

Park House, Taunton

277 Cheddon Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7AX

Inspection dates

19–21 September 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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and directors ensure that all the independent school standards are met.
- The passion, dedication and determination of the headteacher to provide the very best care and education for pupils is palpable. She is ably supported by her staff, who share her vision and drive.
- Teaching is good. Teachers and specialist teaching assistants are highly skilled and passionate in their work. They are determined to provide pupils with high-quality learning experiences alongside well-considered therapy.
- Pupils with a history of exceptionally complex needs and significant trauma make considerable progress from often very low starting points. Bespoke learning packages for each pupil ensure that their needs are met well.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate. However, identified areas for improvement are not consistent with the school's development planning. The plan lacks the precision needed to bring about continuous improvement.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are impressive. This enables pupils to build high levels of trust in an environment where they are nurtured and cared for.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, as is staff promotion of pupils' personal development. Staff understand pupils' needs exceptionally well and manage their complex and anxious behaviours with skill.
- Pupils have access to a range of subjects across the curriculum. These interest pupils and encourage them to learn. Nonetheless, leaders have not ensured that the curriculum consistently provides pupils with the knowledge and skills to allow them to make the best possible progress, especially the most able. This is preventing them from reaching their academic potential.
- Staff have a good understanding of what pupils can and cannot do. Assessment of pupils' individual needs is in place but, as yet, this is not fully embedded to secure their rapid progress.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education and care their children receive at Park House.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - school development plans have precise success criteria which focus on raising pupils' outcomes further, and are regularly monitored and evaluated by leaders to determine what is, or is not, working well and why
 - the school's planned curriculum better meets the needs of pupils and develops their knowledge and skills more effectively to enable them to make the best possible progress
 - the range of accreditations and academic qualifications is extended to enable pupils, especially the most able, to achieve their full potential.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and continue to improve pupil achievement by ensuring that:
 - new assessment systems are embedded securely across the school
 - planned activities better meet the needs of pupils, especially the most able.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- 'Passionate, pioneering and driven' is how the headteacher of Park House School is described. The headteacher leads with a determination and absolute belief that every child can succeed, irrespective of their starting points. Parents and carers describe the school as 'quite wonderful to see' and 'fabulous' in the quality of care and education their children receive.
- Leaders, including directors, ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards. They are highly reflective and united in their ambition to provide pupils with the very best education. They work together to make sure that pupils are successful and are prepared well for their futures.
- The headteacher is ably supported by a committed and skilful staff, who share her vision. They welcome the support, training and guidance they are given to improve their practice. 'Staff are valued and encouraged to innovate to ensure that young people get the best possible opportunities' and 'Leadership is consistently brilliant, with a real focus on supporting us to celebrate what we do well' are just two of the positive comments received from staff.
- Excellent relationships between, staff, pupils, parents and carers are fundamental to the early success of this new school. Pupils feel safe and secure. Staff have a deep knowledge and appreciation of the many challenges their pupils face. This enables staff to support pupils' social and emotional development extremely well. For example, the availability of an exercise bike enables pupils to let off steam and reduce anxiety, if required, while they are in school.
- Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and checking progress. They provide support and guidance where required and professional development is targeted carefully to improve practice.
- The curriculum is evolving as the school grows. It covers a wide range of subjects with a focus on the key skills of reading, writing and mathematics. However, while teachers are engendering a love of learning which pupils have previously lost, the current curriculum does not develop pupils' knowledge and skills well enough. This means that planned activities do not always precisely meet the individual needs of pupils.
- Learning is enhanced by the high-quality alternative provision made available to pupils. For example, leaders have provided access to bricklaying, agriculture and hospitality. This enables pupils to pursue their interests and develop knowledge and skills in their chosen field.
- Pupils have access to a wide range of therapeutic and additional activities to build their self-esteem and confidence. For example, leaders provide every pupil with gym membership which is well received and used by pupils. In addition, equine therapy and trampolining are popular activities with pupils. These activities help pupils better manage their often high levels of anxiety.
- Leaders have carefully woven spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the curriculum. They carefully and sensitively plan activities to meet the needs of pupils.

Pupils demonstrate an understanding of what it means to live in modern Britain. They understand democracy, respect and the rule of law. This is because they are taught well and have positive role models in school to learn from.

- The school's evaluation of its performance is accurate. However, development plans are not sufficiently precise. They do not show well enough how actions taken are going to be monitored to check that they are having the planned outcomes on pupils' achievement.

Governance

- The proprietor and directors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Directors, including the chief executive officer, provide leaders with increasing challenge and hold them to account for pupils' achievement and continued school improvement. Directors use information about pupils' progress, quality of teaching and the findings of independent external advisers to inform their challenge. They carefully monitor the expenditure of leaders to ensure good value for money.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The nature of the school means that pupils are extremely vulnerable in a variety of ways. Leaders and staff show a steadfast determination to ensure that processes, systems and checks to safeguard pupils are robust, thorough and continually checked to minimise risk to pupils and to keep them safe. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies and parents and carers to reduce risk. Parents and carers express no concerns about the safety of their children while at school. 'The school is fabulous, it plans around my child's needs' was a typical response received from parents.
- Leaders have embedded a strong culture of safety and security. This is clearly evident around the school and other alternative provisions. Names of designated safeguarding leads, with contact numbers, are well positioned for immediate access should the need arise.
- Staff receive high-quality training in all aspects of safeguarding, which includes child sexual exploitation and 'Prevent'. This means that they are confident in the action to take should they have any concerns. Staff describe how they are taught to be 'constantly vigilant and to watch pupils to ensure they are safe'.
- Leaders, including directors, understand the importance of recruiting safely. The school's procedures to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils are robust. All staff are carefully vetted prior to starting employment at the school. Similarly, leaders carefully check the suitability of staff in six alternative provisions used by the school.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspector talked openly about how they feel safe in school, are well cared for and looked after. This reflects the high levels of care and guidance that staff provide. Pupils trust staff and are confident that they can talk to them about their worries or concerns.
- Leaders ensure that the policy and procedures for safeguarding are robust and take into account the most recent legislation and guidance. These documents are readily available to parents and carers and are easily accessible on the school's website for ease of access.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and specialist teaching assistants demonstrate a desire for pupils to achieve well. Together, they create a positive atmosphere for learning, through their passion, enthusiasm and the caring relationships they forge with pupils. This means that pupils enjoy coming to school, attend regularly and make strong progress in their learning.
- Teachers provide pupils with learning activities which motivate and inspire them to learn. These are well suited to pupils' interests and needs. For example, pupils show a prowess in bricklaying, demonstrating their ability to measure accurately, and used their awareness of shape effectively to build a patio.
- Pupils lack self-confidence. Teachers and specialist teaching assistants are highly skilled in building pupils' independent learning skills, encouraging pupils to take risks with their learning and persevere. For example, during the inspection, the inspector observed the look of joy and exhilaration when pupils had been successful in completing an assessment in mathematics accurately.
- Teachers have high expectations for their pupils. They demonstrate resilience and determination to enable them to get the very best out of pupils. Staff are not deterred when they have setbacks. They have the expectation that pupils will work hard, be successful and achieve well. This motivates pupils and they want to achieve well and make good progress.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. This means that they can rephrase questions and check pupils' understanding to good effect. For example, in photography pupils learn to use correct terminology with accuracy and confidence.
- Teachers model learning effectively. This develops pupils' knowledge and skills successfully and improves the quality of their work.
- The most able pupils typically make good progress. Nonetheless, more challenge is required by teachers to ensure that these pupils achieve their full academic potential and gain the qualifications they need to achieve their aspirations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff receive high-quality training to recognise signs of harm and abuse. They are assiduous and act rapidly to deal with any concerns. Daily briefings, morning and evening, ensure effective communication between leaders and staff. This minimises risk to these extremely vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils have a highly positive experience of Park House and feel exceptionally well looked after. This is because leaders audit pupils' needs to ensure that they receive high-quality support, therapy and guidance. This is managed extremely effectively by teachers and specialist teaching assistants, who care for, value and respect the pupils.
- Staff are excellent role models for pupils. As a result, pupils quickly learn how to listen to each other and to respect the views of others when they differ from their own. Pupils

learn how to tolerate each other and to accept each other's differences. This means that pupils develop important behaviours and attributes that will help them thrive in their future lives.

- Pupils enjoy Park House, and this is reflected in their impressive attendance. Records confirm that pupils attend regularly and absence is rare. This is because they quickly begin to appreciate and understand the importance of their education, and the need to catch up rapidly with their peers in mainstream schools.
- Pupils attend alternative provision in a range of different settings to suit their individual needs. Pupils are well looked after and make good progress given their specific circumstances. Leaders receive regular reports about pupils' well-being and progress, so that they have a good awareness of how pupils are doing at any given time.
- Pupils appreciate the high-quality and impartial careers guidance they receive. This helps them make informed choices about the next steps in their education, employment or training. Leaders ensure that transition arrangements are planned carefully for each pupil. As a result, no pupil leaves the school without transferring successfully to education, apprenticeships or paid employment.
- Leaders ensure that risk assessments are firmly in place and adhered to. They monitor these closely and amend them when required. This ensures that they remain fit for purpose. Furthermore, leaders ensure that the risk assessments of the alternative providers are robust. Pupils' individual risk assessments carefully detail the strategies that staff need to implement in order to successfully manage pupils' behaviour.
- Pupils, staff and parents are very positive about behaviour and safety. Pupils describe how 'the school is allowing them to follow their dreams in the future'. Comments received by parents and carers include, 'The school is fabulous, I am confident that my child is safe' and 'My child has connected with the school completely.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils who attend the school have significant and complex needs which can result in displays of challenging behaviour. Staff quickly form extremely positive and trusting relationships with pupils. This means they can rapidly de-escalate pupils' anxious behaviours on the occasions where they get distressed. As a result, the school does not use physical restraint, nor does it exclude pupils. During the inspection pupils' behaviour was exemplary. Pupils demonstrate a desire to work hard and behave well, not only for themselves, but also for the staff who care for and educate them.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector are adamant that staff are kind, caring and work hard to ensure that they enjoy their learning experiences and achieve well. Pupils trust the adults who work with them in the school and at the alternative provision they attend. As a result, pupils quickly build self-confidence and raise their self-esteem. For example, pupils spoken to during the inspection aspire to go to university.
- Teachers plan and deliver lessons that excite and motivate pupils to learn. Pupils describe how teachers make them work hard. They comment how sometimes they would welcome less conversation with their teachers because they want to 'get on with my work'.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Prior to joining the school, all pupils have experienced traumatic life events. For all pupils, education has been a low priority, which has resulted in them being out of the education system for long periods of time. This means that, on arrival at the school, pupils' attainment is significantly below that expected across all subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders see education as the key to turning the lives of their pupils around. Therefore, staff make sure that pupils quickly raise their confidence and self-esteem, learn to appreciate the value of academic qualifications and the importance of developing life skills. This they achieve successfully. Pupils have a desire to catch up rapidly on lost opportunities and all have aspirations for the future, including going to university.
- A careful look at pupils' work during the inspection confirms that pupils, over time, are provided with a wide range of activities to build their knowledge and skills successfully. There is a focus on reading, writing and mathematics threaded throughout the subjects they access. For example, pupils can read confidently from a menu. In mathematics, pupils use their knowledge of money to budget when writing a shopping list prior to a visit to local supermarkets.
- The good progress they make, combined with the therapeutic care they receive, ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The new assessment procedure provides accurate information about what each pupil knows, understands and can do. This informs teachers' planning well. However, the system is very new and needs to be embedded to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress.
- The personalised curriculum and good teaching mean that pupils achieve well and gaps in prior learning are closing quickly so that pupils can access appropriate qualifications. Nonetheless, leaders are aware that they are not yet consistently challenging pupils in their learning. This is limiting pupils' ability to make the very best possible progress and fulfil their academic potential. This is especially the case for the most able pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	145308
DfE registration number	933/6009
Inspection number	10053796

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	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Five Rivers Child Care Ltd
Chair	David Howard
Headteacher	Anne Balderstone-Dowds
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,150 to £128,115
Telephone number	01823 282668
Website	www.five-rivers.org/education/schools/park-house
Email address	education@five-rivers.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Park House School is a small special school located in a detached bungalow in Taunton. The school was registered in February 2018 for up to 12 pupils, aged from eight to 19 years.
- The school caters for pupils with emotional, social and mental health difficulties.
- All pupils have experienced disrupted education and long periods out of school due to significant trauma in their lives. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are children looked after.

- The school uses off-site facilities for some physical education (PE) lessons at a local leisure centre.
- The school uses six alternative providers known as partners: Reach, Otterhead Forest School, AEC, Quayside, Conquest, Equus and Wiltshire outdoor learning team.
- The ultimate aim of the school is to enable pupils to return to mainstream education when appropriate.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning across all sites in the school. All observations were undertaken with the headteacher. The quality of pupils' work was scrutinised alongside the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and the head of education for Five Rivers. A telephone conversation was held with the chief executive officer.
- The inspector met with individual pupils to listen to their views about the school.
- The school's alternative providers were visited during this inspection.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's quality improvement plan, and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The inspector took into account the 12 responses received from the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector considered the one response to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as one text message. The inspector also considered information from phone conversations with parents and a manager from a care home.
- As part of this inspection, the Department for Education (DfE) requested that a material change to increase the number of pupils from 12 to 14 was taken into consideration. The inspection found that standards are likely to be met and a recommendation to the DfE that the material change is agreed.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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