

Huntercombe Hospital School Stafford

Ivetsey Bank, Wheaton Aston, Stafford, Staffordshire ST19 9QT

Inspection dates

5–7 March 2019

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
Sixth form provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The strengthened leadership team, along with the head of education, CAMHS, the Huntercombe Group, are committed to providing a positive experience of education for every pupil. Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Well-qualified teaching staff have a good knowledge of the subjects they teach. They ensure that work is personalised to pupils' needs and provides a good level of challenge.
- Effective links with the pupils' home schools enable pupils to continue with their examination courses. As a result, pupils achieve strong outcomes at the end of key stage 4.
- The curriculum provides a breadth of experiences and opportunities for pupils to pursue a variety of courses that interest and engage them.
- Safeguarding is effective at the school.
- Staff develop positive relationships with the pupils at the school. They understand and support their individual needs well, including their transition back to school or college.
- Pupils usually behave well in the school, and incidents are rare. However, strategies for managing pupils' behaviour are not articulated well enough, which can lead to inconsistent support for pupils.
- Pupils' individualised timetables mean that they have limited opportunities to work and interact together to enhance their social development.
- Sixth-form students enjoy a variety of 'taster' courses but they do not have enough opportunities to access suitable accredited courses. Their attendance at school is low.
- Leaders are developing suitable careers advice and guidance for the pupils. Currently, pupils do not participate in work experience activities.
- Assessment systems do not yet provide leaders with a sufficient overview of pupils' progress. The school's improvement planning is rather disjointed and lacks monitoring and oversight.
- While collaborative relationships between the school and hospital are improving, education and health professionals are not yet working in true partnership for the benefit of the pupils.

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?

- Strengthen leadership and management further to ensure that:
 - education and health leaders work collaboratively and in a true partnership to ensure a consistency of approach for pupils
 - the school's improvement plan has a clear focus on areas for development with appropriate timescales, monitoring milestones and success criteria, with tasks that are more evenly distributed
 - the school's assessment system is further developed to enable leaders to have an understanding of the progress pupils are making across all key stages and subjects.
- Improve the sixth form provision so that:
 - students have improved opportunities to access a wider range of post-16 accreditation
 - students are motivated to attend school more frequently.
- Ensure that all pupils, including students in the sixth form, access improved careers advice and guidance and opportunities for work experience.
- Improve aspects of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare so that:
 - behaviour strategies are clearly stated, understood and implemented by all adults supporting pupils in the school
 - incidents of inappropriate behaviour are recorded with greater accuracy and pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on incidents in a supportive way
 - pupils have more opportunities to interact with others in learning activities, thereby enhancing their social and emotional development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that the good standards of education seen at the previous inspection have been maintained, and that the independent school standards continue to be met. The new headteacher, who has been in post for less than a year, has worked closely with the head of education, CAMHS, the Huntercombe Group, to strengthen leadership arrangements in the school. The recent appointment of a capable deputy headteacher is further developing the capacity in leadership.
- Staff say that they are well supported by leaders. All the staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey said that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to be a member of its staff. They value the opportunities they receive for their professional development, and they are able to access a wide range of training, including training relating to mental health and autism as well as subject-specific courses. This enables staff to support pupils effectively.
- Inspectors saw evidence of the many compliments that the school has received from parents and pupils over time. Several pupils who have now left the school have taken time to contact the school to thank them for the support they received while attending Huntercombe Hospital School. Comments such as 'Thank you so much for all the time and effort you have put into me' were typical of the messages received.
- Link teachers are effective in their role. They act as the main conduit between the hospital and the school, sharing information and supporting pupils' transition between the two settings. They ensure that information about pupils' needs is shared on a daily basis with staff, so that pupils are receiving the support they need.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's curriculum provides a breadth of opportunity for pupils, according to their needs and abilities. Subject leaders ensure that pupils can continue the specific courses they have begun at their home schools, enabling pupils to take their final examinations. Each pupil has their own timetable, bespoke to their individual needs, but with a suitable breadth and variety of learning activities.
- The SENCo is effective in her role. She ensures that the small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported, through information sharing with staff and checks on individual pupils' progress and welfare. The shared information resource bank, available on the school's information technology network, enables staff to access additional resources to support pupils' specific needs in areas such as autism or dyslexia.
- Pupils are given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities to support their learning and recovery. Pupils have benefited from visits to a professional kitchen, an art gallery (linked to their GCSE work) and a careers event. Photographs of the school's fun day and the Summer Ball demonstrate pupils' enjoyment of these experiences.
- Leaders are currently reviewing the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) curriculum to ensure that those pupils who only stay with them for a short period of time are able to access a six-week 'core' offer of a suitable breadth of topics.
- Leaders are continuing to refine their assessment systems. Currently, they have a good understanding of the progress that pupils make on an individual basis, both academically

as well as in their emotional and mental health needs. They analyse where pupils' mental health needs are having an impact on their learning. However, they do not have a sufficient understanding of the academic progress some pupils are making overall, for example in key stage 3 or in the sixth form provision. Teachers are currently using different systems to check on pupils' progress, rather than one whole-school agreed approach.

- Collaborative relationships with hospital leaders are at an early stage of development. The headteacher has recently begun to meet with the hospital senior management team, but education is not a separate agenda item and is only included in 'any other business'. This does not foster a true partnership with health professionals in the best interests of the pupils.
- The school's improvement plan identifies appropriate areas for development but is disjointed and relies far too much on the actions of the headteacher. Currently, areas for improvement are not checked sufficiently well because no one has been identified to carry out this task. Actions which should have been completed have not yet been evaluated. As a result, the focus and pace of improvement are hampered.

Governance

- The head of education, with the support of the proprietary group, has demonstrated the commitment to ensuring high standards of teaching and learning at the school. Every teacher at the school is a qualified teacher, receiving appropriate training. As a result, there is a skilled and committed workforce of staff at the school.
- The head of education supported the new headteacher's transition into her role effectively, with frequent visits to the school. The head of education carries out checks on leaders' observations of teaching and learning to ensure that judgements leaders make are accurate.
- The head of education shares information about the school with the proprietary body on a quarterly basis. However, there is insufficient oversight of the school's improvement plan. Leaders did not provide any evidence that this is monitored regularly or systematically.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is well qualified to carry out her role, and the newly appointed deputy headteacher will shortly receive training to become the deputy DSL. Staff are appropriately trained to identify any concerns they may have about pupils. They also receive additional training in safeguarding themes such as the 'Prevent' duty and female genital mutilation. The school's updated safeguarding policy provides staff with clear guidance on how to report any concerns they may have about pupils' welfare.
- The school has a safeguarding policy which is made available to parents and carers on request. It takes into account the most recent advice issued by the Secretary of State.
- Currently, safeguarding referrals are made via the hospital's designated lead. The DSL relies on updates from the hospital's designated lead. The monthly meetings held between the DSL and the hospital lead are too infrequent to ensure that the DSL is kept informed of cases in a timely way. Both the headteacher and the hospital worker

acknowledged this during the inspection and have now arranged to meet on a weekly basis.

- The proprietary body ensures that suitable pre-employment checks are carried out on staff prior to their appointment to the school. During the inspection, the lead inspector noted that some information was missing from the school's single central record (SCR) of safeguarding arrangements. She was assured, through additional scrutiny of employment files, that this information was held by the school, but had not been recorded on the SCR. Leaders acted swiftly to update the SCR.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The strong systems for checking pupils' abilities on entry to the school, through baseline tests and the use of information from home schools, ensure that teachers have an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points. This enables teachers to plan activities carefully to make sure that pupils are provided with a sufficient level of challenge in their work. Teachers also use this information to identify where pupils may have initial gaps in their learning, so that they can support them well to address these.
- Pupils are supported to access courses at a higher standard, appropriate to their needs, such as A levels. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making progress in their learning over time, across a range of subjects.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and behaviours for learning are positive. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to support pupils well with their learning. Inspectors saw pupils making good progress in their learning because of the ways in which teachers skilfully developed their understanding, using effective questioning, for example.
- Work is personalised to meet pupils' individual needs. Many pupils can, and do, choose to work independently, but are able to seek additional help from teachers where needed. Some pupils contribute well to their individual learning plans, agreeing targets for themselves, with members of staff.
- Pupils usually produce work that is of a good standard. Inspectors saw examples of GCSE art work of a high quality. Work in mathematics shows a breadth of areas being taught, and the progression of pupils' knowledge and understanding is evident. Work in English demonstrates pupils' ability to write at length, for a range of audiences, with pupils developing and refining their writing. Pupils can assess their own work and identify where it can be further improved.
- Work in books shows that pupils are applying their reading, writing and mathematical knowledge in other curriculum areas. In science, pupils apply their mathematical knowledge and reasoning skills well. In a PSHEE activity, pupils were supported well to discuss the effects of stress on the body, before writing a summary of their discussions.
- The school's assessment system does not enable subject leaders to have a sufficient overview of the progress groups of pupils are making in their subjects. They cannot identify any trends, or gaps in learning in their subjects. This is because teachers use a range of different formats.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils take pride in their work in lessons.
- Pupils are most appreciative of the support they receive from staff in school. They told inspectors how it helps them with their recovery, for example, using the internet in a safe and supervised way.
- Pupils are provided with frequent opportunities to develop their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, and their understanding of British values. Schemes of work show a wide range of themes, appropriate to the needs and abilities of the pupils. There is a strong emphasis on equal opportunities and diversity within the curriculum. Recently, pupils have been engaging in activities focusing on prejudice and discrimination, knife crime and social media.
- Pupils feel safe in school and say that staff help to keep them safe. They learn about risks that they may be exposed to in the local community, such as child sexual exploitation. The PSHEE curriculum promotes all aspects of safeguarding such as online safety and the appropriate use of social media. However, health and education staff do not work together when supporting individual pupils in areas of concern, such as online safety. This can result in health and education working in silos rather than sharing their expertise and having an agreed approach in the best interests of the pupils.
- Pupils have a strong knowledge of equalities and the right to 'have a say', through the democratic process. Pupils and staff attend regular community meetings, and pupils chair these meetings. Meetings allow pupils to express their views, concerns or complaints. Recently, pupils requested a change from a community meeting book to a 'box' as this would ensure that they could express their views anonymously.
- Pupils are less clear about rewards systems in school, beyond the 'star of the week' award. Some pupils expressed a sense of injustice about attending lessons, when other pupils appear not to. Leaders have not articulated clearly enough the rewards and incentives that are available to pupils.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying in school and there are no incidents of bullying recorded. However, pupils say that they do not spend much time together in lessons working as a group. Pupils' timetables have limited opportunities to develop their social, communication and interaction skills as most of the work is planned on an individual basis.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils usually behave well in and around the classrooms.
- Attendance is low but is improving. Despite having experienced disruption in their education over time, almost all pupils have improved their attendance since joining the school. Leaders have analysed why some pupils are not attending school, which gives them a greater insight into pupils' individual needs and difficulties. Inspectors observed that some lessons were better attended than others, and on occasions, pupils were late to arrive.

- The recording of the very small number of incidents lacks detail and oversight. Pupils are not given the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour following an incident.
- Staff do not work collaboratively with health professionals to agree strategies to manage pupils' behaviour in lessons. As a result, pupils can experience inconsistent responses from staff on the rare occasions when their good behaviour slips.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Despite their previous difficult experiences and disruption to education, pupils are helped to continue their studies and achieve good outcomes. The accurate baseline information and liaison with the home schools provide pupils with a continuity of approach.
- In 2018, all pupils achieved GCSE accreditation and nearly three quarters achieved high grades in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. This ensures that pupils are better prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.
- Leaders ensure that pupils can access any additional support to which they may be entitled, for their final examinations. Leaders make sure that pupils are well prepared for what could be a stressful time during the examination period. Pupils become familiar with the room where the examinations will take place, for example. Leaders liaise with the home schools to ensure that pupils have access to the relevant revision materials.
- Careers advice and guidance are available to pupils, but are quite limited, and have only improved recently since the appointment of the deputy headteacher. Pupils are not able to access any work experience opportunities. Leaders are aware of this and have already identified it as an area for development. Some arrangements are being finalised for one pupil, but this experience has not yet begun.
- Leaders have a limited understanding of the progress key stage 3 pupils are making, because their assessment system requires further refining.

Sixth form provision

Requires improvement

- The newly appointed deputy headteacher is the leader of the sixth form provision. She is highly motivated and has already brought about some improvements to the provision in the short time she has been at the school. Leaders recognise that aspects of the sixth form provision require further development and have included this in their improvement plan.
- While leaders are able to articulate different curriculum pathways for students, these are not being implemented effectively. In reality, students have limited access to suitable accredited courses and rely on 'taster' courses. Leaders are investigating a range of short, accredited courses to better meet the needs of the students in the sixth form, in conjunction with a local college. However, this is at a very early stage of development. Leaders do not have an overview of sixth-form students' outcomes overall.
- Students in the sixth form do not attend school regularly. As a result, they are not sufficiently engaged in learning, which will limit the progress they are able to make. The changes the new sixth-form leader has made, introducing a performing arts course and improving careers guidance, appear to be having a positive impact on students'

attendance. When taking into account pupils' medical appointments, rates have risen from 52% in the autumn term to the current rate of 67%. This is still low and is even lower when medical appointments were not considered.

- Students are beginning to access careers advice and guidance and told inspectors about how they have been supported to apply for college courses or apprenticeships. Some students have been able to access support from the National Careers Service.
- Students are not currently able to engage in any work experience activities. The sixth-form leader is acting swiftly to address this, but it is too early to see any impact in terms of improved opportunities for students.
- Inspectors saw a group of students engaging in a performing arts activity, which has recently been introduced to the curriculum. Students developed their keyboard skills, learning to play chord sequences. The most able students were given more challenging tasks to complete. All students review their learning and work with the teacher to identify their next steps for development. Inspectors saw a similarly high level of engagement in a drama activity, where students were learning to collaborate with each other.
- Students are given the opportunity to improve their GCSE grades in English and mathematics, where appropriate.
- Students have the opportunity to try out a number of different courses to meet their needs and interests, such as learning Japanese or Dutch, or completing their online driving theory test. Usually, students work independently, following their own interests. Some students are completing A-level courses.
- A group of students participated in the 'ten pounds, four weeks, one goal' enterprise activity, providing them with some experience in setting up and running a small business to make a profit. Activities included making cakes, washing cars and designing greetings cards.

School details

Unique reference number	142013
DfE registration number	860/6041
Inspection number	10056222

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Huntercombe Group
Headteacher	Claire Blakemore
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,680
Telephone number	01785 842 103
Email address	HHstaffordschool@huntercombe.com
Date of previous inspection	9–11 March 2016

Information about this school

- Huntercombe Hospital School (Stafford) is one of four schools in the Huntercombe Group. It provides day education to pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs who have been admitted to the hospital. The hospital provides a tier 4 child and adolescent mental health service and is run by the same proprietary group.
- Pupils usually remain on their home school's roll while undergoing treatment and can be admitted at any time during the school year, for varying lengths of time, depending on their needs. Currently, 10 of the sixth-form students are not on the roll of any school or college, and are described as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). The

school does not receive any funding from local authorities for these NEET students, unless they have an education, health and care plan, or are children looked after.

- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils with a finalised education, health and care plan.
- The large majority of pupils at the time of the inspection were White British. There are significantly more girls than boys.
- None of the pupils attend alternative provision.
- This is the school's second standard inspection. The school received its first standard inspection in March 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of education of the Huntercombe Group, who was acting as the proprietary body's representative, and senior and middle leaders.
- The lead inspector conducted a check of the premises, accompanied by the headteacher. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including school policies, schemes of work, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, meeting records, progress information and leaders' monitoring. The lead inspector looked at documents relating to safeguarding, including pre-employment checks on staff. Inspectors used the information gathered to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils to gather their views, as well as talking to them informally in lessons. Inspectors observed teaching and learning activities throughout the inspection and looked at a wide sample of pupils' work across a variety of subjects, in lessons and as part of a work scrutiny.
- There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, to consider. The lead inspector considered an email from a parent.
- The inspectors considered the seven responses to the Ofsted staff survey.
- There were no responses to the online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Maybank

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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