

Belmont School

Haslingden Road, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 6RX

Inspection dates

30 January–1 February 2018

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Significant changes have taken place since the previous inspection. Mostly notably, all senior leaders are new to the school.
- While some aspects of provision are not as strong as previously, leaders, with the full support of governors and the proprietor Acorn Care and Education Ltd, are effectively moving the school forward. They ensure that teaching and pupils' achievement are good.
- Most teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of pupils. However, occasionally pupils are not fully challenged in their learning. In addition, procedures for monitoring pupils' progress are still developing.
- Pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Older pupils often make outstanding progress, especially in vocational areas such as horticulture and construction.
- Safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and adhered to by all staff.
- Advice given to teachers on how they can improve is not precise enough. Improvement plans sometimes lack clarity.
- The school has an excellent track record in preparing pupils for life after school. By the time pupils left school at the end of Year 11 in 2017, all went into either further education, employment or training.
- Work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are respectful and have a good appreciation of British values.
- Pupils benefit from an interesting curriculum, which captures their imagination and ensures their good progress.
- Most pupils have very high levels of attendance. They say that they feel safe in school and well looked after. Pupils are well mannered and courteous.
- Most parents and carers are highly positive about all aspects of the school, including their children's safety. Typically, they comment that their children are 'doing very well'.
- Local authorities are complimentary. They say that communication with the school is good, and placements are quickly organised.

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 the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently challenge pupils to achieve to their absolute best
 - making sure that teachers inform pupils how they can take the next steps in their learning.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that effective procedures are in place, which provide all teachers with accurate information about exactly how much progress pupils are making
 - sharpening procedures for evaluating the school's strengths and areas for development and the plans that arise from this
 - improving procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The leadership and management structure of the school has changed since the previous inspection. An executive principal and deputy headteacher have been replaced by a headteacher and deputy headteacher for the primary school and the same for the secondary school. Senior leaders report to the chair of governors and the proprietor.
- Senior leaders and governors have a good understanding of the independent school standards. With the full support of the proprietor, and other schools and services within the Acorn Care and Education group, leaders regularly review educational provision, premise and safeguarding procedures and ensure that all independent school standards are met.
- The school's self-evaluation states that, 'the school is currently going through a period of transition to enable it to meet the higher demands of the more complex pupils that are being referred to us'. During this time of change, the morale of most staff is high. All staff who spoke with inspectors, and most of those who completed the inspection questionnaire, said they are appreciative of professional development opportunities. Those new to teaching indicated that they are well supported through the mentoring and advice offered by experienced staff.
- Senior leaders ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities including football, gymnastics, outdoor pursuits and dodgeball. The curriculum broadens pupils' experiences through a range of summer camps, residential trips, outward bound activities and visits to museums.
- Writing and mathematics are promoted well across the curriculum. The school's work to develop pupils' basic skills is effective. Senior leaders' strategies, and teachers' effective practice to develop pupils' reading skills, particularly in the primary school, are highly effective. Pupils who enter the school unable to read soon develop good phonic skills and an appreciation of books.
- Leaders' work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn about the major world faiths, including Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Pupils enjoy learning about, and celebrating, religious festivals. They understand that people have different beliefs and respect each other's differences. Pupils enjoy the theatre and pantomime, 'survival workshops' and visits to local places of interest. All look forward to their learning in the Lake District, where they can cooperate in teamwork activities and develop their leadership skills.
- Pupils have a good appreciation of British values and respect for the culturally diverse nature of British society. They are familiar with commemorative events, such as Remembrance Day, and empathise with those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils collect money for worthy causes and recently raised over £1,000 through organising various charity theme days. They also like putting democratic principles into practice, as school council members recently did, when they canvassed their peers' opinions on the design of a new school uniform.
- Almost all parents are very positive about the school and say that their children are safe and well looked after. Typically, they comment that, 'the school has helped my son grow

in so many ways, not just academically', and, 'my son's progress has been superb'. Representatives from local authorities say that the school is very quick to respond to pupils' needs and organises visits for parents and placements very quickly. In addition, they are of the view that the school offers good value for money and say that communication is good.

- Senior leaders are determined to ensure that the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement move forward on an upward trajectory. To this end, they have made it a priority to refine systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and supporting teachers to improve their practice. The primary and secondary headteachers have implemented a programme for monitoring teachers' performance. Other new leaders have recently been involved in scrutinising the quality of work in pupils' books and are in the process of evaluating their findings. However, advice given to teachers sometimes lacks precision and is not always clear about how teachers can improve their practice.
- Senior leaders are keen to learn from best practice and are currently developing more focused plans. However, leaders' work to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses more precisely is still developing. Systems to assess pupils' progress in all subjects are not yet fully effective. Action plans sometimes lack focus with the result that improvements are not as swift or effective as they could be.

Governance

- Effective arrangements for governance are in place. Senior leaders regularly report to governors, and the proprietor, on a range of matters. These include details of pupils' progress, behaviour and reviews of their placements at the school. In addition, leaders report on the quality of teaching.
- The chair of governors visits the school regularly and knows what it needs to do to further improve. She understands that processes, such as monitoring the quality of teaching and assessing pupils' skills and abilities, need to be refined and is working with senior leaders to hasten improvements in these areas.
- Minutes of governors' meetings show that governors challenge and hold senior leaders to account. They set the principal clear performance management targets. Governors are trained to a high standard in areas such as safeguarding, safer recruitment and child development.
- Governors are working closely with senior leaders to ensure that good and outstanding teaching practices are shared with all schools in the Acorn group.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders ensure that comprehensive safeguarding procedures are in place. Many pupils are vulnerable, which requires staff to be especially vigilant when it comes to implementing safeguarding procedures. All staff who spoke with inspectors demonstrated a precise understanding of what they should do if they are concerned about a pupil's safety or welfare.
- All necessary checks are made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. Staff are well trained and familiar with the latest government guidance on keeping children

safe in education. The school's designated safeguarding leads are trained to a very high standard.

- Risk assessments are up to date and consider all possible safety risks at school and in relation to educational trips, school visits and placements with external providers. Senior leaders seek advice on best safeguarding practice and regularly commission specialist audits of the school's safeguarding policies and practices. The school has an up to date safeguarding policy published on its website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most teachers consistently plan activities which meet pupils' individual education and personal development needs. Much of the curriculum, particularly in the primary school, is tailored to account for pupils' academic ability, learning style and behaviour.
- Small-group and one-to-one activities help to build pupils' confidence and resilience. They also allow teachers, teaching assistants and other adults, to tackle the many barriers, such as speech and language difficulties and obsessive-compulsive disorders, that prevent pupils from realising their potential.
- Daily phonics sessions for pupils in Years 3 and 4, also delivered to older pupils when needed, are highly effective. Teachers' highly skilled and sensitive approach ensures that pupils develop confidence in learning and applying their phonic knowledge. For example, pupils who started the school with little or no phonic knowledge were observed confidently practising various long and short sounds such as, 'ur', 'ar', 'ai', and 'oi' and learning to read words such as 'coat' and 'boat'. They showed growing confidence to identify 'nonsense' words and talked happily about the books they enjoy reading.
- Most teachers' partnerships with teaching assistants, and other adults, are very effective. Typically, teaching assistants effectively support pupils to access the curriculum, while encouraging them to 'take charge' of their learning. This was evident in several classes where teaching assistants' subtle cajoling provided just enough impetus for pupils to think about their learning and participate in classroom activities.
- Teachers are highly adept at managing pupils' behaviour. Their training enables them to identify 'triggers' and 'flashpoints', which they manage and/or avoid. This was observed on occasions where the teacher had to decide whether to insist on a pupil's participation in class, or allow him to take 'time out', to 'cool off'. This insightful and sensitive approach helps to develop pupils' learning skills and builds strong relationships with teachers and other adults.
- English and mathematics teaching in the primary school is good. Teachers use various strategies to make learning interesting, get pupils involved and enhance their understanding. This was evident in a key stage 2 class where pupils were learning about syllables. Pupils enjoyed guessing various words, as their peers clapped once, twice and three times, to indicate the number of syllables in various animal names. Teachers encourage pupils to share their mathematical knowledge and understanding with their peers. This was exemplified in a class where pupils confidently demonstrated how to invert multiplication and division calculations.
- As in the primary school, teachers in the secondary school have good subject knowledge. In English, teachers explore a range of topics to help develop pupils' comprehension skills

and understanding of how the English language is structured. This was evident in a mixed key stage 3 and 4 class. Pupils willingly engaged in discussions and comprehension activities because they found a video, comparing Blackpool today with how it was in Victorian times, interesting. As a result, all produced a good factual piece of writing about the characteristics of the seaside resort.

- In mathematics, pupils' different skills and ability levels are considered when planning classroom activities. This was exemplified in a GCSE class where pupils were learning about the volume, area and capacity of different geometric shapes. The teachers asked a series of focused questions to establish whether pupils remembered the formula for working out the volume of a cylinder. All knew it to be the area of the base multiplied by the height. Thereafter, they set about different 'must', 'should' and 'could' activities to extend their understanding of how to measure various three-dimensional shapes.
- Outstanding teaching in areas such as horticulture, stimulates pupils, generates interest and gets good and outstanding results. For example, Year 11 pupils were highly engaged in preparing flower beds, 'potting out' plants and learning about the characteristics of different soils. They displayed an excellent understanding of the pH (potential hydrogen) range and the suitability of different soils for flowering plants and vegetables.
- Outstanding teaching and learning take place in the school's new vocational centre. Here pupils can learn a range of skills in areas including plumbing, plastering, bricklaying, painting and decorating, and motor vehicle engineering. Pupils are well supervised in the workshop. However, they have good independent learning skills and an in-depth understanding of the importance of safety when using machinery, such as drills and band saws, and tools, including chisels and screwdrivers. Pupils are regularly challenged. This was evident when they were observed wiring plugs and light socket fittings. Pupils had to use wire strippers carefully and locate wires correctly, as well as ensure that plug flexes were the correct length, to successfully meet the requirements for their VRQ (vocationally related qualification) assessed units.
- Teaching is not outstanding, because pupils could be challenged even more in their learning. In addition, pupils lack a sound understanding of what they need to do to take the next steps in their learning. This is because feedback on their work is infrequent. The school is currently reviewing procedures to ensure that all teachers accurately identify and monitor pupils' skills and abilities in different areas of learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Some pupils, including those who have obsessive-compulsive disorders, find it very difficult to become resilient, independent learners, able to try out new things and learn from their mistakes. Teachers help such pupils to learn coping strategies to support them in managing their feelings and acting safely and responsibly while in class and when moving around the school.
- Good care and support are available to help pupils' transition from the primary to the secondary school and into the vocational centre. Pupils benefit from good impartial careers advice which facilitates their smooth transition into post-16 provision, college,

employment and training. Pupils are also supported in writing personal statements and applying for training and employment opportunities.

- Risk assessments are carried out to make sure that pupils are safe when they take advantage of off-site provision in local colleges. Those who use the school's vocational centre have an excellent understanding of the importance of wearing protective clothing, such as boots, eye protectors and overalls, and operating machinery safely.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after in school. Many pupils who spoke with inspectors said that, 'this is the safest school I've ever been in'. A minority of younger pupils said that they do not always feel safe. They indicated that they can always talk to an adult if they have any concerns.
- Pupils learn about racism, which older pupils say is, 'when you discriminate against someone because of their colour, ethnicity or beliefs'. They say that racist terms are rarely used in school and are always taken very seriously by staff. Similarly, pupils can define homophobic bullying, which is not tolerated in school.
- Parents and staff who communicated with inspectors, and the majority of staff, stated that the school is always safe. Pupils learn about dangers and risks through the personal, social, health and citizenship aspects of the curriculum. They know that regular exercise and healthy eating are essential components for keeping fit and active.

Behaviour

- Pupils attend school regularly; many have a 100% attendance record. Thorough procedures are in place for following up on absence. For example, staff have several contact numbers for all pupils which they can use if they are unsure about a pupil's whereabouts. The school's attendance and welfare officers make regular home visits where there are concerns about attendance. Their work is continually improving the attendance of the small minority of pupils whose time out of school negatively impacts on their achievement.
- The school's records of achievement show the clear relationship between good attendance and good achievement, especially on courses, including horticulture, which continually assess pupils' learning and acquisition of skills.
- Case studies and school records show that over time the behaviour of pupils with learning difficulties relating to conditions such as autism and attachment disorder dramatically improves. Generally, the longer pupils stay at the school the better their behaviour.
- Some of the challenges faced by staff in the primary school are not manifested in the secondary school. This is because pupils mature as they move through the school. In addition, staff are skilled at managing pupils' behaviour. Older pupils who spoke with inspectors explained that in Year 7 pupils are allowed four lost breaks or removals before they lose their 'options' (free time to play pool, go shopping or play on their games consoles). By the time pupils reach Year 11, they rarely lose breaks and almost always have their options on Friday afternoons.
- Pupils are very welcoming and well mannered. They enjoyed talking to inspectors. More confident pupils are enthusiastic about their learning, which they are happy to talk about. Pupils' good behaviour contributes to the orderly nature of the school. Disruptions are swiftly dealt with and well managed, thus minimising distractions and loss of learning.

Pupils understand that their peers sometimes have difficulty managing their feelings. However, they usually maintain their concentration and focus in lessons.

- Pupils look after the school environment, which is tidy and well maintained. They wear their uniforms, which they selected, with pride, and are well presented. Most pupils take pride in their work. Folders and exercise books reveal that pupils' writing, and the presentation of their work in mathematics, improves over time.
- Almost all parents, local authority representatives, pupils and most staff are of the view that behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school is still in the process of ensuring that thorough procedures are in place for all subjects, and across the school, to accurately assess pupils' skills and abilities and precisely monitor their progress. The school's own data indicates that most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in the primary school, with a small minority making outstanding progress. A full scrutiny of pupils' work books indicates that most pupils make good progress.
- A very small minority of pupils make slow progress due to poor attendance. Those with multiple barriers to learning make steady progress. A sizeable proportion of pupils have spent long periods out of school. They arrive at Belmont School with very weak skills in all areas of learning, and many need specialist speech and language support. Such support, as well as therapy including counselling, successfully reintegrates pupils back into learning and prepares them for their journey ahead.
- Recent whole-school baseline assessments in reading and spelling indicate that pupils are progressing well in these areas. This is due to consistently strong teaching, tailored interventions and targeted one-to-one support, all of which are creating the necessary building blocks to help pupils to become competent readers and writers.
- Pupils who read for inspectors did so confidently, using their phonic skills as and when necessary to sound out and read unfamiliar words. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often and do so both at school and home.
- Pupils in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 make good progress in a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, art, humanities and information and communication technology. Pupils' work books indicate that a small proportion make outstanding progress in their learning.
- All pupils who left school at the end of Year 11 in 2017 gained qualifications. In English, the GCSE pass rate was the best it has been in recent years, with pupils attaining up to grade 6. Pupils attained up to grade 5 in mathematics. Pupils also gained GCSEs in computer science, art, geography and science. This achievement represents at least good progress from pupils' low starting points.
- A wide range of additional qualifications are available to ensure that, where possible, pupils in key stage 4 are accredited for their work. Typically, pupils study for qualifications, including NVQ, AQA and BTEC awards, in functional skills, information and communication technology, preparing for work and life, and practical horticulture.
- Older pupils are certificated for most of their academic work. For example, in sports they

can acquire certificates in recognition of their dodgeball skills, basic games abilities and circuit training achievements. In addition, pupils study for, and make good progress to attain, certificates for basic kitchen hygiene and safety, mental mathematics and reading for meaning. Pupils also gain entry level qualifications in biology and science.

- Outstanding teaching and facilities in the vocational centre and the school's extensive gardens have all helped to ensure that for the last three years all pupils have progressed onto further education and training. At the end of Year 11 in 2017, pupils went on to apprenticeships in areas including auto-mechanics and catering. Other pupils went on to college to study hospitality and catering, carpentry and joinery, media studies and bricklaying. A small minority have gone on to study up to degree level, in areas such as arboriculture (nurturing trees, shrubs and other woody plants).
- All pupils receive additional funding due to their special educational needs. Many are in the care of different local authorities. As such, they attract financial support. Such funding is used well, enabling staff to offer various enrichment opportunities which support pupils' academic development and enhance their life skills. Due to this, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and development after they leave Year 11.

School details

Unique reference number	131025
DfE registration number	888/6029
Inspection number	10043372

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	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Julie Taylor
Headteacher secondary	Andy McGoldrick
Headteacher primary	Mark Fletcher
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,000–£33,000
Telephone number	01706 221043
Website	Belmont-school.co.uk
Email address	admin@belmont-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 June–2 July 2015

Information about this school

- Belmont School is a specialised independent special school which is registered to provide for pupils aged five to 18 years who have moderate to complex learning and behavioural difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. At the time of the inspection, the school was providing for pupils aged seven to 16 years. The school is located on three sites in Rossendale, Lancashire.
- The school opened in 1996. It is owned by Acorn Care and Education Ltd and was last inspected in July 2015. There are 126 pupils on roll. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils are placed at the school from local authorities from across the country.

- The school brochure states, 'At Belmont School, we enable our pupils to improve their academic performance, overcome their behavioural difficulties, develop their social skills and raise their aspirations.'
- The school aims to 'provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life'.
- Due to the complex nature of most pupils' behavioural, educational, emotional and social difficulties, classroom support is often intensive. All pupils learn in small groups. Some classes include pupils from different age groups.
- The school operates from two main sites, one for pupils of primary school age, the other for pupils of secondary school age. In addition, a separate vocational centre is available for key stage 4 pupils.
- Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been reorganised, to include two new headteachers, one responsible for the primary school, the other for the secondary school, and two deputy headteachers, one for each of the schools. In addition, there are new English, mathematics and science leaders in both schools. A number of teaching and support staff have left the school.
- The proprietor has acquired new buildings and premises to create a specialised vocational centre. During the inspection, refurbishment work was taking place in the primary school to extend premises and increase learning space.
- The school uses alternative providers. These are Bury, Burnley and Bolton colleges.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across all key stages, and in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Pupils in the vocational centre were also observed. Most observations were made jointly with the primary and secondary school headteachers. Pupils' work was scrutinised during observations and separately.
- One-to-one teaching sessions and small-group activities were observed. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with headteachers, the chair of governors, and various senior leaders, including deputy headteachers and subject leaders responsible for English and mathematics. Meetings were also held with the school's special educational needs coordinator and staff responsible for monitoring pupils' behaviour, attendance and welfare. Meetings were held with a therapist from the Barnardo's charity and carers of pupils attending the school.
- Inspectors met with the school's independent careers adviser, as well as various staff, to discuss safeguarding.
- Questionnaires submitted by 29 members of staff were scrutinised. Five free-text responses sent in by parents during the inspection were read. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to be considered. Telephone conversations were held with parents and local authority representatives.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils from across the school sites.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence. This included checks on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments, various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. In addition, the inspector scrutinised development plans and the school's reviews of its own performance.

Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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