

Pear Tree School

Toy Top Farm, Houghton Bank, Heighington, Darlington, County Durham DL2 2UQ

Inspection dates

18–20 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The leadership team has ensured that all aspects of the independent school standards have been met.
- The headteacher has a deep commitment and passion to provide the best education possible for the pupils.
- The headteacher’s ambitious vision, which is shared by all staff, is to prepare pupils to gain employment and lead fulfilled adult lives.
- The curriculum is highly personalised to pupils’ needs and interests and offers a wide range of exciting outdoor activities and re-engages pupils with a love of learning.
- Building trusting and respectful relationships with the pupils is central to the school’s work. Pupils gain a very good understanding of the school’s values because they are threaded throughout the ethos of the school.
- Pupils’ personal development and welfare are outstanding. This is because of the school’s values culture, which very successfully develops pupils’ self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Leaders are diligent about all aspects of pupils’ safety and welfare. As a result, pupils are safe, and they say that they feel safe and well supported.
- Teaching is very strong. Teachers plan exciting and enriching lessons, which pupils thoroughly enjoy.
- Pupils thrive in this nurturing environment and as a result their outcomes continue to improve.
- Pupils are very well prepared for life after school. They leave with a range of relevant qualifications that help them to achieve their aspirations.
- The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils develop a well-rounded understanding of the world around them and beyond.
- Leaders do not always think strategically about the information that they gather about the standards in the school. Consequently, their analysis of information does not always lead to improvements that quickly build further on this outstanding provision.

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?

- Build on the outstanding provision by making more strategic use of monitoring information to continue to refine and develop the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The proprietor has ensured that all aspects of the independent school standards have been met.
- Leaders are passionate, dedicated and committed to providing a unique and outstanding education. The headteacher has continued to expand the provision and has completed the conversion of the old barns at the Manor. This has provided classroom spaces for learning and extended opportunities for farm work and horticulture.
- The headteacher has created an aspirational ethos which the whole school community shares. There are high expectations of what pupils will achieve and how they will behave.
- The strong culture that permeates everything that the school does is based on fulfilling five values – respect, integrity, courage, kindness and responsibility. These values are evident in the relationships and interactions that pupils and staff have with each other and the way in which pupils approach new challenges. Pupils say that these values are promoted consistently both at school and at home. This prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- The headteacher ensures that teaching is of a high standard through regular checks on classroom practice. Staff are provided with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through training and undertaking further qualifications. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their own development through considering 20 questions about their practice.
- Leaders have a deep knowledge of each individual pupil. They have a thorough understanding of their starting points and any difficulties that they may have had. They use this information to reduce any potential barriers to learning and to ensure that pupils get the precise support that they need in order to flourish.
- The curriculum is innovative and motivates pupils with a desire to learn. It provides a wealth of rich learning opportunities in the classroom, at the farm and during outdoor activities. The curriculum is personalised to interest and engage each pupil in learning. Pupils study English and mathematics and a variety of other subjects, such as rural studies, technology, preparation for independence, arts and crafts, humanities and equine-assisted therapy. Pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem as they become increasingly skilled at horse riding and at participating in coast-to-coast cycle rides. Pupils know how to grow vegetables, which provide for all meals at school. They hand feed the alpacas and describe the important role that alpacas play in keeping foxes away from the hen house.
- Provision to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils have a good understanding of diversity and tolerance and they help others through fund-raising. Accredited units are achieved to consolidate knowledge, for example in understanding equality and diversity. Visits to the James Cook Museum in Whitby provide an understanding of the history and culture of the area.
- The opportunity to study a wide range of accredited courses, including those leading to GCSE, BTEC and functional mathematics and English qualifications, ensures that pupils

gain qualifications that support their chosen path when they leave school.

- The school caters well for the small number of pupils who are over the age of 16.
- Leaders are collecting a range of information about the quality of teaching and learning and the progress that pupils are making. However, they do not yet use this information effectively enough to further enhance teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body. The proprietor of the school, who is also the headteacher, is responsible for governance.
- The proprietor has recently secured the services of an external consultant to hold leaders to account and validate their evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture. Staff understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe and promoting their welfare.
- Securing pupils' safety is a continuous theme that runs across the setting in response to the broad range of experiences that the pupils enjoy. Leaders are very aware of the potential risks to pupils. Activities are carefully risk assessed to take into account the individual needs of the pupils.
- The school has a safeguarding policy which is available to parents and carers in the school prospectus.
- The safeguarding policy meets government requirements. Staff receive regular and appropriate training in safeguarding matters. As a result, they are clear about how to report any concerns they have and understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe.
- The headteacher has devised additional safeguarding training for all staff. This equips staff to understand the particular context of the pupils attending the school and to know how to respond to concerns.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and that they have a trusted adult with whom they can share any problems.
- Risk assessments, and procedures for checking alarms, lighting and maintenance of firefighting equipment contribute to the safety and welfare of the pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Very effective teaching helps pupils to make strong progress. Teachers have a very clear understanding of pupils' needs and abilities. As a consequence, they plan lessons and activities that motivate and engage pupils.
- Carefully targeted questioning encourages all pupils to take an active role in lessons. Every opportunity is taken to reinforce what pupils already know and to check on current learning. As a result, pupils use their communication skills well to clarify and explain their

thinking.

- There are high expectations and high ambition across the school of what pupils will learn. Pupils respond well to these expectations in the classroom and their positive response contributes to their strong progress.
- Respectful and positive relationships between pupils and staff are a strong feature of this school. This results in a very positive climate for learning where pupils display excellent behaviour.
- Pupils benefit highly from the well-established routines throughout the school day. They feel secure and confident enough to try out new things. For example, when the teacher asks if the pupils are ready to commence a task, pupils comment, 'We were born ready'.
- Staff are highly effective in providing opportunities for pupils to develop impressive levels of independence. During the inspection, pupils were mucking out stables, and in a technology lesson, pupils were making picture frames without any direct support from the teacher.
- Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills are planned across all subjects. Pupils complete a reflective diary where they write about what they have been learning and what they could do better next time.
- Resources and equipment to support the curriculum are excellent. Learning environments at both sites are of a very high quality and offer an attractive and stimulating setting.
- The outdoor curriculum enthuses and excites pupils and fosters a real love of learning. Horse riding, equine-assisted therapy, mountain biking, horticulture and farm work provide pupils with vital skills and increasing independence to transfer to their everyday lives. For example, pupils undertake jobs such growing vegetables and taking care of animals on the farm. Pupils value their education; one pupil said that the school 'teaches us what we need in life.'
- All pupils participate in weekly extra-curricular activities, for example, running clubs, cadets, and swimming provide valuable experiences to socialise with other young people in the wider community.
- Pupils read regularly, and in most lessons. They are fluent readers and read with expression and understanding. Pupils can talk about authors that they like and the different genres that interest them.
- Staff produce regular and detailed reports for parents so that they are well informed about all aspects of a pupil's progress across the wide curriculum and their personal and social development. Parents spoken with during the inspection described the very good communication between home and school, which takes place on a daily basis.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school is very successful at re-engaging pupils in school life. Most pupils have experienced challenges with their attendance at other educational placements. However, because of the nurturing ethos, high expectations and expertise of staff, pupils soon

begin to develop a love of learning when they join the school.

- The school's therapeutic approach to helping pupils to overcome past difficulties helps them to develop their self-confidence and well-being.
- The strong and respectful relationships between staff and pupils results in pupils' excellent attitudes to learning. Pupils concentrate well in lessons and they work hard, and this has a positive impact on their progress.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and they take pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils are very polite and courteous to visitors. They speak articulately about their work and what the school has to offer them.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy, through the very effective work that they do in school. A variety of accredited awards are undertaken, for example safety awareness in the kitchen, food hygiene, healthy eating, internet safety and an introduction to first aid.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The nurturing, supportive environment and respectful relationships create a positive and purposeful atmosphere. As a result, pupils' behaviour dramatically improves when they join the school.
- Pupils conduct themselves extremely well in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying in this school. If there is any bullying, it is not tolerated, and it is dealt with quickly and firmly.
- Pupils have often had difficulties with consistent attendance at previous schools. Pupils enjoy coming to this school and as result their attendance is exemplary.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils typically enter the school with low starting points as a result of time spent away from school, due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils make rapid and substantial progress across the curriculum and in their social and emotional well-being when they join the school.
- The school's tracking system shows that many pupils are making outstanding progress across the curriculum and in their personal skills.
- Work in pupils' books shows that overall, pupils make better progress in mathematics than in English. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make similar progress as all other pupils.
- Pupils are keen to read. They read with increasing fluency and accuracy from their starting points. They use their phonic knowledge to help them to blend letters into words and they talk confidently about what they have read.
- Pupils are making strong progress in a range of subjects. Their written work in horse care and horse management is neat and well presented. Pupils' use of subject-specific vocabulary helps them to make links and transfer this knowledge to their practical

lessons. In humanities, pupils have opportunities to produce extended pieces of writing through learning about the history of farming and rainforests.

- Leaders place a high priority on pupils learning the skills that they will need in the future. They learn how to organise their personal belongings, how to undertake domestic duties and how to make meals. This prepares pupils for the responsibilities of adult life.
- Pupils are very successful in achieving accreditation, both in core subject areas and across the wider curriculum. Pupils achieve unit awards for their work in farm studies. For example, introduction to horse management, livestock management, animal husbandry, rearing calves and an introduction to horticulture provide pupils with the skills and knowledge that they need to work independently on the farm.
- Pupils are accredited for their hard work in key stage 4 through a range of qualifications. Pupils study for functional skills in English and mathematics, mathematics at GCSE and BTEC unit certification at entry levels 2 and 3 and level 1.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next stage in life. Their aspirations for the future are identified and mapped out with careers support. At the end of the last academic year, all leavers successfully went on to college placements.

School details

Unique reference number	135113
DfE registration number	841/6003
Inspection number	10093644

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	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	David Bartlett
Chair	Not applicable
Headteacher	David Bartlett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,135
Telephone number	01388 776799
Website	www.peartreeprojects.co.uk
Email address	info@peartreeprojects.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–9 February 2017

Information about this school

- Pear Tree School is a small, independent special school registered for 18 pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Pupils who attend currently are between the ages of nine and 17 years.
- All pupils have identified SEND and many are supported with an education, health and care plan.
- The school provides a therapeutic approach to re-engaging pupils in learning.
- Pupils spend half of the week at Toy Top Farm and half of the week at the recently developed Manor Farm.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

- The school does not have any particular religious denomination.
- The school received a standard inspection in February 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across both of the school sites. Some of the observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher. A detailed scrutiny of pupils' work took place with the involvement of school leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors looked at behaviour during lessons, and at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked to them about the books that they enjoy and those that they are currently reading.
- Inspectors spoke with a social worker.
- Inspectors took account of a small number of responses from Ofsted's free-text survey.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information relating to the independent school standards, health and safety, curriculum planning, assessment records, staff development records, the school's self-evaluation information, and school improvement planning.

Inspection team

Suzette Garland-Grimes, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Patricia Head	Ofsted Inspector

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