

Sycamore House School

365 Queen Street, Withernsea, East Yorkshire HU19 2NT

Inspection dates

2–3 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- School leaders comply fully with the independent school standards and are highly effective in applying them consistently to support pupils' outcomes.
- The proprietor has a clear vision for the school and an unwavering focus on transforming the experience of education for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.
- School leaders are extremely knowledgeable about pupils' needs and show an unwavering commitment to improving the knowledge, understanding and independent living skills of all their pupils. They provide a holistic and personalised approach to learning that leads to improved outcomes for pupils over time.
- Members of the operational board have a wide range of skills and experience which they use to provide a high level of support and challenge to the headteacher.
- School leaders have designed a broad curriculum that is delivered through personalised, activity-based lessons and complemented by experiences of going into the local community.
- Pupils are happy at school and develop very positive attitudes to learning that contribute to improved outcomes. However, school leaders are aware that some pupils are reluctant writers, and this remains an area for ongoing improvement.
- Pupils who had previously experienced disruption in their education and had poor attendance at school make rapid progress once they have settled at the school and this can be seen in overall attendance that is above the national average.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school and are full of praise for the change they have seen in their child since joining the school.
- School leaders are constantly improving and refining the information they gather on pupils. As a result, teachers are able to identify gaps in pupils' prior attainment, particularly with regard to basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- School leaders are aware that there is still more work to do to embed the use of assessment information to support pupils' progress.

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?

- Continue to improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - the school's assessment system is fully embedded and has sufficient detail to support teachers' planning for pupils' progress
 - there are greater opportunities for pupils to write at length and so develop their extended writing skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders have ensured full compliance with the independent school standards. They are knowledgeable about what is expected of them and how to meet these standards consistently.
- The proprietor has a clear vision for the school and a highly ambitious mission focused on delivering a positive future for each individual pupil.
- School leaders are uncompromising in their belief that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities can become confident, independent citizens. This belief underpins the curriculum available to pupils as the headteacher ensures that pupils learn about their world and develop skills to help them live in it safely and independently.
- The headteacher has designed a curriculum for older pupils which is based on three broad pathways covering GCSE qualifications, vocational training and independent living skills. School leaders have an excellent level of knowledge about the neurodevelopmental needs of their pupils. They have designed a curriculum that enhances pupils' understanding of a broad range of subjects and is implemented in a manner that meets the specific learning needs of each pupil.
- The high expectations of the pupils and staff in their school are visible in all aspects of school life and are transforming pupils' experience of school and leading to rapidly improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils.
- The proprietor has ensured that there is appropriate investment in staff and that all staff benefit from ongoing professional development. Staff speak highly of the training they receive and say that it has helped them refine their teaching of the pupils in the school. It is clear from staff records that school leaders monitor training and ensure that it is targeted to support school improvement priorities.
- The proprietor is very aware of the complex nature of the needs of the pupils in the school and has commissioned clinical and educational psychologists to support staff through frequent and regular reviews of the teaching and learning strategies required for each pupil. The headteacher ensures that the strategies and approaches are implemented consistently by all staff. This is contributing to improvements in pupils' ability to engage in lessons and develop constructive social skills.
- The headteacher has established a system of reflective practice which ensures that staff are constantly reviewing and revising their approach in order to maximise opportunities for pupils to improve.
- The headteacher uses a variety of assessment tools to build a profile of pupils' prior attainment upon joining the school. The headteacher has imported this information into an overarching assessment framework and is now adding to the information held on pupils as she tracks their progress over time. This assessment system is generating useful information. However, the headteacher is aware that it is not fully embedded and has a well-considered plan to strengthen the use of information on learning to improve pupils' progress further.

Governance

- The governance structure is an operational management group that reports to the board of directors. The members of the operational group have a wide range of skills and experience in the fields of health and safety, quality assurance and learning development. They are well placed to scrutinise the information provided by the headteacher.
- The proprietor has appointed a head of education and deputy head of education who work across all schools in the proprietor's company. They are experienced individuals who have the skills and knowledge to ensure that monitoring and self-evaluation of the school is highly effective and leading to rapidly improving outcomes for pupils. The head of education monitors the quality of school provision through frequent visits to the school, meetings with pupils and staff and performance management of the headteacher.
- The deputy head of education supports this monitoring of the school through a centrally held tracking system that he updates following regular supervision meetings with the headteacher and uses to inform the operational management group about school performance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- School leaders ensure that information about safeguarding and pupil welfare, such as the school's safeguarding policy, is available to parents and carers upon request and is compliant with current statutory guidance.
- The proprietor provides high-quality induction and training in safeguarding and child protection and audits training profiles frequently to ensure that all staff are up to date with their training and meeting the expectations of the operational management group.
- The headteacher has developed well-organised systems to foster and monitor the safety and well-being of pupils and she ensures that these systems are implemented carefully by all staff. For example, all staff contribute to a detailed school diary which informs the daily handover of information between school staff and carers.
- The positive relationships between staff and pupils that are evident around the school contribute to the safety of pupils.
- The proprietor ensures that the buildings are maintained to a high standard and the health and safety procedures are robust and contribute to pupil safety.
- The headteacher produces comprehensive risk assessments to ensure that staff know how to reduce any risks to the well-being and safety of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers deliver highly personalised programmes and are able to respond quickly to pupils' changing needs throughout the day, and so maximise opportunities for learning.
- Teachers plan carefully using their strong subject knowledge and awareness of pupils' interests to engage and stimulate pupils.
- The proprietor's investment in the building has ensured that teaching spaces and resources are of a high quality. Pupils are happy to be at school all day and have

individualised learning spaces linked to their own needs.

- Teachers have designed learning environments that foster pupil engagement and displays are used effectively to reinforce knowledge. For example, one classroom had been transformed into a seaside resort with sand castles, amusements and a collection of books all linked to the 'By the Sea' topic that was being delivered at the time of the inspection.
- Teachers are able to identify gaps in pupils' literacy and deliver teaching that supports pupils' phonics, spelling and basic writing skills. Teachers acknowledge, however, that pupils are often reluctant to write independently or at length and this is an area for ongoing improvement.
- The teaching of mathematics is secure. Teachers identify and address pupils' weaker areas in this subject well. Evidence from workbooks shows that pupils engage fully with the work provided and are making rapid progress in this subject.
- The headteacher has ensured that the strategies and approaches advised by external experts are implemented consistently by all staff. This is leading to improvement in terms of pupil interest, reduction in anxiety and development of pupils' communication and interaction with peers. For example, a visit to a local play area, where teachers focused on training pupils to take turns, helped them to play safely with one another.
- Teachers incorporate some experiential, community-based learning every day, which underpins classroom learning. For example, teachers had planned lessons about being at the seaside, which allowed pupils to use local beaches for art projects as well as teaching them aspects of the geography scheme of work and developing investigative fieldwork skills.
- Parents say they are kept well informed about how their child is progressing in the school and what they need to do to improve further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- School leaders are passionate in their desire to develop pupils' ability to be independent in their local community. Teachers deliver structured activities out in the community that contribute to improvements in pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. One such example, observed during the inspection, was the use of dog walking to help pupils learn how to take responsibility for others.
- School leaders have ensured that there is a planned, rich and varied approach to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education in the formal curriculum and the experiential learning that pupils gain through regular trips out of school. Teachers work hard to develop learning activities that help pupils to understand people's differences.
- Parents have no concerns about their child's personal development or welfare. Those parents spoken with during the course of the inspection commented on how they could see improvements in their child's ability to settle to learning, try different activities with confidence and communicate more with others.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour observed during the inspection was friendly and there was no disruption to learning.
- School leaders have created a very positive culture for learning in a short space of time since the school opened in January 2019. They have unwaveringly high expectations for their pupils and their staff.
- Pupils' records show that their ability to remain calm and cooperate with adults improves rapidly during their time in the school.
- Pupils value their time in school and say that they enjoy their lessons. They show positive attitudes to learning and have excellent attendance.
- Pupils have often had a lot of interruptions in their education prior to moving to this school. Some pupils enter the school with a poor history of attendance but overall attendance in the school is currently above the national average.
- Teachers are quick to challenge any anti-social behaviour or language and work hard to develop pupils' understanding of what it means to behave appropriately and take responsibility for their actions. Consequently, pupils' behaviour improves.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make progress rapidly upon joining the school, with significant improvements in their attendance as well as their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The headteacher has established a framework for assessment which ensures that pupils' starting points when they join the school are clear and inform teachers' planning. The headteacher agrees, however, that the impact of the use of ongoing assessments is less clear because the tracking systems that record ongoing checks on pupils' progress and development assessments are not yet fully embedded across the school.
- Parents speak confidently about their relationship with the school. They are very pleased with the level of communication they receive and are delighted with the progress their child has made since joining the school. Parents spoken to during the inspection commented that their child had difficulty attending school previously. They are delighted to note that in a short space of time in this school they have seen them attend fully and improve their social interaction.
- Pupils read well and have made progress in writing, but further improvement of extended writing skills would enhance pupils' ability to write independently and for a variety of different purposes.
- Pupils have the opportunity to gain a wide range of qualifications and are well prepared for their progression to further education, training or employment. Pupils receive careers advice through the curriculum and have access to careers fairs and personal appointments with careers advisers.

School details

Unique reference number	146333
DfE registration number	811/6018
Inspection number	10100344

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
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Francis Ashcroft
Headteacher	Elizabeth Marsden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,940
Telephone number	03336 006600
Website	No website
Email address	sycamore.headteacher@hexagoncare.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Sycamore House is in a coastal location in the East Riding of Yorkshire.
- The school has a sole proprietor, is part of Hexagon Care Services and does not have a governing body.
- Sycamore House is a special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan, but this is not a requirement to be admitted to the school.
- The school caters for pupils who are resident in the attached children's home.
- The school has capacity for four pupils.
- The school staff comprise a headteacher, additional teacher, higher-level teaching assistant and teaching assistant. There is also a head of education and deputy head of

education, who oversee all schools owned by Hexagon Care Services.

- The school opened in January 2019. The headteacher is new in post and joined the school in April 2019.
- The proprietor group has formed an operational board that provides the function of governance and meets every six weeks.
- The school operates on one site.
- The school does not currently use alternative education provision but this will be decided on an individual basis.

Information about this inspection

- One inspector was allocated to this inspection and carried out the following activities:
 - a tour of the school with visits to all classrooms and social areas
 - a check of the school buildings against the independent school standards
 - observations of lessons and of the start of the school day
 - scrutiny of pupils' work covering all subjects
 - scrutiny of school documents, policies and the arrangements to safeguard pupils
 - meetings with the proprietor, headteacher and all staff
 - contact with parents through face-to-face meetings and telephone calls
 - telephone contact with local authority commissioners
 - meetings with pupils.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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