

Bracken School

1 Harbour Lane, Warton, Preston, Lancashire PR4 1YA

Inspection dates

3–4 October 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 proprietor and leaders have ensured that the independent school standards have been met.
- Leaders are successful in delivering their ambitious vision for this improving school and ensure that pupils achieve well both academically and personally.
- Development planning is accurate and leaders have identified the right priorities. In some areas, there is insufficient detail to explain how the planned improvements will be achieved.
- Outcomes for pupils are good despite most having large gaps in their education prior to arriving at Bracken School. This is because all staff work successfully as part of a multidisciplinary team.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide an exciting and challenging range of activities for pupils.
- The broad and balanced curriculum is successfully tailored to meet individual needs of pupils. However, sometimes they are given too much support with their work.
- As a result of the strong focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils are tolerant and respectful. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they have great confidence in the adults who care for them.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are also outstanding. Pupils' growing confidence and self-esteem are evident in all that they do.
- The school provides a secure setting where pupils feel safe. Arrangements for safeguarding and for promoting pupils' welfare are implemented rigorously.

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?

- Improve leadership and management of the school by ensuring that the individual strands of the development plan provide sufficient detail to explain how targets will be met and how school leaders will know that they have been successful in securing improvement.
- Improve teaching and learning so that pupils are not given too much support by adults when completing their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and senior leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- The school has been successful in delivering its aim of 'providing a caring and stimulating environment where every child matters'.
- Leaders have established a positive ethos that inspires pupils to succeed in education and in their lives. It is based on high aspirations for all.
- With strong support from the owners, school leaders have improved the education provision and outcomes for pupils at Bracken House. For example, the recruitment of an additional teacher has enabled pupils to receive more individual support and guidance.
- Staff morale is high. Relationships at all levels are excellent. Those who completed the staff survey indicated that they enjoy working at the school. Pupils comment favourably on these excellent relationships which help them settle. This is especially important as most pupils arrive at Bracken School often following long periods of absence after experiencing difficulties in their previous schools or colleges.
- The headteacher provides just the right level of support and challenge for newly appointed staff members. He scrutinises planning, observes teaching and provides constructive feedback. His evaluation highlights that, on a few occasions, pupils are given too much adult support when completing their work. This was confirmed during the inspection.
- Operating as part of a multi-agency team, school leaders keep comprehensive records of the academic, social and emotional needs of all pupils. There are good relationships with outside agencies. Records of each pupil's behaviour and additional needs are thorough and provide a reliable basis for discussing their personal progress. As a local authority officer commented, 'We have a pupil here and I'm delighted with the progress made. The school builds on the positive and the pupil shows much greater levels of engagement in lessons.'
- The curriculum is designed in a bespoke way to meet the varied needs of pupils who arrive at the school at different times and whose length of stay varies. It is carefully planned and covers the required areas of learning. Wherever possible, pupils work towards external accreditation, including functional skills, entry-level qualifications, practical college courses and GCSEs. A suitably broad range of subjects are offered. 'I now enjoy school much more. Before I came here I never used to go. I'm doing some GCSEs and I think I'll pass this year' is typical of comments made by pupils.
- The school's curriculum is enhanced by the wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities provided for the pupils. An extensive programme of activities is planned termly. It includes regular visits to leisure centres, art galleries, places of worship and outdoor education centres.
- Leaders have a good awareness of the school's effectiveness. Their self-evaluation is realistic and accurate. While the school development plan focuses on the right priorities, it is not detailed enough in its present form. It does not provide enough information on how

leaders will reach their goals and how they will know they have been successful. For example, in the current plan there is too little information explaining how the school will make better links with the local community.

- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. The activities that they undertake have a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the school's curriculum celebrates different beliefs and cultures as well as promoting equality of opportunity and diversity.
- Leaders make effective use of the funding for pupils placed in the school by local authorities. Most of this money is spent on salaries of teaching staff.

Governance

- The school's proprietor is effective in both supporting the school and holding it to account.
- The proprietor has ensured that staff have ready access to well-designed training programmes.
- The director of education for the Keys Group of schools supports Bracken School effectively and oversees the quality assurance of the school's work. She has an accurate picture of the school and knows what needs to be improved.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher has created a strong culture of shared responsibility for protecting pupils, and this permeates all areas of the school's work.
- Pupils confirmed that they feel safe and that they are well looked after. They are taught about their personal responsibilities and how to stay safe online. They appreciate how their teachers and carers work so closely together to look after them.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding are detailed and meet the current government requirements. The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and is regularly updated. It is based on the Secretary of State's latest guidance, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016'. All staff know this guidance and follow the internally agreed procedures.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- The school's flexible, individual approach enables pupils, who generally have complex educational backgrounds, to re-engage with learning.
- A welcoming learning environment ensures that pupils feel secure and are therefore able to apply themselves to learning. 'Teachers want the best for us and I like school now. I can always ask for help if I need it' is typical of comments that pupils made.
- Excellent working relationships between pupils and teachers are the norm, and pupils behave well for most of the time. Pupils often have one-to-one support, and this provides them with the support they need to make up for lost time and make good progress.

- Pupils appreciate how well staff support them and celebrate their successes. For example, displays of pupils' work in the classroom contribute to the attractive learning environment. Pupils talk proudly of their completed work and enjoy pointing it out to visitors. Consequently, pupils feel that their work is valued and that their presence in the school will be remembered.
- Expertly led by the headteacher, staff have high expectations of pupils' learning. Detailed planning informs the lessons, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils' reading skills are successfully developed.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very effectively in class.
- An accurate check on pupils' attainment on entry to school enables teachers to track pupils' progress during their time at Bracken School. This works well, and the information is used by staff to pitch work at the right level for pupils as they settle into the school. A combination of day-to-day assessment and more formal tests allows teachers to continue to measure pupils' progress in different subjects and to plan their next steps in learning.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to plan appropriately for the individual needs of pupils. Occasionally, teachers give pupils too much support with their work, for example not allowing enough thinking time when a question has been asked. This stops pupils from working out things for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Developing pupils' confidence, social skills and emotional well-being is given a high priority by all staff. Pupils confirmed that they are able to make outstanding progress in these areas because of the skills of their teachers and the individual attention that they receive.
- The proprietor gives comprehensive training to all staff to ensure that they have the skills needed to de-escalate situations, and to deflect and diffuse challenging behaviour displayed by some pupils. All staff working in the school apply these skills consistently.
- The school offers high-quality, weekly therapy sessions for pupils. These sessions enable pupils to make progress in successfully dealing with their social and emotional difficulties. Pupils also have close links with key workers and carers who can provide additional support.
- Pupils say that they enjoy attending this school. 'In other schools, I was not always well behaved, but here it is so calm and I can ask questions if I'm not sure' is a typical description of their experience.
- Staff make regular assessments of pupils' attendance, participation, independence and attainment. Pupils are involved in these assessments and subsequent target-setting. Consequently, pupils are well aware of how they can improve in each of these areas.
- Staff are highly skilled at recognising pupils' emotions and generally pre-empt any difficulties that might occur in lessons. If necessary, pupils are offered counselling or the chance to withdraw from the situation before their emotions escalate. This vigilance results in an orderly classroom that promotes learning successfully.

- Pupils respect the views of others and recognise that people are all different. They did not always find this easy and many explain that, in the past, they were intolerant of other viewpoints.
- Pupils confirm that bullying is rare. If it does happen, the school's systems are designed to deal with it quickly.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations because of the good teaching provided by the school. For example, they know the dangers of corresponding with strangers online and know who to go to if they ever feel unsafe.
- Good transition arrangements ensure that pupils moving on to a new care or educational setting make visits to the new location before taking up a place. This helps them to feel confident as they face a new situation.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Most pupils demonstrated challenging behaviour in their previous schools or settings. The school has excellent strategies in place to deal with challenging behaviour and focuses on celebrating the positives. Pupils quickly learn to deal with negative emotions and demonstrate a growing self-discipline. Consequently, incidents of disruption in classrooms are rare.
- Detailed records of any incidents are kept and any follow-up actions shared with all the staff. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions in the last two years.
- Attendance levels are high, including for those pupils who have rarely attended school in the past. They say that they are happy to come to school because they feel well treated and can point to the good progress that they are making.
- Throughout the course of the inspection, pupils were exceptionally well behaved and helpful. They were keen to talk to the inspector and happily explained what they were doing. Many gratefully described the benefits that the school had brought to them both academically and personally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils have experienced disruption in their education before coming to the school. Some have attended many different settings or refused to attend school.
- On entry, pupils' attainment levels are checked and school staff identify gaps in their previous learning. These are often found to be in pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills. Starting points relating to pupils' social, emotional and behavioural development are also identified. Teachers use this assessment information well to plan work at the right level, including for the most able pupils who can complete GCSEs.
- Pupils make good progress overall in a wide range of subjects and qualifications. These include entry-level qualifications, functional skills levels 1–3, vocational training and GCSEs. Pupil numbers are too small to identify patterns or trends for different groups.
- The school's focus on improving pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics is also paying dividends. Scrutiny of pupils' books, conversations with pupils and reading reports on their progress confirm a growing confidence and competence in each of these areas.

- Good-quality, independent careers advice and guidance, along with suitable work experience, prepare pupils well for their future lives. Work experience is carefully sourced by the school to help pupils decide what they want to do in the future. It also builds their confidence in handling situations outside of school and home.

School details

Unique reference number	136050
DfE registration number	888/6112
Inspection number	10026015

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	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Keys Group
Chair	Nicola Kelly
Headteacher	Sean Nayler
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,800
Telephone number	01772 631531
Website	www.keyschildcare.co.uk/services/education
Email address	staff.brackenschool@keyschildcare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 March 2014

Information about this school

- Bracken School is a small school for pupils aged from 11 to 16 years who have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. It is a member of the Keys Group of schools. Most pupils have a history of disrupted educational experience prior to joining the school.
- Currently, none of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- All pupils have been placed at the school by local authorities.
- The school was last inspected in March 2014.

- The school aims to re-engage the pupils in learning and to help them to achieve through a therapeutic approach to address their difficulties. The school's mission statement is: 'Providing a positive, safe and nurturing environment where every child matters'.
- Pupils have in the past attended courses at local schools and colleges and at other education providers. No pupils currently attend these schools or colleges.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in several sessions, covering a range of different subjects.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the director of education for the Keys Group, an advisory headteacher, Bracken House care manager, a therapist and an officer from a local authority that places pupils at the school.
- The inspector met with pupils both formally and informally. He looked at their work and the school's records of their progress.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The inspector took into account eight Ofsted questionnaires that were completed by staff.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents provided by the school, including those available on its website. The inspector checked the school's compliance with the appropriate regulations for independent schools.

Inspection team

Mike Hewlett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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