

Trax Academy

Clifton Drive North, Lytham St Annes, Lancashire FY8 2PP

Inspection dates

17–19 October 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and managers ensure that pupils receive a good education that meets their individual needs. Staff are enthusiastic and inspire pupils to engage fully with their education.
- Pupils thrive in the calm and supportive atmosphere. Positive relationships help pupils grow in confidence and enjoy learning.
- The individualised curriculum and effective teaching motivate pupils to achieve well. Teachers know the pupils extremely well and make learning interesting and accessible.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve a range of qualifications in vocational subjects, functional skills and GCSE. Their good outcomes equip them well for the next steps in their education or employment.
- Assessment is used very effectively to support learning in vocational subjects but less successfully to develop pupils' reading, writing, information technology and mathematical skills. Information from assessments is not shared with all staff and targets in pupils' individual plans are not specific enough.
- Pupils extend their skills in a range of extra-curricular activities. For example, they develop physical and decision-making skills, as well as driving skills, having earned the use of off-road motorbikes and a variety of all-terrain vehicles.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils' personal skills are developed exceptionally well in all subjects. Pupils learn to understand risks and make positive choices. Their welfare is everyone's priority.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and pupils feel and are safe in school. Pupils treat each other and staff with respect.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.
- Leadership and teaching are successful at both school sites but best practice is not shared effectively.
- Pupils' attendance is improving but is still sporadic for some. Absence is followed up immediately and the safety of pupils is assured. However, because registers are kept differently at each site, it is difficult to analyse trends.

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?

- Develop and improve pupils' reading, writing, mathematical and information technology skills by:
 - ensuring that assessments of pupils' language, literacy and mathematical skills are shared with all teachers and are used to set specific targets in pupils' individual education plans
 - ensuring that teachers in all subjects use assessments to reinforce and extend pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills
 - further developing pupils' use of information technology skills across the curriculum.
- Improve leadership and teaching by sharing best practice across both school sites.
- Improve attendance further by:
 - working with carers to ensure that pupils attend unless an absence is authorised
 - ensuring that records of attendance and absence are consistent across both schools, so that patterns in absence can be analysed.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new strategic leadership arrangements are having a positive impact. The new education director and proprietor successfully oversee the work of academy managers and ensure that provision at the two school sites is of good quality. Academy managers ensure the smooth running of each site and are well respected.
- Leaders at all levels rigorously check the quality of provision and ensure that the independent school standards and other requirements are met fully.
- All staff are highly motivated and committed to their work. They do all they can to help pupils achieve to the best of their ability, and make sure that they are safe and nurtured. The school is calm and pupils thrive in the positive atmosphere.
- Leaders check teaching and pupils' progress carefully so they have an accurate view of the school's performance. School improvement planning is focused on the right priorities to help pupils gain qualifications and skills that prepare them for further education or employment.
- The education director supervises the work of academy managers thoroughly. Managers are held to account for the impact of their work, through weekly reports and termly evaluations that include details of pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety.
- Academy managers check the performance of teachers, instructors and support workers effectively at each site. They are knowledgeable and provide constructive feedback to staff to support improvements in provision. As one member of staff at the Preston site said, 'The school is a safe environment for staff and pupils. The manager provides outstanding support to the whole team.' Inspection findings corroborate this view.
- Most staff feel that they are able to develop their professional skills through training. All staff complete safeguarding, health and safety and clinical training but a small minority feel that strategic leaders do not provide well for their professional development and improvement of skills. Staff training is recognised as a development area and is a priority in the school improvement plan.
- The curriculum is planned carefully to ensure that pupils receive a personalised education that meets their needs and abilities. Pupils enter the school at any point during the school year and in any year group. Many pupils have had long periods out of school, have gaps in their learning and additional needs. Pupils' prior learning and any therapeutic needs are assessed thoroughly on entry to the school and the curriculum is adapted to build on their knowledge and skills.
- The school excels in providing pupils with a wide range of vocational qualifications that capture their interest, including, for example, motorcycle maintenance, mechanical engineering, plant driving, woodwork, construction and garden maintenance. Alongside vocational subjects, all pupils are taught English, mathematics, information technology and personal, social and health education (PSHE) and are entered for qualifications. The focus on vocational, functional and personal skills prepares pupils of all abilities well for further study and work.
- Additional subjects such as art, geography, history, physical education and science are

provided on the school site. Pupils who have the ability are supported to take GCSEs in a range of subjects through attendance at the Tower Learning Centre for individual tuition.

- Pupils enjoy a range of extra-curricular activities that motivate them and extend their learning and personal skills. For example, they develop physical and decision-making skills, as well as driving skills, having earned the use of off-road motorbikes, all-terrain vehicles, rally cars, quad bikes, go-karts, mountain bikes and wind surfers. Pupils' experience is enriched through trips and visits out of school.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted successfully in all subjects. PSHE sessions explicitly teach pupils about British values and support them in making considered decisions to keep themselves safe and healthy. They are encouraged to consider the moral implications of their own and other's actions. Pupils are taught about protected characteristics and show respect for people regardless of their age, disability, gender or sexual orientation and for people from different faiths and cultures. Pupils work together and with instructors cooperatively and safely in practical sessions.
- Partnership working with external agencies and professionals is very effective. The school liaises with social workers and virtual school staff in different local authorities, to make sure that each pupil receives a bespoke and effective education. Care professionals who made their views known were highly positive about the work of the school, citing excellent communication, productive personal education plan (PEP) meetings, and harmonious relations with the children's homes. The school works effectively with clinical therapists and professionals to help pupils overcome barriers to learning, heal damage and engage in positive activities and education.
- Although academy managers know the strengths and development areas at each site, the best practice in teaching and leadership is not shared across both sites. This restricts staff's ability to share their expertise with each other and information about pupils' learning effectively. For example, records of attendance are not consistent, approaches to performance management differ and assessments of pupils' skills and targets in literacy, mathematics and information technology are not shared.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body. Governance is provided through the education director, who reports to the managing director and executive board of the Care4Children group.
- The education director has relevant knowledge and skills to quality assure the work of the school.
- Proprietors have a good understanding of the school's performance and a clear vision to develop the provision further. They are focused on ensuring that pupils achieve to the best of their ability, by providing an individualised curriculum to meet each pupil's needs, aspirations and abilities.
- The school works constructively with virtual school leaders, social workers and carers. The pupil premium is used effectively to support pupils' personal education plans.
- Proprietors oversee the performance management of staff effectively; they have reviewed and rationalised staff salaries since taking ownership of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and all staff are vigilant in ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils in school. They have a completed training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty, health and safety, first aid, fire safety, crisis intervention and physical restraint appropriate to their role. All staff understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any safeguarding concerns. They engage with other agencies effectively to follow up concerns and provide pupils with multi-agency support as needed. Leaders engage well with carers and stakeholders to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe.
- Pupils are nurtured and cared for effectively, so they feel and are safe in school. They say, for example, 'It's always calm' and 'We learn about risky behaviour and how to keep safe in PSHE; it helps me keep safe inside school and outside.' Pupils feel they can talk to staff with any concerns and they will be supported.
- The school premises are safe and secure and health and safety procedures are extremely rigorous. Staff and pupils ensure that tools and potentially dangerous substances are handled safely and locked away. Staff and pupils have an excellent understanding of health and safety in the workshops.
- The safeguarding and related policies are comprehensive and meet all current government requirements. They are available to parents and carers on request, as the school does not have a website. Procedures to ensure the safe recruitment of staff meet requirements. Record-keeping is thorough. Pupils' individual records are updated daily, ensuring that their whereabouts and needs are known for the day.
- Pupils' attendance is tracked carefully and absence is followed up immediately if necessary. However, because registers of attendance are kept differently at each site, it is difficult to analyse trends and patterns to inform the way in which the school works with homes to improve attendance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Individualised instruction supports pupils to make good progress from their different starting points. Pupils' learning and therapeutic needs are assessed thoroughly when they enter the school. Teaching is planned successfully to build on prior learning, fill gaps in knowledge and support pupils' personal development.
- Positive, constructive relationships between staff and pupils are a key factor in the school's success. Pupils who previously have not engaged in learning are motivated and cooperative in this setting. Staff plan learning that tunes into pupils' interests and present it in a way that is accessible and motivating.
- Pupils are motivated by the interesting curriculum and effective teaching. For example, pupils stated that they are 'learning loads and really looking forward to next year in school' and that 'learning here is fun'.
- Teaching at both sites supports pupils' progress and personal development effectively. In a literacy session, for example, pupils animatedly discussed how first impressions of people based on limited characteristics can be misleading. In geography and PSHE, the

teacher skilfully engaged pupils in discussion and written work by tuning into their interests and making learning relevant for them.

- Practical and vocational subjects are highly motivating and effectively taught. Clear instruction enables pupils to gain new knowledge, learn new skills and stay safe. Pupils work together cooperatively. The school is extremely well resourced with good-quality practical materials and tools and an exceptionally wide range of vehicles.
- Staff ensure that pupils attending the Tower Learning Centre make good progress with GCSE courses. They visit regularly and check pupils' progress rigorously.
- Assessment is used successfully in vocational and additional subjects. Daily review of each pupil's personalised learning plans ensures that sessions build on their prior learning and are tailored to their interests and preferred learning styles. Pupils follow Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) syllabuses, which enables them to achieve a range of vocational and short-course qualifications that support their career aspirations and personal development.
- All pupils have useful electronic personal education plans (ePEPs) and individual education plans (IEPs). These provide a comprehensive overview of any barriers to learning and positive strategies to support pupils' all-round achievement. The individualised plans are especially effective with regard to mapping out pupils' targets and achievements for vocational subjects, short courses and, where appropriate, GCSE. However, targets for the development of reading, writing and IT skills are not specific enough.
- Assessment is used less effectively to develop pupils' reading, literacy, information technology and mathematical skills. Information from diagnostic assessments is not shared with all staff, thereby limiting their ability to extend pupils' skills in subjects such as geography, science, personal, social and health education and vocational sessions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The focus on developing positive relationships with pupils from the start helps pupils develop confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' personal development and welfare are the prime consideration in all the school's work. Barriers to learning and pupils' physical and emotional well-being are thoroughly assessed and positive strategies are carefully used to help pupils overcome them.
- Pupils engage in their education with enthusiasm and develop excellent personal skills during their time at the academy. For many, this is the first time they have experienced success and they rightly take pride in their work.
- Pupils are treated respectfully by staff and increasingly take responsibility for their learning and actions. Pupils' personal and social skills and self-motivation grow significantly as they take on responsibility, for example as junior instructors. They learn control and discipline in their increasingly expert handling of all-terrain vehicles, off-road motorbikes and various other tools and equipment.
- Pupils say that they feel extremely safe and that staff ensure that they are safe in

school. Pupils are free from bullying and harassment. Records show, and pupils confirm, that there has not been any bullying in school in the last two years. Pupils have a good understanding of different sorts of bullying, including, for example, cyber bullying, physical or verbal bullying and racist, gender- or sexuality-based bullying.

- Pupils develop a good understanding of how to keep safe in the world beyond school, through the excellent PSHE curriculum and highly effective teaching. Pupils learn to make considered decisions and identify and avert unhealthy risks. They understand risks associated with extremism, online grooming and unhealthy lifestyles.
- Pupils receive excellent impartial careers education information and advice. It is linked closely to their PEPs and their interests and aspirations. Advisers from external agencies provide further information and pupils are supported to attend college open days and work experience appropriate to their ambitions. PSHE lessons support pupils with curriculum vitae writing and interview skills.
- Leaders ensure that pupils attending alternative provision are safe and attend each day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning during their time at school. Many start at the academy having had negative experiences of school previously or with long gaps in their education. They develop positive attitudes over time because the activities are interesting and positive relationships with instructors and therapists help them overcome barriers to learning.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is good. They are respectful to staff and each other. Disruption to learning is rare and dealt with effectively by staff, with a focus on de-escalating potentially disruptive behaviour. As one pupil said, 'behaviour here is always good so you feel comfortable and safe'. There is some casual swearing at times, but pupils increasingly do their best to check their language while they are at school.
- Attendance is improving but is sporadic by a few pupils. Attendance is not tracked consistently across both sites so it is difficult to analyse patterns in pupils' absence. There are effective procedures, however, to ensure that the whereabouts of each pupil is known and that they are safe each day. Any absence is followed up immediately following morning calls between the two Trax academy sites and the Tower Learning Centre.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress from their various starting points. The personalised curriculum supports each pupil to catch up on missed schooling and gain skills and qualifications appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- All pupils gain various useful qualifications, for example in AQA vocational subjects, functional skills and short courses. Pupils are appropriately supported to study a range of GCSEs at the Tower Learning Centre, where they achieve well. The most able pupils achieve well in the courses of their choice.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported very effectively. Staff know each pupil very well and the individual approach means that resources and teaching can be adapted to each pupil's needs. All identified special needs are behavioural, social or emotional and there are no pupils with disabilities.
- Pupils make good gains in literacy and mathematical skills and achieve relevant qualifications in functional skills or at GCSE. However, their progress is not as rapid as it could be. This is because assessment information is not shared with all staff and targets in pupils' IEPs and ePEPs are not specific enough to support teachers to extend these skills. Pupils' written work is variable between subjects and sometimes instructors' expectations of what pupils can do independently in reading, writing and mathematics are too low given their assessments.
- Pupils' knowledge and skills in information technology (IT) are developed effectively in IT sessions but are not reinforced and extended as well as they could be in other subjects.
- Pupils' excellent personal development, their good vocational skills and the wide range of qualifications equip them well for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

School details

Unique reference number	131563
DfE registration number	888/6093
Inspection number	10020824

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Tariq Verpalen
Chair	NA
Headteacher	Tariq Verpalen
Annual fees (day pupils)	£24,000
Telephone number	01253 781445
Website	None
Email address	tariq.verpalen@care4children.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–10 October 2013

Information about this school

- Trax Academy opened in 2006, under the ownership of the Trax group. Since the last inspection, the school has become part of Care4Children, which operates a total of 10 schools in England and Wales. The school has been refurbished, with further purpose-built classrooms and a gymnasium. An electronic monitoring system has been introduced.
- It is a small mixed independent school which provided for pupils and learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It is registered for 13 boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years. There are currently 12 pupils on roll, all boys, aged up to 16 years. All

pupils are young people who are looked after and reside in children's homes run by Care4Children. They have been placed at the school by different local authorities across the country.

- The school offers a vocationally based alternative curriculum, combined with functional skills and GCSE. It aims to re-engage students who are not able to attend mainstream schools. The school comprises a motor vehicle, go-karting and race track located on a riverside site in Preston and a second site specialising in wind sport activities in Lytham St Annes. Both sites offer a combination of vocational and academic subjects. Pupils are supported to study GCSE courses at the Tower Learning Centre, a specialised tuition service in Blackpool. This provision is not owned by Care4Children.
- Many pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector examined the premises and observed the school's work at both the Preston site and the Lytham St Annes site.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning and scrutinised pupils' written work at both sites. She spoke with pupils during teaching sessions and in individual meetings.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including action planning, self-evaluation, monitoring of teaching and performance management, pupil progress tracking, safeguarding procedures, health and safety checks and risk assessments. All school policies were seen.
- The inspector met with the education director of Care4Children, an academy manager, all teaching staff and instructors who were present in school. She spoke by telephone with social workers from several different local authorities, the Care4Children clinical director, a care worker and the leader from the Tower Learning Centre.

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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