	01924 572100
Website	www.highwellschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@highwell.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Since the last inspection the school has relocated to Pontefract in West Yorkshire.
- Currently the school is led by an acting headteacher who has been in post for two years. She is currently supported by an executive headteacher whose substantive post is head of a local pupil referral unit.
- Pupils who attend the school all have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health needs. More than one third have other related conditions which impact on their ability to learn.
- The school educates a small group of vulnerable pupils on a second site named the Old Quarry Adventure playground which is approximately three miles from the main school. Staff from the school deliver education to eight pupils at this site.
- The school uses four alternative providers: The Wilderness Experience, Chevin housing

construction skills at Featherstone College, Riding for the Disabled Pontefract, and Reverse the Cycle, Pontefract.

Information about this inspection

- I observed learning in classrooms across the school with members of the senior leadership team.
- I also analysed a range of school documents including safeguarding documentation, pupil progress data and the school's curriculum planning.
- Meetings were held with pupils, senior leaders, middle leaders, members of staff and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body.
- Informal meetings were held with a small number of parents at the start of the day and I took into account the feedback of two parents given via Ofsted's online texting service. Three parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey; however, this was too small a number to view their responses.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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