

Learn 4 Life School

Quarry Bank Community Centre, 364 Ormskirk Road, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 9AL

Inspection dates

25–27 September 2018

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| 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 | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that the independent school standards have been met.
- In this improving school, leaders are ambitious for pupils as they encourage them to achieve well both academically and personally.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate, and leaders have identified the right priorities. Subject leaders and other staff have too little involvement in monitoring the school's work or planning for improvement.
- Most pupils make good progress despite having large gaps in their education prior to arriving at the school. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers provide an exciting and challenging range of activities for pupils. Assessments and tracking systems celebrate pupils' achievements and identify the next steps in their learning.
- The well-planned and interesting curriculum includes an impressive range of extra-curricular opportunities. It is tailored to meet the individual needs of pupils. Sometimes adults give pupils too much support as they complete their work.
- Pupils' attendance and behaviour generally improves after they join the school. Pupils have confidence in the adults who teach and care for them.
- Throughout the school there is a strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are becoming more tolerant and respectful. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good. Pupils' growing confidence and self-esteem is evident in all they do.
- The school provides a secure setting where pupils feel safe. Arrangements for safeguarding and for pupils' welfare are effective.

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 of the school by strengthening the role of staff, especially subject leaders, in monitoring the work of the school and contributing to improvement plans.
- Improve teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils by ensuring that pupils are not given too much support by adults when completing their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Learn 4 Life School is successful in delivering its aim of 'ensuring that pupils have the best chance of success in their lives'.
- Leaders have established a positive ethos that encourages pupils to succeed in education and in their lives. It is based on wanting the very best for all.
- With support from the proprietor and owner, school leaders have improved the education provision and outcomes for pupils since the last inspection. Stability in staffing and greater challenges for pupils in lessons have led to improved outcomes in both their personal and academic development.
- Staff work well as a team, and most comment positively on the improvements that the school has made in recent years. Relationships are good. Most staff who completed the Ofsted survey indicated that they enjoy working at the school. Pupils commented favourably on the welcome and sensitivity that is shown by staff, which helps them to settle quickly. This is a key factor as most pupils arrive at Learn 4 Life School following long periods of absence or difficulties in their previous schools.
- The headteacher provides good leadership. Developing staff and supporting them is at the heart of the school's approach. Staff appreciate the training opportunities to which they have access. For example, recent training in managing pupils' behaviour and meetings with therapists have provided staff with a deeper understanding of the complex needs of pupils. Most staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire felt that the school is better than it was at the time of the last inspection.
- The introduction of subject leaders is strengthening the capacity to bring about further improvements. For example, strong leadership in the teaching of English and art and design is setting high standards for pupils. Work in these subjects is used as a model to help other members of staff to improve their practice.
- School leaders have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school's self-evaluation is an accurate reflection of its current position and it links directly to a development plan which sets out how improvements will be made. Most of the work in producing these plans is left to the headteacher. This means that subject leaders and other staff have too little involvement in contributing to the current reviews or in planning future improvement.
- The school provides successful individual teaching for each pupil. Staff have a good understanding of the learning characteristics, strengths and interests of each pupil. They develop strong trusting relationships with the pupils. On occasions, staff provide too much adult support when assisting pupils as they complete their work.
- The school keeps detailed records of all pupils and their individual needs. Plans for all pupils are well documented and carefully followed. Records of each pupils' behaviour and starting points are thorough and provide a reliable basis for discussing their academic and social progress. Before pupils join the school, leaders work closely with carers, social

workers and other stakeholders to gather information. This results in a smooth transition process for pupils.

- The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the varied needs of pupils who arrive at the school at different times and whose length of stay varies. It is carefully planned and covers the required areas of learning. Wherever possible, pupils work towards external accreditation, including AQA unit awards, BTEC Firsts and GCSE. A suitably broad range of subjects are offered. 'I'm confident I will get my passes at GCSE this year because I'm working harder now,' is typical of comments made by pupils.
- The school's curriculum is enhanced by the wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities provided for the pupils. An extensive programme is planned based on pupils' interests and following discussions with them. It includes visits to leisure centres, museums, country parks and outdoor education centres.
- Staff promote British values well within the context of strong arrangements for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities for pupils to discuss and make decisions on topics such as rewards and the school environment enable them to develop an understanding of the society in which they live. The school promotes diversity and equality well. It has an inclusive ethos and takes positive steps to enable pupils to overcome any barriers to their individual success.

Governance

- The school's proprietor and the chief executive officer of Care Afloat, the company that owns the school, are effective in both supporting the school and holding it to account.
- They have ensured that staff have ready access to relevant training programmes.
- Governors do not hold back in making significant changes needed to improve the effectiveness of the school. For example, since the last inspection they have recruited experienced staff, appointed subject leaders and started to hold them to account for pupils' progress. They recognise that staff have too little input into school reviews and future planning.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of shared responsibility for protecting pupils.
- Pupils confirmed that they feel safe and that they are well supported.
- Leaders have ensured that a good-quality safeguarding and child protection policy is available. The policy is not published on a website but is available on request. The safeguarding policy and practice are robust and meet current government guidelines.
- Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders follow up concerns and ensure that they inform outside agencies when they are worried that a pupil might be at risk. Staff keep appropriate records that detail safeguarding concerns and actions. They are trained to recognise signs of extremism or radicalisation.
- Leaders are scrupulous in maintaining risk assessments for all aspects of school life and for individual pupils where necessary. For example, this includes detailed risk assessments

of all off-site facilities that pupils use.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- Teaching is effective because of the good relationships that teachers and teaching assistants develop with pupils. Adults taking a flexible approach that is responsive to pupils' needs, for example, by providing one-to-one support or small group work.
- Pupils re-engage with their learning because staff make every effort to make it interesting and relevant. 'Teachers know what interests me and found a placement that suits me. I can always ask for help if I need it,' is typical of comments that pupils made.
- Pupils appreciate how well staff support them and celebrate their successes. For example, an 'achievement wall' on the school's Elmstead site proudly displays the certificates that pupils have gained through external qualifications and work placements. Most pupils take a pride in their work and are happy to share their workbooks, explaining how much their work and presentation has improved since they arrived at Learn 4 Life. They know that their work is valued and this adds to their growing self-esteem and confidence.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils' learning. Detailed planning informs the lessons, especially in English and mathematics. This is complemented by comprehensive records which highlight what pupils have learned, and confirms the next steps in their learning. Pupils' reading skills are successfully developed and, in conversations with the inspector, they readily talked about books that they have enjoyed.
- A new system for assessing pupils' learning has recently been introduced. This is providing greater consistency across the curriculum because it links directly to exam expectations. It also helps staff to pitch work for pupils at the right level of difficulty.
- Staff manage behaviour in lessons effectively. They demonstrate patience, tolerance and resilience when dealing with challenging behaviour. They set clear expectations and boundaries for pupils and challenge unacceptable behaviour.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to plan appropriately for the individual needs of pupils. Occasionally, teachers give pupils too much support with their work, for example not allowing enough thinking time when a question has been asked. They intervene too quickly, and this stops pupils from working out things for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils make strong progress in managing their personal anxieties and emotional barriers to learning. This is because of the quality of the individual care and strong personal relationships within the school. Consequently, pupils develop confidence in themselves and in their ability to succeed. Given pupils' previous negative learning experiences, this approach takes considerable patience and sensitivity from staff.
- Staff are well trained to ensure that they have the skills needed to de-escalate situations,

and to deflect and defuse challenging behaviour displayed by some pupils. All staff working in the school apply these skills consistently.

- The school's approach to personal, social and emotional development enables staff to pay particular attention to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Clear rewards and sanctions enable pupils to recognise the importance of making the right choices. If any pupil displays inappropriate attitudes, staff use this as a learning point to encourage pupils to consider their response and reflect on their actions.
- The school offers regular therapy sessions for pupils. These sessions enable pupils to make progress in successfully dealing with their social and emotional difficulties. Pupils also have close links with key workers and carers who can provide additional support.
- Pupils say that they enjoy attending this school and what it offers, including the 'Bright and Breezy' sessions at the start of each day. These meetings allow pupils to meet as a group to discuss feelings, emotions and express their views on topical matters.
- High levels of individual supervision contribute effectively to pupils' safety. The school is a safe environment where all adults place a very high priority on pupils' well-being. Both teaching and non-teaching staff work continually to improve pupils' awareness of e-safety and risks within the wider community.
- Staff are skilled at recognising pupils' emotions and predicting difficulties that might occur in lessons. Pupils are offered counselling or the chance to withdraw from the situation before it escalates. As a result, most classrooms are orderly and promote learning successfully.
- School records and conversations with pupils themselves confirm that bullying is rare. If it does happen, the school's systems are designed to deal with it quickly.
- Pupils learn about safe and healthy lifestyles. They discuss what they eat and drink and develop an awareness of what constitutes a healthy diet. They are encouraged to exercise regularly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Despite having disrupted histories of education, most settle well into school life. Inappropriate behaviour reduces as pupils grow in confidence and they build strong relationships. This helps them to develop coping skills and to interact positively with the adults supporting them. Consequently, they learn to manage themselves increasingly well. Conduct is generally positive during lessons and around school.
- Detailed records of any incidents are kept and any follow-up actions shared with all staff. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions in the last two years.
- Most pupils attend regularly and, where necessary, individual arrangements are made for pupils in crisis to receive their education in their care home. Attendance rates are improving, including for those pupils who have rarely attended other schools or education settings in the past. Pupils respond well to the individual teaching arrangements and the attention given to their emotional needs.
- Checks with the alternative providers used by the school confirm that pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare in those settings matches that seen in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils have experienced disruption in their education before coming to the school. Most have attended different care and education settings or ceased to attend school.
- Induction arrangements are comprehensive and are aimed at ensuring that pupils' needs are fully understood. On entry, pupils' attainment levels are checked and school staff identify gaps in their previous learning. These are often found to be in pupils' English and mathematical skills. Starting points relating to pupils' social, emotional and behavioural development are also assessed. This assessment information is used successfully to plan work and support at the right level, including for the most able pupils who can complete GCSEs.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal development. This is because staff are highly skilled in the management of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They enable pupils to feel secure, begin to self-regulate their behaviour, gain confidence and enjoy their learning.
- A similar picture is seen in pupils' academic success. Most make good progress from their different starting points in a wide range of subjects and qualifications. These include AQA unit awards, BTEC Firsts and GCSEs. Pupil numbers are too small to identify patterns or trends for different groups.
- The school's focus on improving pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics is also paying off. Scrutiny of pupils' books, conversations with pupils and reports on their progress confirm a growing confidence and competence in each of these areas.
- Pupils benefit from well-chosen vocational placements. These are carefully selected and monitored by school staff. Feedback from the placements and evidence in school records confirm pupils' successes in these placements. As well as helping pupils to decide what they want to do in the future, placements build pupils' confidence in handling situations outside of school and home.
- The school provides independent careers guidance for pupils on a regular basis. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 129571 |
| DfE registration number | 888/6089 |
| Inspection number | 10053725 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 9 |
| Number of part-time pupils | None |
| Proprietor | Daniel Curran |
| Chair | Mike Fletcher |
| Headteacher | Cath Briggs |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £34,048 |
| Telephone number | 01695 768 960 |
| Website | No website |
| Email address | cath.briggs@careafloat.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 18–20 October 2016 |

Information about this school

- Learn 4 Life is a small school for pupils aged from 11 to 16 years. It is registered to provide education for up to 16 pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- All pupils are in the care of local authorities. They live in care homes near the school, owned and managed by Care Afloat, which is the company that owns the school.
- Currently, there are nine pupils on roll. Some pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has two main sites in Skelmersdale, a shared-use community centre called

Quarry Bank and a sea cadet centre called Elmstead.

- The sites are in walking distance of each other. The school also has use of a mobile caravan and a narrowboat for pupils in crisis.
- The school opened in 2005 and was last inspected by Ofsted in 2016.
- The school uses four alternative providers. These providers are BDS Training, Skelmersdale, Fix it UK, Wigan, Fir Tree Fisheries, Appley Bridge and E Rooms, Skelmersdale.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in a variety of subjects.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor, the chief executive officer of Care Afloat, the school's headteacher, other school leaders and staff.
- The inspector had phone conversations with two care home managers.
- The inspector met with pupils both formally and informally. He looked at their 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 took account of one free-text response from a parent or carer.
- The inspector took into account five responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the online pupil questionnaire.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents provided by the school.

Inspection team

Mike Hewlett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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