

Austen House

Bridge House, 1 Stuart Road, Bredbury SK6 2SR

Inspection dates

5–6 March 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' evaluation of the quality of education in the school is overly generous. This means that plans for improvement do not accurately identify how to raise standards further.
- Teaching, at times, does not stretch or motivate pupils sufficiently. Pupils are not given enough opportunity to apply skills learned in English and mathematics to help consolidate learning.
- Leaders' understanding of what the curriculum should look like and how it will be delivered has been given insufficient attention. This is in stark contrast to the carefully thought-out plans for pupils' mental and personal well-being.
- Assessment procedures do not take full account of pupils' prior learning. An over-reliance on baseline tests means that expectations of some pupils are not high enough.
- The curriculum is not wide-ranging enough to meet pupils' needs and interests fully. Some subjects are only offered if requested by pupils, which limits their ambitions and employment opportunities.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. The same academic rigour is not evident in planning, and skills are not built on consistently.

The school has the following strengths

- The school's therapeutic programme makes a significant difference to the well-being and personal development of pupils.
- Many pupils' attendance improves significantly during their time at Austen House. This is because of the highly effective support they receive from the headteacher and staff.
- Leaders and staff place the highest priority on the safety and welfare of pupils. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are thorough.
- Pupils typically make good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics.
- Pupils learn about Britain's cultural heritage and the diversity of society. This helps them to prepare for the next stage of their lives.

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 quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the school’s evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is more accurate and this information is used to identify how to improve outcomes for pupils
 - the school’s curriculum is well thought out and implemented so that it provides more opportunities for pupils to achieve success and broadens their ambition and employment opportunities.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that staff identify opportunities to motivate and challenge pupils so that they enjoy lessons more and their concentration is improved
 - ensuring that more opportunities are planned across the curriculum for pupils to reinforce and apply the knowledge and skills they have developed in English and mathematics
 - improving the accuracy of teacher assessment so that expectations of what pupils know and can do are raised.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and those responsible for governance make sure that the requirements of the independent school standards and procedures are met. However, leaders are overgenerous in their views of the school's effectiveness. Monitoring in some areas does not ascertain whether actions are improving outcomes for pupils. This limits leaders' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and means that plans for improvement are not always accurate.
- The delivery of the curriculum is not consistent. Although the school has a policy that includes all areas of the curriculum, this does not reflect pupils' day-to-day experiences. Leaders wait until pupils express an interest before planning the programmes for their learning. This can limit access to some subjects and lead to delays in implementation while teachers or courses are found, usually via external providers. Examples of these include humanities and linguistics, which are not taught regularly because few current pupils show an interest in these subjects.
- The detail that is applied to plans for pupils' personal, social and mental well-being is not replicated in other areas of the curriculum. This results in lower expectations of what pupils can achieve and means that outcomes in some areas of the curriculum are not high enough.
- Leaders have developed an effective strategy to improve pupils' English and mathematics skills. They use subject-specialist teachers to prepare pupils for appropriate examinations. They make regular checks on pupils' progress in these areas.
- Visits to places of interest, coupled with a range of interesting activities, enrich the curriculum. This broadens pupils' experiences of life beyond school. Pupils talk with real enthusiasm about these opportunities and are keen to share their photographs and memories.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils support local and national fundraising projects, and this helps them to develop an understanding and feeling of belonging to a community. Leaders plan a calendar of events so that pupils are made aware of significant people, festivals and celebrations that shape the society in which they live.
- The school promotes British values well. Pupils gain a good understanding of democracy, including the impact of elections and referendums in changing the country. Pupils discuss and challenge stereotypes and prejudice, preparing them well for life in modern British society.
- Leaders are successful in providing pupils with a therapeutic recovery programme following their often traumatic experiences before arriving at school. This allows pupils to grow in confidence, develop self-esteem and resilience and improve their relationships with others.
- External agencies value the effective communication and accurate information that the school provides. This supports the allocation of appropriate support for pupils.

Governance

- Members of the Care 4 Children board ensure that the school meets the requirements of the independent school standards. They hold school leaders to account for this and conduct their own checks to emphasise the need for vigilance.
- The head of education has regular oversight of the school through the weekly reports about pupils and provision. The company uses this information to monitor the school against its own objectives for success. This ensures that clear lines of accountability are in place.
- The board holds leaders to account for the school's performance and bonus schemes are in place to reward success. Members of the board have a range of expertise and offer support when needed.
- The board seeks to provide appropriate training and support for staff. However, this is linked to the school's self-evaluation, which is not always accurate. Consequently, some training needs are not identified. These include making sure that leaders have the knowledge and skills to design and implement an interesting curriculum.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders ensure that all members of staff keep pupils' safety at the forefront of their work. Staff are vigilant and share any concerns they may have about pupils' well-being with the designated safeguarding leader.
- Leaders make sure that staff are well trained and safeguarding records are accurate. For example, all staff have completed appropriate training on the 'Prevent' duty. Staff know how to spot signs that pupils may be at risk of harm and monitor pupils' well-being closely.
- Comprehensive risk assessments are in place to help make sure that pupils are safe when in school and on educational visits. Individual risk assessments have been carried out for each pupil, and staff are fully aware of these, using them consistently to protect pupils.
- The safeguarding policy is current and available to parents and carers on request. Staff are familiar with school policies and government guidelines, including the latest guidance on keeping children safe in education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Although the minimum standards for independent schools are being met, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough across a range of subjects. Some of the learning does not have a clear purpose because curriculum plans are not fully developed. Opportunities are missed to help pupils consolidate learning or use and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The school's assessment of pupils on entry to the school does not always take account of their prior learning and the standards they achieved. This can result in work which is not pitched at the right level in some subjects.

- For some pupils, teaching does not capture their attention or sustain their interest sufficiently to make sure that they make consistently good progress. Where pupils do not find teaching motivating, they are easily distracted, lose concentration and waste time. This means some tasks are not completed.
- Although the quality of teaching in some areas requires improvement to be good, the teaching of mathematics and English is effective. Teachers ensure that pupils are able to tackle increasingly complex mathematical concepts and that their computation skills improve. All pupils are encouraged to read and their written work becomes more accurate and sophisticated over time.
- Teachers have established effective relationships with pupils to support their learning. Pupils feel at ease and are confident about raising questions and giving opinions because teachers are adept at building their self-confidence and resilience as learners.
- In subjects that progress through to GCSE, including English and mathematics, teachers have good subject knowledge. Their specialisms support them in being able to answer questions relating to their subject knowledge. In Year 11, teaching follows examination syllabuses and ensures that pupils are effectively prepared for their examinations.

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 three-phase recovery programme includes teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe. Pupils increase their levels of independence.
- The curriculum and other activities effectively promote pupils' physical, mental and emotional health. Leaders are responsive to pupils' requests to explore different activities, including climbing, horse riding and fitness training.
- Pupils receive regular mentoring and support from staff. Pupils value being listened to and receiving feedback on their progress through the therapeutic programme. This enables pupils to develop their self-esteem and to recognise their strengths.
- Pupils are safe from bullying and harassment in school. The vigilance of staff and the carefully planned programme of support for pupils' personal development mean that awareness of all forms of bullying is high. Pupils are respectful of each other's differences and of people from different backgrounds and with protected characteristics. For example, pupils describe the residents of a local care home as their friends and demonstrate empathy and understanding for those much older than them.
- The school actively promotes equality of opportunity. Pupils discuss the display of images which challenge stereotypes about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and racism. They express well-thought-out arguments and show a good understanding of prejudice and bias.
- Leaders have provided an online programme to help pupils understand career opportunities. This helps to raise pupils' awareness of educational pathways towards different jobs. However, pupils told inspectors that the school does not always help them with the opportunities to succeed in their chosen pathway because the curriculum is limited. Inspection evidence supported this. For example, there were delays and

uncertainty about suitable courses for pupils whose college placement had broken down.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils make considerable strides in managing their own behaviour and in their personal development. The school's records show that it improves behaviour considerably and, for some pupils, this is transformational.
- The integrated work that leaders and staff undertake with pupils, therapists and support services contributes significantly to improvements in pupils' behaviour. Levels of frustration and undesirable behaviour reduce and, in some cases, are eradicated because of the good-quality pastoral support that pupils receive.
- Many pupils start school with very low levels of attendance. The effective systems that the school has put in place to encourage pupils to attend well improve their attendance significantly after a short time.
- Similarly, pupils turn up on time for lessons because staff make sure that the start to the school day is positive and welcoming. Pupils value the rewards systems on offer, which help them take greater responsibility and become more independent in managing their time.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Leaders ensure that pupils' key skills in English and mathematics are prioritised. Many pupils arrive in school with significant gaps in their knowledge as a result of previous poor school attendance. They build up their knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics and progress well from their starting points.
- Every effort is made to prepare them for accredited examinations in these subjects and, for some, this is successful. Most pupils leave school at the end of key stage 4 with some qualifications. These include functional skills and accreditations including GCSE qualifications. In 2018, some pupils attained mathematics and English GCSE at grade 4, which represents good progress from their starting points.
- Work in pupils' folders and information about pupils' achievement show that progress is not consistently good across different subjects, including science, art and humanities. This is linked to the variable quality of teaching and changes to pupils' personal circumstances.
- Although leaders have used alternative providers to extend the curriculum in the past, this is not consistent. Current pupils do not have access to training in some subjects which would broaden their employment opportunities. This limits ambitions for some pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in their attitudes to learning, as demonstrated by their improved attendance and punctuality. The school's very effective personal, social, health and well-being programme gives pupils confidence for the next stage of their education and training.

School details

Unique reference number	142333
DfE registration number	888/6062
Inspection number	10067927

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	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Proprietor	Care 4 Children Residential Services Ltd
Chair	Tariq Verpalen
Headteacher	Robert Greaves
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,000
Telephone number	03455 215 155
Website	www.care4children.co.uk
Email address	robert.greaves@care4children.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–22 September 2016

Information about this school

- A new headteacher was appointed to the school in February 2018.
- The last standard inspection took place in September 2016.
- The school is a provision of Care 4 Children. The organisation helps the most traumatised children and young people and provides for high-acuity young people whom the local authority find difficult to place.
- Austen House opened to pupils in September 2015.
- The school can provide up to five full-time places and serves local authorities across the country. There are no pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has used Tower Learning Ltd and Blackburn College as alternative providers but does not do so currently. They do use off-site provision for physical education

activities.

- All pupils on roll are eligible for pupil premium funding and all pupils are children looked after.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice and took place over one and a half days.
- The inspector spoke to the chair of the board (who is also the director of education), the lead teacher, the clinical psychologist, sessional teachers and support staff.
- The inspector observed teaching sessions and breaktimes, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning and the school in general.
- School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, risk assessments, the single central record and safeguarding policies.
- Information about pupils' achievement and attendance and behavioural logs were reviewed. The inspector also considered information and evidence relating to the independent school standards, including health and safety audits.
- The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans were shared and also records showing checks made on the school's progress towards its performance targets.
- No parent completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, but the views of external agencies were taken into account.

Inspection team

Cathy Parkinson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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