

Expanse Learning Wigan School

Expanse Learning and Development Hub, Tyrer Avenue, Worsley Mesnes, Wigan WN3 5XF

Inspection dates

22 to 24 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The proprietor has not ensured that all independent school standards are met consistently.
- The school's plans and curriculum policy meet the requirements of the independent school standards. However, the curriculum plans are insufficiently detailed to ensure that pupils acquire the essential subject knowledge during the time they attend the school.
- Leaders do not have an adequately detailed understanding of how subject teachers are assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Consequently, the data they gather does not always give the information they need about how well pupils are learning.
- The quality of teaching is variable. In some lessons, the lack of pace and insufficient challenge hamper pupils' progress.

The school has the following strengths

- Many pupils have experienced years of educational failure prior to joining Expanse Learning Wigan. In the short time that the school has been open, the school has transformed the lives of some of its most vulnerable pupils. This is the first time that these pupils say they have felt safe, happy and successful at school.
- Pupils are generally pleasant and polite to staff, visitors and each other. Pupils are kind, considerate and quick to lend a hand.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is a strength of the school. As a result of the help and support given by staff, almost all pupils improve their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning within a short space of time.
- Teachers plan learning which engages and enthuses pupils. From their first days, pupils pay attention to their teachers, take pride in their work and show a willingness to 'have a go'.

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 leadership and management of the school, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for pupils by:
 - developing more detailed curriculum plans which set out clearly the essential knowledge that leaders want pupils to acquire
 - providing teachers with subject-specific training and support to help them plan learning to meet the needs of all pupils
 - setting out clearly the school's measures and benchmarks of pupils' progress so that leaders have an accurate view of how well pupils are achieving
 - using the independent school standards as a tool to help leaders to monitor the school's effectiveness.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- A number of independent school standards were unmet at the start of the inspection. Leaders' swift actions ensured that these issues were resolved before the end of the inspection. These unmet standards did not pose a health, safety or welfare risk to pupils. Neither did they have a negative impact on pupils' academic progress.
- The proprietor's ambitious vision for the school is shared by leaders, staff and governors. Leaders have 'rolled their sleeves up' and have worked well with staff over the last few weeks to get the school up and running. Leaders have faced the challenges of the school's first few weeks with stoicism, determination and good humour.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have a well-considered development plan which sets out clearly the actions to be implemented. The plan has suitable timescales and clear success criteria. Governors carry out frequent checks to make sure that these plans are progressing well.
- Leaders' and governors' lack of experience and expertise in secondary education means that some key aspects of the school's provision are not as well developed. While they make sure that pupils settle well into day-to-day school life, they do not make the most of pupils' readiness to learn. Leaders have well-developed plans in place to rectify this.
- Staff morale is good. Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders have put in place effective performance management, which staff appreciate. Staff feel well supported by their leaders. Moreover, staff are heartened by leaders' willingness to let them implement their own ideas and try things out. Consequently, leaders recruit and retain new staff more successfully now.
- In these early days, leaders have made sure that they carry out their statutory duties in relation to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders make good use of the resources and expertise that they have available in order to provide the support that these pupils need. They make sure that pupils' education, health and care plans inform teachers' planning so that pupils work towards their targets. Parents applaud the skills of staff to identify, assess and meet the needs of their children successfully. Moreover, they appreciate the support that the school gives them as parents of pupils with SEND.
- The school works well with children's social care and other external partners to support its most vulnerable pupils, including those children looked after. The pastoral team make sure that there is frequent communication with carers, social workers and other professionals so that nothing is left to chance. This has helped these pupils get off to a good start at the school.
- Leaders and governors have adapted their provision to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of current pupils. Parents and professionals are impressed by the positive difference that the school has made to these pupils' lives within a short space of time.
- Leaders make sure that pupils' behaviour is good at the school. Leaders keep up-to-date records and logs of events within the school, including those that record incidents of serious behaviour. They track any rare incidents closely. Appropriate actions are put in

place swiftly in response to any emerging patterns and trends. Leaders make sure that all incidents are followed up thoroughly and risk assessments are reviewed if required.

- The school's curriculum plans, drawn up last year, are not suitable for the cohort of pupils who have started at the school since it opened. Plans are insufficiently detailed to set out clearly for staff what leaders expect pupils to learn. Pupils joining the school have a fragmented learning journey; some have been out of school for several years. Leaders have not sufficiently thought through the organisation of the curriculum and the time given to each subject.
- A strength of the school's curriculum is its contribution to pupils' mental and personal well-being. The school makes sure that pupils are helped to overcome or better manage some of the considerable challenges that they face. These are related to their time in school as well as their day-to-day lives.
- The school does not receive any additional pupil premium or special educational needs funding from the local authority.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's safeguarding policy pays due regard to the most up-to-date guidance from the Secretary of State, and that it is published on the school website.
- Staff appreciate the wealth of support and training they receive to do their jobs well. Staff are well trained to know how to keep pupils safe and meet their welfare needs. This helps pupils to settle into school life quickly. However, leaders have not made sure that teachers have had specific training to further develop their skills and expertise to plan, deliver and evaluate learning. This applies to the range of academic subjects they are required to teach.
- Leaders carry out checks on pupils' learning in lessons and work in their books. However, leaders do not have reliable, robust pupils' performance information and analysis of pupils' progress across the curriculum. While a baseline assessment is carried out for every pupil on entry, each subject teacher has devised their own approach to ongoing assessment. This means that leaders cannot be confident that they know how well pupils are achieving academically.

Governance

- The proprietor and governors provide strong leadership for the new school. They have made sure that the provision responds to demand locally. They work in partnership with the appropriate local authority officers effectively.
- The proprietor has established clearly defined governance structures. This means that the proprietor, directors, governors and school leaders carry out their designated roles and responsibilities without stepping on each other's toes.
- The proprietor, directors and governors are passionate about improving the life chances of their pupils. There are high levels of scrutiny and accountability at all levels. They do not shy away from challenge. The governing body holds both directors and leaders to account for the impact of their actions. They ask probing questions, making good use of their relevant experience and expertise. The governing body employs an external consultant to support the school's leaders. This also provides governors with an independent view of the effectiveness of the school's provision.

- As with leaders, governors lack expertise around secondary education. This means that they do not scrutinise the school's academic curriculum, the quality of subject teaching and pupils' outcomes as closely as other aspects of the school's performance.
- Governors are in the process of agreeing the recruitment of a deputy headteacher to help them better meet pupils' academic needs. They are also recruiting new governors with relevant secondary school experience and expertise.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils learn to understand the consequences of their actions. They develop skills and attitudes such as tolerance and respect for other people's faiths and beliefs.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers ensure that there are suitable systems in place to keep pupils safe. Leaders carry out pre-employment checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with pupils. Staff undergo comprehensive training as part of their induction programme, and they also receive further training over time. Staff are attuned to the particular vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND and remain highly vigilant. They make sure that any important information is passed on to parents and professionals when relevant.
- Pupils trust the adults who work with them in school. They feel confident to speak to a member of staff if they have any worries or concerns. Posters around school remind staff, pupils and visitors about potential risks, such as radicalisation, and what to do if they have any concerns.
- The pastoral leader builds good links with parents. She makes sure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need. She liaises closely with external partners to coordinate support.
- Parents, pupils and staff agree that pupils are well cared for and safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Staff support pupils well to overcome their fear of educational failure and distrust of school and teachers. Despite most pupils having previously had long periods of time out of school, they settle in quickly at Expanse Learning Wigan. Once pupils start attending the school, teachers continue to provide the support that pupils need to reduce their levels of anxiety. As a result, almost all pupils willingly participate in lessons, take pride in their work and listen attentively to their teachers.
- Teachers plan lessons which engage pupils and capture their interest. They make sure that the activities planned help pupils to develop the key skills they need to be effective learners. For example, pupils are encouraged to work in pairs as well as small groups, complete independent homework tasks and carry out research using the internet.
- Teachers are endlessly patient. They work hard to rebuild pupils' confidence and self-esteem. They provide clear explanations to help pupils to understand tricky concepts. They encourage pupils when they find work hard, they and celebrate their achievements.
- While pupils engage well in lessons and have a go willingly at the tasks teachers set, they find the pace of learning slow and the level of challenge too low. Teachers do not pitch

the work appropriately for the range of ages, aptitudes and abilities in their classes, including for the most able pupils. The school's schemes of work do not provide non-subject-specialist and less-experienced teachers with sufficient information about the content and sequence of knowledge that they need to teach in each subject.

- Teachers make use of some of the information provided by pupils' baseline assessments. However, these assessments do not provide subject teachers with the information they need to pinpoint pupils' starting points precisely. Pupils' erratic progress across different subjects, due to the gaps in their learning, makes it even more difficult for teachers to be confident about how well pupils are progressing.
- The lack of detail in the school's curriculum plans and weaknesses in assessment have an impact on the quality of teachers' lesson planning. Too often, teachers' lesson planning lacks precision around what they want pupils to learn. It does not anticipate possible gaps in pupils' knowledge. Nor does it identify the next steps for those pupils who are quick to grasp the new learning. This means that, regardless of prior attainment, ability or need, all pupils work at the same pace and stage of learning.
- Teachers make sure that pupils have opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, pupils have too few opportunities to practise writing at length or to express ideas in their own words. Moreover, information about pupils' learning in English and mathematics is not shared with other subject teachers, so there is no consistency of expectations.
- Teachers provide parents with useful information about how well their children are getting on. Teachers contact parents informally to share news about what has gone well and also to raise any concerns. Written reports and review meetings enable parents to get more detailed information about their children's learning over the term. Parents feel confident to get in touch with the school if needed.
- Teachers receive detailed feedback about the quality of teaching in their lessons following observations by leaders. Teachers listen to and act on this advice. However, too little heed is paid in these observations to the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time. For example, leaders and teachers do not focus on the work that is in pupils' books.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together in lessons. They are adept at recognising when pupils are becoming anxious. They step in quickly to help pupils to calm down and settle back to work. As a result, learning generally proceeds without interruption.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Good relationships are a strength of the school. Pupils quickly learn to trust staff. Pupils are keen to please the adults who work in school. They settle quickly to task and have a go at work even when it is tricky. Pupils are also willing to lend a hand. Pupils get on well together. They are sensitive to each other's needs. For some pupils, this is the first time that they have formed friendships at school.
- Staff keep in regular contact with parents. They keep parents up to date with how well

their children are getting on. Parents appreciate the support and help that the school offers them and their children.

- Parents and external partners testify to the transformation to the lives of pupils and families. Many of these pupils had struggled to cope in their previous schools. Both parents and pupils have a renewed sense of hope for the future. For example, some key stage 4 pupils are keen to study for GCSE qualifications now.
- Year 11 pupils are being supported by staff to put together realistic and suitable plans for their next steps, such as college courses and apprenticeships. There are well-developed work experience plans in place which have been matched carefully to pupils' interests and aptitudes.
- Staff work well with pupils to raise their awareness of how to keep themselves safe. The school's personal, social, health and economic curriculum incorporates lessons about risks, both online and in the community. Pupils know that they should not share their personal details online. They also know how to report any concerns.
- The school encourages pupils to take part in physical activity. Twice-weekly physical education lessons offer a series of lessons in different sports. This means that pupils can take part in a range of sports, such as dodgeball and badminton, to find out which ones they enjoy.
- Teachers are highly skilled in developing pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour for learning. However, the school has limited information to assess and track pupils' progress and to identify next steps. This means that pupils are not able to capitalise on their good start by developing higher-level skills, including greater resilience, self-assurance and self-discipline.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Despite long periods of time out of school prior to starting at Expanse Learning Wigan, almost all pupils re-engage quickly with education. They enjoy coming to this school. Their rates of attendance improve considerably within a few days or weeks. Many pupils have attendance above 90%.
- The school provides effective support to help pupils to manage their high levels of anxiety so that they can cope day-to-day in school. Most pupils learn to regulate their own behaviours successfully, so that serious incidents are rare.
- The school is calm and orderly. Pupils are pleasant and polite to staff, each other and visitors. Teachers are quick to challenge any disrespectful language. They make sure that pupils treat each other and other people with tolerance and respect. Pupils report that they generally get on well together. For some pupils, this is the first time in a long time they have formed friendships with their peers.
- Pupils are adamant that bullying does not happen in this school. They are confident that should any issues arise, staff would deal effectively with these. Despite some pupils' vulnerability to bullying, pupils feel well supported by staff and other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- This school succeeds with pupils where other schools have failed. These pupils really do get a 'last chance' when they join Expanse Learning Wigan. All pupils attending the school are disadvantaged by their social, emotional and mental health needs. They commonly enter the school with considerable gaps in their academic knowledge and understanding. Their attainment is well below those expected for their age. No pupils have yet completed a full year in the school. However, in the short time that they have been attending, they have made progress from their starting points.
- No pupil has completed any externally accredited qualification in the school because it is too soon after the school opened for them to have completed the courses. All key stage 4 pupils work towards recognised qualifications and accreditation. Leaders have ensured that the school's offer meets the diverse needs of pupils in terms of ability, interest and aptitude. Pupils recognise the value of achieving qualifications to help them to gain college places, apprenticeships and employment.
- Within a short space of time, the vast majority of pupils overcome their reluctance to attend school. Despite most pupils' history of school refusal, pupils quickly establish patterns of good attendance and punctuality.
- In the short time that pupils have been in school, subject teachers have carried out assessments. These give them an accurate baseline of what the pupils know and can do. It also informs teachers what the pupils need to work on in English and mathematics. However, teachers have not reassessed pupils to evaluate how much progress they have made since joining the school.
- Pupils' progress in all subjects is erratic due to considerable gaps in their learning. Teachers and pastoral staff work hard to get to know pupils. Staff put in place the help and support that pupils need so that they can catch up with their learning.
- A few pupils who join the school have undiagnosed, unmet needs. Staff make sure that these are identified, assessed and plans are put in place to meet these needs as quickly as possible. This helps these pupils to settle in well and make better progress than in their previous schools. Moreover, this helps to determine the most appropriate provision to meet these pupils' needs long term.
- Pupils' work in books, observations of learning and discussion with pupils testify to their learning across the range of subjects studied. For example, pupils are acquiring new knowledge in geography, computing and science. They can talk knowledgeably about what they have learned in previous lessons and topics.
- Teachers make sure that there are opportunities for pupils to practise reading and writing across the curriculum. In English, pupils are encouraged to use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling in their work as well as making sure that their handwriting is neat and legible. In mathematics, teachers plan opportunities for pupils to develop their fluency, such as recall of times tables and number bonds.
- For many pupils, this is the first time that they have taken part in lessons in a long time. Despite this, most pupils willingly contribute to lessons, complete tasks set and take pride in their work.

- The oldest pupils receive support to help them to put together realistic and suitable plans for when they leave the school. These pupils can talk about the options available to them and what their preferences are. A number of these pupils are due to start work experience placements linked to their preferred career path, for example in retail and childcare.
- The work set by teachers lacks challenge. Pupils, including the most able and lower-ability pupils, report that they find some of the tasks too easy and the pace of learning too slow.

School details

Unique reference number	145289
DfE registration number	359/6003
Inspection number	10081231

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 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Expanse Group Ltd
Chair	Martin Budden
Headteacher	Richard King
Annual fees (day pupils)	£23,620
Telephone number	01942 877 715
Website	www.expanselarning.co.uk/wigan
Email address	tony.brown@expansigroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This was the first inspection of Expanse Learning Wigan School. It was first registered by the Department for Education in July 2018 and opened as a school in September 2018.
- The school is located in a refurbished building in Wigan that formerly housed a pupil referral unit. In addition to the pupils who are on the school's roll, pupils who are dual-registered with their mainstream schools or pupil referral unit attend on short-term and/or part-time assessment placements.
- The school provides education for pupils aged 11 to 16 who are at risk of or have fallen out of education.

- Almost all the registered pupils have an education, health and care plan. A small number of pupils are placed at the school while a needs assessment is carried out. Pupils have a range of special educational needs, including autistic spectrum disorders and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice to the school.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school. The inspector checked work in a range of pupils' books.
- The inspector held meetings with the chief executive officer and directors of the proprietary company, leaders, teachers and other adults working in the school. The inspector met with and held a telephone conversation with officers of the local authority who have placed children in the school.
- The inspector scrutinised an extensive range of school documentation, including policies, planning, documentation relating to the leadership and management of the school and information about the progress, behaviour and attendance of pupils in the school. She scrutinised the school's records and systems to check the suitability of adults to work in the school.
- The inspector spoke formally with pupils, as well as informally during the school day and observed them during breaktimes.
- There was one response to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. The inspector spoke to three parents by telephone.
- The inspector considered the 10 written responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- The inspector made a thorough tour of the school.

Inspection team

Pippa Jackson Maitland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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