

Halton School

31–33 Main Street, Halton, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2AN

Inspection dates

6–8 March 2018

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 school leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher has built a cohesive team. Staff share the high aspirations of leaders and are committed in their quest to provide pupils with the very best learning opportunities in this improving school.
- The rich curriculum and the outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contribute to pupils' excellent personal development.
- Staff are vigilant in all aspects of pupil welfare and safeguard pupils effectively.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well and their attendance levels are high. Their attendance improves significantly during their time at the school.
- Relationships in the school are strong. Staff create a warm and supportive environment which enables pupils to feel safe and secure.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. They are pleased with the provision and the way that the school is led.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and for their future lives as British citizens.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Pupils typically make good progress in all subjects, often from low starting points. However, some pupil make slower progress with their writing because they are given too few opportunities to write at length or to practise their writing in subjects other than English.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, improvement plans lack precise details of how the impact of any changes will be checked to ensure that they make a difference for pupils.

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?

- Raise pupils' attainment and improve the quality of teaching and learning in writing by:
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to write at length
 - providing pupils with the necessary guidance and support so that they understand how to improve their writing
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to write in subjects other than English.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the development plan makes it clear how the success of the planned changes will be evaluated and what difference they will make for pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- All staff have high aspirations within a warm and welcoming atmosphere. They want the best for each of the pupils. The principle that 'all young people, without exception, are to be valued as unique and productive members of society' is embedded in the culture of the school. It is translated into practice in all aspects of school life.
- The headteacher has ensured that there are efficient systems and documentation in place which support the day-to-day work of the school. The parent company, Keys Childcare, provides valuable support for some aspects of the running of the school, for example finance and human resources.
- The headteacher is providing strong and focused leadership. In the short time that he has been in post he has made a difference in this improving school. He is very well supported by a strong and cohesive team, who are committed to improving the life chances for the pupils.
- Leaders and teachers have created the right environment to ensure that the wide-ranging social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils are met. They have rightly focused on re-engaging pupils with learning and developing their personal and social skills. This has been highly successful and all pupils have improved their behaviour and attendance levels since being at Halton School.
- The headteacher has ensured that there is an effective system for monitoring the performance of the school. It includes regular checks on the quality of teaching, pupils' learning, behaviour, attendance, pupils' progress and safeguarding.
- Teachers comment on the constructive nature of the appraisal system and talk about improvements they have seen in their own teaching as a result of the support they have received. Continuing professional development is viewed as an important priority for all staff at the school. 'This company cares about what I do at Halton and wants to help me improve' is typical of comments made by staff.
- Leaders know the school well and have an accurate view of what is working well and what could improve further. They have identified the right priorities and the school development plan is comprehensive. However, it is not as effective as it could be. The plan states what actions are needed but does not spell out clearly enough what impact these changes will have on the provision and outcomes for pupils. In addition, the plan does not explain how leaders will know that they have been successful in implementing the changes.
- The proprietor and leaders are ambitious for pupils and strive to ensure that transition from the school to the next stage of their education is the right one. Most pupils leave the school at the end of Year 9 and either transfer to a mainstream school or to another independent school. This move is considered well in advance and the school, working with the pupils, parents and local authority placement officers, leaves no stone unturned to find the best option for each of the pupils. Letters received from former pupils are testimony to the school's success in this important area.

- Leaders and teachers have worked together to devise a rich and engaging curriculum which meets the requirements of the independent standards and is well matched to the needs of the pupils. Pupils are offered a wide range of experiences and acquire knowledge and develop skills in an extensive range of subjects.
- A good range of extra-curricular activities, combined with an increased focus on community links, prepare pupils well for life beyond Halton School and help to prepare them for their adult life.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Through the comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education programme pupils learn about British values such as democracy, equality, tolerance and the rule of law. They understand that discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.
- Pupils have many opportunities to reflect on their rights and responsibilities. They understand how they can influence events through school council discussions and recommendations. For example, the list of activities made available for them on Friday afternoons increased following their representations.

Governance

- Governance of the school is effective. The chair and board members have a strong commitment to enhancing pupils' opportunities in life. They are effective both in supporting the school and in holding it to account.
- Governors have an accurate view of the school's work through visits, meetings with the headteacher and receiving reports from individual board members who visit regularly.
- Governors ensure that arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. They undertake regular checks to ensure that agreed policies are delivered in practice and act promptly on any recommendations found in external reports, for example making urgent repairs or improvements to the premises should any problems be found.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. Adults in school have a thorough knowledge of safeguarding procedures, including the most recent guidance for keeping children safe, and the potential risks faced by many pupils.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets current government requirements. It is fully implemented and available to parents and carers on the school website or from the school office.
- Staff apply the school's expectations and policies consistently and are mindful of pupils' welfare and safety at all times.
- All members of staff are observant and vigilant when working with pupils. They meet each day to review pupils' well-being and discuss therapeutic approaches they can use to support pupils. Staff liaise closely with parents, children's home managers and others with responsibility for the pupils' welfare and respond promptly to any concerns raised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is effective because of the very good relationships that teachers and teaching assistants develop with pupils. Most pupils have experienced problems in their previous schools or setting and so the ability of staff to re-engage pupils in the education process is key to their future success.
- Staff make consistent, effective use of the school's behaviour management systems during lessons to ensure that inappropriate behaviour does not become a barrier to learning. This includes the awarding of points for demonstrating appropriate learning behaviours. The pupils value this and respond positively to the strategies used.
- Staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum effectively. Teachers use this knowledge well to deepen pupils' understanding.
- Lessons are well structured and pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn. Staff use a wide range of activities to support learning, resulting in high levels of involvement from pupils. Teachers make every effort to make learning interesting and relevant. As one pupil explained about his mathematics work with 3D shapes, 'I work better when I can be hands on in my lessons. This happens all the time here.'
- Staff use questioning techniques well, both to probe pupils' understanding and to build their confidence when they explain why they have answered in a certain way. As a result, pupils enjoy the confidence adults have in them and generally try hard to do their best.
- Most teaching is on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, and this enables adults to take a flexible approach that is responsive to pupils' needs at the time. Leaders have developed an effective framework for assessment which enables them to monitor the progress of individual pupils. It also informs teachers' planning by highlighting gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Evidence from these assessments and the work in pupils' books shows that over time pupils make strong progress from their low starting points. Assessments and scrutiny of work also shows that pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is stronger than in pupils' writing.
- Leaders have spotted this trend and improving pupils' writing is a priority across the school. Some pupils are not given enough guidance and encouragement to write extended pieces of work or provided with opportunities to practise their writing in subjects other than English.
- The school provides detailed information about pupils' academic progress to parents and carers. The report also includes information about attendance and behaviour, demonstrating pupils' non-academic progress. This is valued by parents, who typically talk about 'the great progress my child has made since arriving at Halton School and how much he enjoys the school'.
- Teachers liaise closely with teaching assistants, who deliver some lessons with groups and individuals. This is a real strength of the teaching because of the partnership and the complementary skills that they bring to the classrooms.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

- Pupils were keen to tell the inspector how well the school supports them. Typical of the comments made were: 'They've helped me to settle in here and I get on well with everyone now' and 'I didn't go much to my last school because I was always in trouble but I haven't missed a day here yet.'
- High-quality pastoral support received by pupils ensures that they make great strides in their personal development. Pupils' self-confidence grows and flourishes the longer they stay at Halton School.
- Pupils enjoy feeling valued members of the school community where they can influence what happens. The friendly, family feel of the school is evident.
- Pupils feel safe at the school. They have confidence that all adults will look after them and say that if they are worried or unhappy 'someone will notice'. Pupils have regular opportunities to discuss any concerns that they may have.
- Pupils know about the risks associated with social media and internet use. They learn about how to keep themselves safe online and 'I even have a certificate to prove it', commented one pupil.
- Pupils know about the different types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They say that bullying rarely happens in school and that any issues are dealt with very quickly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment, where a caring ethos permeates all aspects of its work.
- Staff know what makes pupils feel anxious or aggressive and they are very skilled at defusing potential problems. The sensitive manner in which staff help pupils to improve their behaviour and stay on task is very impressive.
- Leaders track behavioural incidents with individual pupils in detail. Because they reflect carefully on the causes, leaders are able to reduce the number of incidents through the support and interventions that they provide.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance rates closely. All pupils have improved attendance levels from the time they joined Halton School and the current overall figure is close to 95%. This represents a significant improvement for individual pupils when measured against their attendance rates in their previous schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- When pupils arrive at the school, most have gaps in their learning, largely due to previous interruptions to their education. Many also have negative attitudes towards school.
- On arrival at the school, staff carry out a detailed assessment of what pupils can do and then match pupils' needs with a range of support from highly effective staff. As one parent commented, 'This school looks at what each of the children need. This is the first time that anyone has done this for my child.'
- Many pupils read competently and accurately, often with good expression. They have a good understanding of the text they are reading, and answer questions about it. Pupils

say that they enjoy reading and are happy to talk about the books they have enjoyed. Developing pupils' competence in reading is given a high priority in the school.

- Mathematics books show that pupils complete a good range of activities to develop their fluency in calculation. For many pupils, there are major gaps in prior learning, which means that the work they tackle has to be set individually with different levels of difficulty.
- Some pupils confidently tackle problems and apply a range of mathematical skills in different contexts. Other pupils, especially those who are new to the school, complete work successfully with support but lack the confidence to work independently.
- Attainment in writing is often low relative to pupils' ages. Work scrutiny by the staff, confirmed by the inspector, has identified that pupils' progress in writing, while still good, lags behind progress in their reading and mathematics, which have been school priorities. Some pupils struggle to complete extended pieces of writing and do not regularly practise their writing skills in subjects other than English.
- Pupils make good progress across the wider curriculum, acquiring new knowledge and skills and discovering how they can become more effective, successful learners. Pupils make equally good progress in subjects, such as science, music, technology and international studies.
- Good-quality careers information and guidance ensures that pupils and their parents have sufficient information to enable them to make the right choices when choosing subject options and future schools.

School details

Unique reference number	133485
DfE registration number	876/6000
Inspection number	10043376

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	7 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Keys Childcare Limited
Chair	Nicola Kelly
Headteacher	Martyn Deakin
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,050
Telephone number	01928 589810
Website	www.keyschildcare.co.uk/services/education/halton
Email address	head.haltonschool@keyschildcare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–26 November 2015

Information about this school

- The school opened in 2000. It is a small independent special school which caters for residential and day pupils. It is registered for up to 14 boys and girls from seven to 14 who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- Currently there are 11 pupils on roll. Most pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school is owned and operated by Keys Childcare Limited, which owns a number of other schools in England.

- The current headteacher joined the school in December 2016.
- The school aims to provide 'a safe, secure, positive and supportive environment which is caring consistent and fair, irrespective of gender, disability and background'.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school's last standard inspection was in November 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in all classes. Some of these observations were undertaken jointly with the head of school.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, regional manager, headteacher, other school leaders and staff.
- The inspector had phone conversations with the heads of two children's homes that place pupils at the school.
- The inspector met with pupils both formally and informally. He looked at pupils' work and the school's records of their progress. He also listened to individual pupils as they read.
- There were insufficient responses to generate a report from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. The inspector met with a parent bringing her child to school and had a telephone conversation with another parent. He also read written comment that parents had sent to the school.
- The inspector took into account nine 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

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018