

Highcroft School

Highcroft, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL13 5AG

Inspection dates

16–18 October 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The proprietor and headteacher ensure that all the independent school standards are consistently met. The proprietor and the recently formed governing body hold leaders to account against key performance indicators.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the needs of the pupils and this helps them to plan interesting and engaging lessons for them.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is continuing to improve because the headteacher carries out checks on work in the classroom and in pupils' books.
- Opportunities for pupils to develop strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are threaded throughout the curriculum.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils have a good understanding of fundamental British values and they are respectful to staff and to each other.
- The headteacher has ensured that there is a broad curriculum which is personalised to pupils' needs and interests, and now includes a wider range of courses than previously.
- Pupils make good progress in improving their behaviour over time at the school because of the very effective work that staff do to support and manage behaviour.
- Information about how well pupils achieve, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics, is not yet accurate and consistent.
- School improvement planning does not enable leaders to be clear enough as to the difference their intended actions will make to pupils' outcomes.
- On occasions, pupils' personal development is slowed because they are not told how to learn independently or given opportunities to learn by their mistakes.
- Pupils' outcomes are good in English and mathematics. However, there is insufficient emphasis on improving pupils' skills in reading to help them become more confident readers.

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 effectiveness of leadership and management further by:
 - ensuring that leaders accurately analyse and evaluate information about pupils' skills and abilities, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - sharpening up school development planning so that leaders are clear as to the intended improvements in pupils' outcomes as a result of the planned actions to be taken.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of pupils' progress information to plan learning in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Improve pupil outcomes by:
 - ensuring that pupils' reading skills further develop and that they have greater opportunities to access books that are appropriate to their reading age and interests.
- Improve pupils' independent learning skills further by:
 - providing opportunities and support for them to learn from any mistakes they may make.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is committed to providing a bespoke curriculum for each pupil, which engages and inspires them to achieve their best. This vision is shared by all the staff.
- The headteacher and the proprietor work effectively together to continue to improve the quality of education. They have taken action to address the main key areas for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection report. They ensure that the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and this builds a strong and cohesive team.
- Relationships between staff, pupils, parents and carers are strong and instrumental to the success of this school. Pupils who made their views known say that they feel safe and secure. Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the many challenges that their pupils face, which enables them to support pupils' development extremely well.
- The headteacher has introduced an effective system for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is supported by regular visits from the regional manager and external improvement partner. Teachers say that this has led to improvements in their teaching through professional conversations and further training.
- Leaders have extended the curriculum since the previous inspection. GCSE courses are offered in English and religious education. Pupils also follow courses in functional English and mathematics. Through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), pupils gain qualifications matched to their interests and abilities. For example, pupils are well prepared for their move into education or training through courses such as science, employability skills and living independently.
- The curriculum provides rich opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The scheme of work for religious education is very effective in enabling pupils to broaden their knowledge of the main religions of the world and in nurturing respect for all faiths and cultures. Pupils explore relevant topics such as extremism, racism and about people who have different life styles, and this encourages them to be considerate in their views and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have developed systems to assess pupils when they start at the school to track their progress in English and mathematics. There is currently no reliable and accurate system in place to assess the progress that pupils make across other subjects.
- Leaders are aware of the strengths of the school and this information is used to improve the school. Although the school development plan accurately identifies priorities for improvement, the success criteria are not clear enough to check whether the intended improvement in pupils' outcomes have been achieved.

Governance

- The proprietor, who is also the chair of the governing body, works closely with the headteacher to provide good support and challenge, and to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress in their academic and personal development.

- The proprietor's regional team and the governing body ensure that leaders are challenged to continually improve standards. The headteacher provides a weekly report to the governing body which covers statistics on all areas of the school's work. Regular visits from the regional manager and reports from an external consultant provide additional evidence of improvement.
- The proprietor ensures that policies are in place and regularly reviewed to guide the work of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of providing a safe and secure environment in this school. Appropriate checks are made on staff before their appointment to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Safeguarding training is in place and staff understand their responsibilities in identifying safeguarding concerns. Parents are provided with a safeguarding policy on the school's website, which meets current government requirements.
- Leaders have put in place thorough systems for checking all aspects of health and safety. Risk assessments are in place for activities in and out of school, including alarms, lighting and fire equipment, and regular drills ensure fire safety. First aiders accompany visits off-site and all staff are trained in food hygiene.
- Detailed individual risk assessments for each pupil inform staff of how to keep pupils safe. Staff work effectively with other agencies to support the welfare of the pupils.
- Effective sharing of information between home and school twice each day ensures that safeguarding information is immediately available to relevant staff.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in this school. As a result of the depth of knowledge that the staff have about the risks facing the pupils, they can provide individual advice to support them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils who have previously experienced long periods of absence from school and have negative attitudes to learning begin to enjoy education at Highcroft. This is because of the strong support and guidance that they receive at the school.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are because of the effective behaviour system that is consistently applied. Pupils are keen to take part in lessons to earn extra points, and this contributes to the good progress that they make.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use effectively to plan lessons that pupils enjoy. The effective personalised approach to each pupil has ensured that they are provided with an appropriate curriculum that is suited to their needs. However, information about the progress that pupils make in subjects other than in English and mathematics is not fully accurate or consistent. This prevents leaders identifying clearly the proportions of pupils who meet or exceed the school's expectations.
- Teachers know the pupils well, and they use this knowledge skilfully to motivate and

encourage them when they begin to lose their focus.

- Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and books shows that pupils take care with their work.
- Pupils' workbooks indicate that there are an interesting range of activities for them across a variety of subjects. In mathematics, pupils in key stage 4 work on problem-solving, multiplication and rounding and sequencing numbers to 100,000. In English, pupils rearrange sentences in the correct order and edit text to correct grammatical errors. There are opportunities for extended pieces of writing in religious education, geography and citizenship.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points, particularly in English and mathematics, because they are interested and engaged in the work that has been planned for them. Their progress in reading is not as good as it could be, because pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to read confidently at their own level.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's ethos and values, 'To provide a safe, secure, positive and supportive environment in which each individual can contribute and feel valued' threads across all aspects of school life. This nurturing and supportive ethos enables pupils to identify and overcome some of the barriers that have prevented them from learning in the past.
- Staff have a very good understanding of the individual context of each of their pupils. They are skilled at shaping their approach to provide exactly the right sort of support at the right time to keep pupils on track.
- Leaders work with a variety of different agencies to effectively support pupils' emotional well-being. A therapist is available for pupils to access if they need help.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their experience at the school, for example their comments included: 'It is the best school that I have been to' and 'It is like a family here.' Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe and that they make good progress. Conversations with parents confirmed these views.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong, and this helps students to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. They learn to 'have a go' at new and difficult tasks.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Pupils are respectful towards staff and their friends and towards anyone who is different to them. This includes people with alternative lifestyles and from different faiths and cultures. Pupils learn about the justice system and discuss crimes and punishments and how the voting system works. Following a topic on the environment, a letter was written to the Prime Minister to share concerns about the effect that plastic waste has on marine life.
- Charitable events demonstrate how pupils develop their thinking about social and moral issues. Pupils raise money for the local church by holding coffee mornings and running craft stalls. Pupils are currently considering which organisation will receive their donation

this year.

- Staff ensure that pupils' health and well-being and safety are a priority and any issues are immediately addressed through the close communication that takes place morning and evening.
- Sometimes teachers' planning for pupils' lessons does not encourage their independence in learning effectively. This slows their progress in working out what to do next and does not provide opportunities for them to learn from their mistakes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good
- Pupils respond well to the effective behaviour and reward strategy that leaders have introduced. Records shows that pupils' behaviour at the school improves over time.
- Pupils respond well to the nurturing environment and to the praise and support from the staff. This approach helps them to learn how to manage their own behaviour and make sensible choices.
- The conduct of pupils in lessons is generally positive, and they appreciate the praise and humour that they receive, and that is a feature of lessons.
- Pupils' attendance improves substantially when they arrive at Highcroft. Some pupils who have previously rarely attended school gain awards for 100% attendance. This is because of the work that home and school do together to provide a consistency of approach.
- Pupils' conduct in the classroom is generally purposeful, and any minor disruptions are dealt with skilfully by staff so that it does not affect the learning of other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school with gaps in their knowledge and understanding because they have experienced extended periods of absence from education. Assessments carried out on pupils when they start at Highcroft show where pupils need help and identify the gaps in their knowledge that have built up over time.
- From low starting points the majority of pupils make good progress across most areas of the curriculum. Pupils achieve positive outcomes in English, mathematics and religious education GCSE qualifications and in English and mathematics functional skills at level 1.
- Pupils say that they work hard and make good progress, and their work in books confirms that they take great pride in their work.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in life, for example through work experience in a local shop and advice and support to guide them in their chosen pathway. At the end of last year almost all pupils had progressed into employment, education or training.
- Pupils' progress is not strong enough in reading, as pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their reading skills and access a suitable range of books.

School details

Unique reference number	136748
DfE registration number	840/6012
Inspection number	10053830

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	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Nicola Kelly
Chair	Nicola Kelly
Headteacher	David Laheney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,050
Telephone number	01388 710 753
Website	www.keyschildcare.co.uk
Email address	davidlaheney@keyschildcare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–10 December 2015

Information about this school

- Highcroft School is a small independent special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is currently registered for boys and girls aged from 11 to 18 years.
- The school has no religious denomination.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school was previously inspected in December 2015.
- The school is part of the Keys Group, who provide care and education services to children

and young people.

- There are currently nine pupils on roll, most of whom reside in the residential setting. Four of these pupils have an Education Health and Care plan.
- Pupils generally attend the school for a relatively short period of time, usually between one and nineteen months.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities and local pupil referral units. Pupils take part in work experience with local businesses.
- The company's mission statement is 'working in partnership to unlock each individual's true potential'. Its aims include: 'to provide a safe, secure, positive and supportive environment in which each individual can contribute and feel valued, knowing that his/her achievements are recognised'.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out over two and a half days.
- The inspector observed learning in lessons in a range of subjects.
- The inspector looked at work in pupils' books over a range of subjects.
- The inspector spoke to pupils and staff during the inspection and took their responses into account.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Four staff questionnaires were considered.
- The inspector spoke with parents during the inspection and took their responses into account.
- The inspector held regular meetings with the headteacher and the proprietor throughout the inspection.
- The inspector examined school documentation, such as admissions and attendance registers, a wide range of policies, including those for behaviour, safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, and all documents required as part of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Suzette Garland-Grimes, 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