

Assess Education

Bilalil House, 260 Picton Road, Wavertree, Liverpool L15 4LP

Inspection dates

27–29 November 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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders work together as a close team. They have successfully improved the school. Leaders and other members of staff are highly committed to pupils.
- The school gives many pupils a fresh start in their education. For some, it allows them to be successful and enjoy learning for the first time.
- The school's work is highly valued by the local authority, which places most pupils at the school. The school's strong relationship with the local authority's alternative-provision team strengthens how leaders are held to account.
- The headteacher, who is also the proprietor, ensures that the independent school standards are met.
- While school policies are comprehensive, these sometimes lack helpful detail about the school.
- The school's systems for ensuring that pupils are well looked after are very strong indeed. Safeguarding is effective.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. This is sometimes in marked contrast to their conduct in previous schools.
- Pupils get along together very well.
- While pupils often have better attendance than in previous schools and staff work hard to encourage pupils to attend regularly, absence remains too high.
- Teaching and learning in English and science are effective. Outcomes in these subjects are improving.
- Provision in mathematics is weaker and pupils do not so as well. The school finds it hard to recruit new mathematics teachers. Teaching in mathematics does not provide enough challenge for pupils or ensure that they present their work as well as possible.
- Pupils make strong progress in learning social skills and developing their confidence.
- Pupils who come to the school speaking little English make rapid gains, including in reading.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of the school's diverse community. The school has recently extended the curriculum by introducing online learning. Pupils are benefiting from this.

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?

- Ensure that pupils' attendance continues to improve by further:
 - celebrating their good attendance and challenging poor attendance
 - educating pupils and their families about the importance of regular attendance at school.
- Ensure that policies and procedures fully reflect the details of the school's provision.
- Ensure that high-quality teaching in mathematics enables pupils to make the fastest possible progress including by:
 - resolving the current staffing shortage in mathematics
 - effectively using the school's system to give pupils long-term learning challenges
 - helping pupils to present their work in ways which support their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The small leadership team, led by the headteacher, has improved the school considerably since its previous inspection. Leaders are determined in their commitment to pupils. They ensure that the school gives pupils positive opportunities even when these have been limited in their previous school experience. Pupils gain the skills and other attributes needed for future success.
- Leaders have an accurate picture of what the school does well and the aspects that can still be improved. They are prepared to be brutally honest in their own analysis, whenever they believe this will help pupils. They very successfully implemented a systematic plan to improve the school following the previous standard inspection. The success of this work means that some parts of the plan are now out of date. The school is ready to move on to its next stage.
- Leaders have arranged for the school's work to be underpinned by a comprehensive set of policy documents. These are based on model documents that leaders have procured from outside the school. Leaders have taken steps to match these policies to the specific features of the school. However, this is sometimes not done in enough detail to make the policies as useful as possible.
- Leaders provide frequent opportunities for staff training. These include online courses, often about the care and safety of pupils, and face-to-face opportunities to learn about important matters, such as effective approaches to teaching pupils who have particular needs. When leaders judge staff would benefit from specialist advice, they arrange for this. Staff have recently benefited from training about teaching and learning provided by an advanced skills teacher from outside the school.
- Staff have positive views about their work in the school. They share leaders' commitment to provide the best possible for pupils.
- The school's curriculum is designed to provide pupils with a core of academic learning, together with opportunities to develop important wider social skills and self-confidence. All pupils are in mixed-age classes in English, mathematics and science together with a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). However, the details are somewhat different depending on the course pupils follow. This allows leaders to match the curriculum to pupils' needs. In addition to their core studies, most pupils follow an additional subject which gives them opportunities for wider academic learning. They gain experience of information and communication technology by using computers in their other studies. The school does not have its own facilities for physical education. However, staff use nearby facilities including a sports centre and local park, to provide space for recreation and teaching.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new feature to the curriculum by providing facilities for online lessons for pupils who are unable, or unwilling, to attend school. This development is at an early stage. However, leaders already report the positive impact it is having on some pupils who previously would not attend school at all. Leaders have carefully considered how such learning can be effective and safe for pupils.
- Leaders are successfully building the school's relationships with the local community. One

example of this is the provision of a café for community use close to the school. This also allows the school to organise healthy and tasty lunches for pupils.

- Pupils are very well supported in developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Staff arrange for frequent visits to places around Liverpool which will interest pupils and extend their knowledge. For example, during the inspection, a large group of pupils went to Anfield to learn about Liverpool Football Club. A short time before, pupils had visited a court to help them understand the country's judicial system. In addition, the school makes full use of Liverpool's museum and art galleries as part of the education provided. The school's ethos also develops pupils' wider awareness in other ways. For example, pupils' moral understanding, including of right and wrong, is supported by the very high but subtly enforced standards of behaviour in the school. Pupils accept and follow important principles about tolerance, fairness and respect. They demonstrate these in the way they make the school one community despite their highly diverse backgrounds and needs.
- The local authority's alternative-provision team is very complimentary about the positive difference the school makes to the educational chances of pupils. They confirm that the school is flexible in providing high-quality provision for challenging pupils, sometimes at short notice.

Governance

- The proprietor is also the headteacher. This means that there is less opportunity for separate challenge and accountability than in many schools. However, the close working relationship with the local authority's alternative-provision team and their quality-assurance processes mean that there is regular external scrutiny of the school. In addition, the proprietor has ensured that school policies make reference to local authority systems and approaches, when this is relevant.
- In her role as headteacher, the proprietor works closely with, and enjoys the support of, other senior leaders. Their relationship further increases scrutiny of the proprietor's areas of responsibility.
- The proprietor ensures that the independent school standards are met.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils and their circumstances are known very well to staff. Staff also understand the wider context in which pupils live. Staff receive regular training. This has included the most recent changes to the government's guidance about safeguarding, as well as other aspects that could be particularly relevant to pupils, such as gangs, forced marriage and sexual health. The senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding is confident and knowledgeable. Features such as these contribute to the school's strong safeguarding culture.
- The systems for checking that staff are suitable to work with pupils are thorough.
- The school's safeguarding and child protection policy is available for parents, carers and others on the school website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers rapidly create strong relationships with pupils. These enable teachers to rebuild pupils' confidence in school and learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' effort and behaviour.
- When pupils initially arrive at the school, staff make a detailed assessment of their abilities. Teachers and leaders use the results of these tests to ensure that pupils are following the right courses in the school and, in particular, for longer-term pupils, whether they should follow GCSE or functional-skills courses. Staff use information from continuing assessment to give guidance to pupils about what they should be aiming to achieve. This system works well in English and science but is less effective in mathematics.
- Teaching in the school has a strong emphasis on pupils' spoken English and literacy. This allows some pupils to fill gaps which have arisen because of previously disjointed education. For those who are at an early stage of speaking and using English, it is even more fundamental. Teachers develop such pupils' English in whatever subject or activity they are undertaking. For example, the inspector saw pupils learning the English alphabet in addition to the names of parts of the human body during science. When pupils have limited reading ability, they are provided with successful, additional one-to-one teaching. The success of English teaching and learning is reflected in the gains made by pupils in the school, as well as in the external examination results in English, which have improved over time.
- Teaching in mathematics has less impact on pupils' learning than teaching in English. At present, the school has a vacancy for a mathematics teacher. This has meant that some pupils currently receive limited mathematics teaching. Over time, pupils' books show that mathematics teachers' expectations have not been high enough. For example, messy presentation that does not support precision in pupils' answers has been allowed. In addition, mathematics teachers' guidance to pupils about what they should be focusing on next in their learning has not followed the school's policy.
- Some pupils have relatively short stays at the school. For this reason, leaders and teachers ensure that internal assessment and external accreditation quickly build up a picture of how well pupils are learning. The school uses ASDAN qualifications as part of its system for doing this. For example, a recent project provided by a specialist charity led to pupils gaining formal accreditation of the work they had done about the use and misuse of drugs.
- Teachers use resources effectively to support learning. For example, the inspector saw pupils collaborating and being helped to develop their skills in working with others in PSHE by planning how to drop a dragon-shaped sweet into a cup from a large distance. This was also a very good example of how learning interests and engages pupils.
- The school does not normally use homework. However, pupils are keen to complete additional, out-of-school work for BTEC assessments when this is needed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

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

- The extremely calm and friendly ethos of the school sets a very high expectation for pupils. This is set from the start in the detailed conversations in which pupils and their parents share, before pupils start the school. Pupils very quickly understand that they are valued and have a fresh opportunity to learn and develop, whatever their previous school or life circumstances. Pupils who have had troubled previous-school experience very quickly gain the confidence they need to behave well and enjoy learning. Similarly, pupils who have recently arrived in the country, sometimes with harrowing experiences on their journeys, are made welcome and integrate into the school's community.
- All staff, and particularly those with pastoral responsibility, know the pupils very well indeed. This knowledge is reinforced by twice-weekly meetings at which staff discuss any issues which are starting to arise. These allow any developing problems to be nipped in the bud. Pupils are confident to talk with members of staff should they need help or advice.
- Leaders identified that support for pupils who have mental health needs can sometimes have long waiting lists. In response, they have arranged for a counsellor to provide programmes of weekly meetings with pupils who would benefit. Similarly, leaders have made special arrangements to ensure that pupils have as easy access as possible to a school nurse.
- The school provides a well-planned curriculum to extend pupils' knowledge and awareness of a wide range of personal and social issues. This often matches staff training, with external professionals providing consistent messages to pupils and staff, about important issues. These provide clear messages but are also discussed with sensitivity. For example, recent learning for pupils about sex and relationships, led by a representative of a specialist charity, was hard-hitting about matters such as consent. It was delivered to boys and girls separately so they had confidence to be more open in their conversations.
- The school's computer system is carefully monitored to ensure that pupils cannot easily access any unsuitable websites or information. Pupils are not allowed to have mobile phones in school and hand these in as expected on arrival. However, staff do not allow this to become a challenging situation. It is just part of the warm, daily welcome routine that pupils are used to and accept.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying in the school. The cooperation between pupils, their commitment to each other and their acceptance of their very diverse backgrounds are significant strengths.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' good behaviour is a notable feature of the school. Many pupils' response to their educational provision in the past has included defiance and disruption. The inspector saw no evidence of these. In fact, pupils are friendly and pleased to talk about the school. Their behaviour in class supports the learning for all.
- Pupils' attendance is considerably lower than the national average for all schools. However, this still represents a marked improvement for many pupils when compared to their attendance at their previous school. Leaders and other staff make concerted efforts to encourage pupils to attend. For example, the school makes very swift telephone

contact with the family of any pupil who is unexpectedly not at school or arrives late. The newly introduced online lessons are very successfully allowing some pupils to take part in learning, even though they may find it very hard to attend school in the normal way.

- Leaders emphasise praise and reward in their systems to encourage pupils to behave well. Pupils know what is expected. This contributes to their good behaviour. Even if pupils make a slip in their behaviour, they are ready to apologise, often without prompting.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school uses a range of external qualifications to ensure that groups of pupils of different abilities have their success recognised. Some of these qualifications are not recorded in nationally published information about pupils' outcomes. In addition, the relatively short time many pupils have in the school makes it hard to meaningfully compare the school's academic results to those achieved in most other schools.
- Some information is available about those pupils who have taken GCSE or equivalent qualifications in the past. Year 11 pupils' results in English have improved over the last three years. In mathematics, pupils' attainment has stayed roughly the same over the same period. Pupils' results in the recently introduced BTEC qualification in science also show gains in pupils' learning.
- Inspection evidence, including the scrutiny of pupils' books and the school's own records, indicates that current pupils' progress is also stronger in English and science than mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in their wider learning is very strong. They often arrive at the school lacking understanding of how to be successful in school or society. The combination of effective teaching, individual care and the school's commitment to use external accreditation gives pupils educational success and ensures that this is recorded. For some pupils, this is the first time that school has worked for them.
- Pupils, including those who arrive at the school with limited skill in using English, make clear gains in their reading. The school measures pupils' reading ages as part of the initial assessment of pupils. For some, the increases in their reading ages are marked. Various types of books are available for pupils to read. This variety allows pupils to increase the breadth of their reading, as well as their level of skill.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils receive individual careers advice and guidance. In addition, leaders ensure that pupils are very-well supported in preparing for college applications. Leaders have arranged for local colleges to keep application dates flexible to allow pupils to have most chance of applying. Nearly all pupils successfully move from the school to continue their education.

School details

Unique reference number	138878
DfE registration number	341/6003
Inspection number	10053735

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Proprietor	Dena Robinson
Headteacher	Dena Robinson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,165
Telephone number	01517350036
Website	www.assessededucation.co.uk
Email address	info@assessededucation.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–15 September 2016

Information about this school

- Assess Education is a mixed, independent day school offering alternative provision for education. It was registered as a school in October 2012.
- Pupils are taught in five groups: two groups of pupils receiving an alternative education, one studying GCSE and BTEC courses and the other studying functional skills and BTEC courses; a group of students who speak English as an additional language; a group of pupils who receive their education by online, distance learning and an assessment group who are placed by the local authority to have their longer-term needs assessed. Pupils in this latter group usually stay for a six-week period or until another placement has been found for them.
- Most pupils are placed at the school by the local authority. The local authority commissions places at the school to provide for pupils whose previous school placements

have broken down or because they are new arrivals to the country and in Year 11.

- The school sometimes accepts pupils from different local authorities when they are being placed out of their area.
- The school can cater for pupils with an education, health and care plan for social, emotional, and mental-health needs, but there is none on roll currently. However, pupils often come to the school having missed periods of education and with previously poor attendance.
- A number of pupils are currently looked after. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnicities.
- The school provides physical education at a local sports centre.
- The headteacher is the proprietor of the school.
- The school is registered for up to 60 pupils aged 14 to 18. At present, there are no pupils aged over 16 in the school.
- The school does not make use of any off-site, alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with the headteacher, who is also the proprietor, and other senior leaders. He had discussions with other members of staff. He also met with two representatives of the local authority's alternative provision team.
- The inspector toured the school's premises accompanied by the headteacher.
- The inspector had discussions with pupils in and out of lessons.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning. He scrutinised pupils' books.
- The inspector examined school documents about teaching and learning, outcomes, behaviour and leadership. These included the school's record of self-evaluation and the school's post-Ofsted plan, which serves as its improvement plan. In addition, he considered records and information about safeguarding.
- The inspector scrutinised policies and other documents to provide information about the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.
- The inspector considered four responses from members of staff to an inspection questionnaire provided by Ofsted.

Inspection team

David Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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