

# Bluebell School

Kidsgrove Day Service, Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove, Staffordshire ST7 1EH

## Inspection dates

26–28 June 2018

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | <b>Good</b>              |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- The school provides life-changing education for pupils who have often had difficult and troubled starts to their school careers. Pupils who previously refused to attend now come regularly because they enjoy coming to school.
- The proprietors and senior leaders have created a community that is committed to improving pupils' life chances. They provide excellent leadership. Some middle leaders are still refining their roles in relation to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.
- School leaders have developed a curriculum that prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain and enables them to make informed choices about their futures.
- There is a holistic and therapeutic approach to teaching and learning, which helps pupils successfully develop their social, emotional and academic skills.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and appreciation of British values is outstanding.
- The school's work to help pupils manage their behaviour is excellent. During their time at school, they develop excellent attitudes to learning and demonstrate independence and resilience. They benefit greatly from being part of a very caring community.
- Teaching is highly effective. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils very well. They have high expectations for them and an in-depth understanding of how they learn. A team of therapists provides further effective support to pupils.
- Safeguarding procedures are comprehensive. Staff are highly vigilant in all aspects of pupils' welfare and safety. Pupils say they feel safe and secure and know how to raise any concerns that they might have.
- In the short time they have been at the school, pupils have made strong progress in a wide range of subjects. School leaders have developed efficient ways of monitoring pupils' progress across the curriculum. Nevertheless, aspects of assessment and opportunities for pupils to complete extended pieces of work could be improved further.

### 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?

- School leaders should continue to:
  - build capacity at all levels of leadership
  - develop the assessment system, so that information about pupils' engagement is used to accelerate pupils' progress even more
  - develop the range of learning opportunities available to pupils so that they can complete extended pieces of work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The headteacher and her senior leadership team provide exceptional leadership. In the year since the school opened, they have developed a culture of high expectations, which all staff share. The shared vision of directors, leaders and staff underpins the day-to-day running of the school. It is the key reason why the school has become so successful and the quality of education it provides is outstanding.
- Leaders and staff are committed to ensuring that pupils who attend Bluebell School can re-discover a sense of self-worth and self-belief, re-engage in learning and start working towards achieving their full potential.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have well-organised procedures for setting baseline assessments of pupils' skills and abilities on entry to the school. They have moderated assessment information with other special schools locally to set challenging targets for all pupils. Pupils' progress is analysed systematically by leaders to identify anyone who needs additional help.
- Leaders ensure that teaching is high quality. They have a strong and continual focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff receive regular feedback about their work, and they use this guidance to refine and improve their teaching. Staff appreciate the support they have received to develop their own practice and careers. All staff are proud to work at the school and morale is high.
- The curriculum is very well organised, balanced and provides a range of varied and stimulating opportunities, appropriate for pupils' needs. Specialist therapy sessions are built into pupils' timetables to provide expert individual guidance and to overcome any barriers to learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well. Given some pupils' complex needs, staff plan learning that allows pupils to make sense of the world around them. For younger pupils, this involves taking turns, developing teamwork skills and making choices about what they want to do. For older pupils, this includes opportunities to develop as citizens, contribute to the local community and raise money for charity.
- All the parent comments gathered during the inspection were very positive about the school. Parents and carers all recognise the benefits the school is having on their children's lives. In comments made during the inspection, parents described how the school helps their children to overcome problems and enjoy education for the first time.
- Senior leaders recognise that, due to the newness of the school, some new middle leadership roles are still developing. As the school grows, leaders have plans to increase other leaders' management responsibilities for specific areas of school life.
- Parents, teachers, teaching assistants and governors recognise the school's leaders' successful work to drive forward substantial improvements at the school.
- Leaders are rigorous in ensuring that the school meets all of the independent school standards.

## **Governance**

- The governance for Bluebell School is undertaken by the board of directors and a 'critical friends' group. These two groups are highly supportive and committed to the development of the school.
- The school's critical friends are not afraid to ask probing questions to make sure that they are fully informed about the work of the school. They challenge the school to improve constantly.
- Directors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They monitor the quality of the school's work, including the performance of senior leaders. They are well informed and have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and its impact on the gains made by pupils.
- Directors ensure that the school complies with the independent school standards.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All leaders promote a culture of safety and vigilance throughout the school. The work of the school's safeguarding team to keep pupils safe and secure is detailed and thorough. Pupils feel safe at school. Parents are confident that their children are looked after and always cared for.
- Staff are committed in all their work to keeping pupils safe and reducing risk. They make any referrals in a timely manner and concerns are followed up appropriately. They regularly receive training on a broad range of safeguarding topics.
- Staff are trained about ways to reduce the need for physical contact between staff and pupils when managing behaviour. Risk assessments and care plans are effective and responsive to incidents. These detailed documents clearly guide staff in how best to support pupils presenting risks and meet their specific needs.
- The safeguarding policy is available on the school's website and reflects the latest updates in statutory guidance.

## **The school's application to make a material change to its registration**

- The school has requested increasing the number of pupils on the school roll from 32 to 100.
- If the material change is implemented, the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Outstanding**

- Teachers and teaching assistants provide highly engaging and effective teaching. The excellent teaching at Bluebell School is instrumental in helping pupils to enjoy school and see the relevance of education to their lives. Teachers' careful planning ensures that teaching effectively meets pupils' needs. Teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subjects and are adept at translating this to make it accessible and relevant to their pupils. They use instruction and questioning skilfully to stimulate engagement and secure

rapid development of skills. Pupils are pushed to achieve through the challenge inherent in all lessons.

- Teachers have high expectations of all pupils. They listen astutely to pupils and ask probing questions that challenge pupils to think more deeply and persevere. This helps boost pupils' learning very well.
- Teachers use assessment information well to promote learning and identify the next steps pupils need to take to improve their performance. They are constantly promoting independence for all pupils, and most pupils are confident to 'have a go'.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled and work in close collaboration with teachers to provide a high level of support for all pupils.
- Relationships are extremely positive between teachers and pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants model their expectations well and give pupils clear guidance on how to succeed. Pupils are motivated to do their best. They want to achieve, and older pupils are able to explain what they need to do to reach their individual targets.
- Pupils are proud to talk about, and to share, what they are doing. Work in pupils' books is consistently of a high quality and is very well presented. This reflects the value pupils put on their learning.
- Teachers use the school's marking and feedback policy consistently. In line with the school's high expectations, pupils respond very positively to teachers' guidance about their work.
- At this school, all lessons are taught following the same structure, with pupils moving from one task to another during the lesson. Pupils manage these transitions extremely well and settle very quickly into new activities. Sometimes, they do not have the opportunity to complete or extend some pieces of work, or learn from any mistakes, before they have to move on again.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Many pupils arrive at Bluebell School after irregular patterns of attendance at previous settings. Most pupils now come to school nearly every day. This consistent attendance has a strong impact on their learning.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are almost always positive. They are very proud of what they can do and how well the school supports them. This has a very strong impact on the progress they are making in all areas of the curriculum.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils are reflected in the relationships between pupils. There is an all-pervading culture of caring for one another and wanting the best for everyone.
- Pupils appreciate that they are given responsibilities and feel that their views are always listened to. Being on the school council enables them to be involved in discussing and

making recommendations for changes in the school. They feel that their confidence to make decisions is actively developed by staff.

- The school's provision for pupils' social and moral development makes a highly effective contribution to pupils' behaviour and welfare. They discuss current topics in the news and explore their ideas about the wider world. Pupils are taught to look after their environment, and this respect is reflected in their behaviour and conduct around the school site. British values are promoted well throughout the curriculum through work, for example, on what it means to be British, and learning about democracy and the damaging effects of racism and prejudice.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online and know how to seek help if they have a problem or find anything that worries them.
- Pupils are taught how to keep healthy. They can explain how they make healthy choices at lunchtime and the benefits of taking part in sport and fitness activities.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils take pride in their uniform. There is no evidence of graffiti or any damage around the building or in the grounds, reflecting the sense of respect and belonging which pupils feel about their school.
- Pupils develop important social skills, including taking turns when speaking, and listening to one another. They show exemplary manners to staff and visitors. Behaviour does not need to be constantly managed by staff but is shaped by the positive relationships and examples pupils are surrounded by. Pupils' behaviour at times of the day when they are less directly supervised, such as at breaktimes or lunchtime, is always positive.
- The school has an effective system of self-assessment and rewards to promote high standards of behaviour. Pupils appreciate the way these are used consistently and feel motivated to work towards targets. They acknowledge the impact the school has had on their behaviour and attitudes towards school. One pupil told the inspector: 'I never liked school before I came here. I used to get into trouble all the time. Here, it is different.'
- Where pupils need extra support with their behaviour, the school puts in place plans for positive handling and intervention. These plans are followed carefully by staff, who have all been trained in de-escalation techniques and positive handling strategies.
- The school's analysis of records of behaviour shows that the number of incidents of physical intervention has reduced dramatically across the school. Pupils who may have given frequent cause for concern in their first term at Bluebell School have learned other ways to express themselves and manage their behaviour.
- The school's behaviour records show very little evidence of prejudicial or derogatory language being used at any time around school.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school opened a year before the inspection. In the first term, there were nine pupils. For the majority of pupils, there is only assessment information from one term in the school for progress from their starting points. Leaders have introduced an effective way of recording pupils' progress across the curriculum, but this could be refined further to demonstrate each pupil's particular learning journey.
- Pupils' attainment on entry is significantly below that expected for their age. Most have experienced disruptions to their education, including poor attendance, that have limited their progress. Many pupils also face barriers to their learning relating to their social, emotional and health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- When pupils first arrive at Bluebell School, teachers devise personalised learning plans and pupils settle quickly into school routines. Pupils respond well to the skilled support from teaching staff and to the individual sessions with therapists. Consequently, they soon develop more positive attitudes to learning. They start to succeed, both academically and socially, and their self-confidence and self-esteem improve.
- In a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education, all pupils are making good progress against their individual targets. Understandably, there is a strong emphasis on improving pupils' basic literacy and mathematical skills. The quality of work in pupils' books supports the school's assessments of their achievement. In pupils' books, progress is evidently very strong.
- School leaders have set this year's targets at a very challenging level, and there is a high degree of confidence that pupils will achieve highly over the next year. Staff have moderated work with other special schools to make sure that the targets set for pupils are challenging but realistic.
- When pupils do fall behind in any aspect, school leaders are quick to identify the reasons for this and put appropriate intervention and support in place to address specific needs.
- Pupils have all made excellent progress in improving their behaviour and attitudes to learning. Regular use of self-assessment against the school's expected behaviours throughout the day has helped older pupils recognise successful strategies that help them in this area. This helps them maintain focus on their learning tasks in lessons.
- Pupils are given opportunities to consider their future options through careers education, which forms part of the school curriculum. In one lesson observed, pupils were discussing their aspirations, developing business plans and writing formal letters to local companies. These sort of activities are typical and help to prepare them well for their next stage of education.
- No pupils have been entered for national tests or external accreditations this year.

## School details

|                         |          |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 143932   |
| DfE registration number | 860/6045 |
| Inspection number       | 10045269 |

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 16  |
| Gender of pupils                    | Mixed  |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 32   |
| Number of part-time pupils          | 0  |
| Proprietor                          | Bluebell School Limited  |
| Chair of critical friends           | Dawn Houghton  |
| Headteacher                         | Sarah Deaville   |
| Annual fees (day pupils)            | £49,500 – £73,500  |
| Telephone number                    | 01782 987012   |
| Website                             | <a href="http://www.bluebellschool.co.uk">www.bluebellschool.co.uk</a>                 |
| Email address                       | <a href="mailto:csutherland@bluebellschool.co.uk">csutherland@bluebellschool.co.uk</a> |
| Date of previous inspection         | Not previously inspected   |

## Information about this school

- Bluebell School opened in June 2017.
- Bluebell School is an independent special school catering for pupils aged between five and 16 who have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include: complex social, emotional and mental health needs, cognitive impairment and/or aspects of autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.



- Pupils are placed in the school by a number of local education authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent City, Staffordshire and Cheshire.
- Due to the complex nature of most pupils' needs, support from adults to meet their educational, emotional and social needs is often intensive. All pupils learn in small groups, with opportunities for therapeutic sessions on a one-to-one basis. Most classes include pupils from different age groups.
- The school has recently developed and decorated nine new classrooms and a changing room with showers. Plans are in place to develop more areas of the building, including the sports hall, before September 2018.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons. For most of these, he was accompanied by a senior leader. The inspector selected and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work from all subject areas and year groups.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, teachers, teaching assistants, members of the critical friends group, and some of the directors of the proprietorial group.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils who make up the school council. He met with one parent.
- The inspector considered a range of school documentation, including records of attendance, behaviour, physical intervention, safeguarding, staff development, pupils' progress and teachers' planning and a range of policies and reports on the school website or held in the school office and available to parents.
- The inspector considered four responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View and 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Robert Roalfe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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