

# Elmbank Learning Centre

Viewly Hill Farm, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 1PQ

**Inspection dates**

4 July 2019

**Overall outcome**

**The school is unlikely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

*Paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i)*

- The proposed school will be part of the Witherslack Group. The company has employed an experienced headteacher who will oversee two schools, the proposed new school and the headteacher's current school.
- Discussion with the headteacher shows that he has high expectations for pupils and is clear that their individual needs are to be met in the classroom. It is planned that pupils will receive social, emotional and clinical support during their time attending school. A further aspiration is that pupils may move towards attending other larger schools as their mental health improves.
- The headteacher has already put in place a curriculum policy which outlines the proposed timetable and curriculum. This is supported by a comprehensive range of schemes of work which offer a broad and balanced curriculum for prospective pupils. This meets the requirements of the independent school standards.
- Schemes of work show that mathematics and English are to be taught as discrete subjects. Other subjects such as science, geography and history will be taught using a themed approach. Discussions with the headteacher made it clear that the curriculum will depend upon the needs of individual pupils, and that a bespoke approach will be used across the school.
- Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is to be taught regularly. Due to pupils' vulnerabilities and needs, the curriculum content will be supported by health professionals and the clinical team, when necessary.
- The curriculum outlined at the time of the inspection offers pupils a range of opportunities to ensure that they develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

*Paragraph 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii)*

- The headteacher has already put in place a successful programme for delivering careers education to pupils at his current school. Pupils are offered careers advice in

key stage 3. An external advisor leads the programme. Email confirmation shows that a similar programme is to be set up at the school which will support pupils to make informed choices about their future careers.

*Paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i), 3(j), 4*

- Two experienced teaching staff and three teaching assistants have been appointed to their new roles at the school. They are currently undergoing specialist training to enable them to have a full understanding of the needs of vulnerable pupils.
- In order to cover all subject areas, particularly for older pupils, the leaders aim to use staff, who are subject specialists from another of the company's schools, which is close to the proposed school site. It is also proposed that when practical rooms are needed, for example for GCSE science, pupils will travel to another of the company's schools close by.
- Documents currently in place show that school leaders have already put in place a system to check on pupils' starting points. It is planned that pupils will be set targets in line with their age and aptitude. Work set, it is envisaged by leaders, will ensure that pupils are able to make the progress of which they are capable, once they have settled into school.
- The headteacher is planning to use the same system which is currently in his school to track and monitor pupils' progress. This system is used effectively across the company.
- Leaders' philosophy for the pupils is that they are likely to need time to re-engage with learning after periods of absence from school. Personalised learning plans are aimed at getting pupils ready to learn and to function in a school setting, as well as offering them an exciting and vibrant curriculum.
- The standards in Part 1 are likely to be met.

## Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

*Paragraph 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(v), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5(d)(ii), 5(d)(iii)*

- The proposed PSHE curriculum covers a wide range of topics and is based on resources from the PSHE association. Planned work for pupils includes developing and managing personal feelings, enterprise projects, and understanding British values.
- The personal development programme, combined with an extensive timetable of religious celebrations, it is planned, will enable pupils to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills and knowledge, as well as tolerance and respect for others from different faiths and religions.
- Through studying topics such as prejudice and discrimination, as well as through discussions on current affairs, leaders' plan will develop a sound knowledge of right from wrong and respect for civil and criminal law.
- The headteacher and proprietors intend that pupils should learn about the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010 through the PSHE curriculum. Leaders will ensure that any material presented by external speakers is checked before it is presented and that any external speakers provide pupils with broad and

balanced viewpoints. All external speakers will be approved by the principal.

- The headteacher is clear that any material presented by external speakers is checked before being presented to pupils. All external speakers, it is planned, will be stringently vetted before they come into school.
- The standards in Part 2 are likely to be met.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)*

- The company has provided an appropriate safeguarding and child protection policy that reflects recent government guidance. The policy is clear and informative and describes procedures which are bespoke to the proposed school. For example, the policy already names the designated safeguarding leads (DSL). Leaders intend that the policy will be published on the school's website when it is launched. In the meantime, a copy is available to parents and local authorities through the school information pack.
- At the time of the inspection, staff were receiving a range of different training, including safeguarding training. Safer recruitment training has been used by leaders to ensure that checks have been carried out to ensure that staff are fit to work with pupils.
- The headteacher has developed working partnerships with external agencies and adults who work with pupils in his current school. He intends to replicate this in the proposed school in order to support and protect pupils.

#### *Paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c), 10*

- The headteacher has ensured that there is an appropriate behaviour policy in place. The proposed policy links closely to the policy in his current school, but empathetic changes have taken into account the vulnerabilities of the proposed pupil group.
- In line with other schools in the group, the headteacher aims to focus on rewarding positive behaviour. In line with this, the behaviour policy focuses on positive attitudes to behaviour. Information about the rewards and sanctions that are available are to be made clear to pupils. Overall, the policy aligns with the school's ethos of respect and equality. There is to be a system in place for recording, analysing and sharing behaviour information.
- The anti-bullying strategy is clear and spells out that bullying will not be tolerated in the school. There are clear roles for all involved in the school and clear processes for dealing with and recording any incidents that may occur.

#### *Paragraph 11, 12, 13, 14, 15*

- The health and safety policy is personalised to the school. Cleaning materials and other hazardous materials are to be stored in locked cupboards. There are appropriate actions in place to ensure that health and safety is a priority.
- A fire assessment has been conducted on the building. Leaders have ensured that the fire safety procedures meet requirements. Fire signage is clear, fire extinguishers are in place and there are systems ready to record regular fire checks and maintenance.
- The first aid policy gives guidance on treating pupils should they injure themselves or

become ill. There are forms ready to use to record any incidents. A first aid kit is available in the medical room, with sufficient supplies to meet the requirements of pupils.

- The school's registration request is for six pupils. The proposed number of five staff is likely to be sufficient for effective deployment to meet the needs of prospective pupils. The headteacher intends to employ additional staff, should additional support be needed to increase the curriculum offer.
- No pupils are currently on roll. The proprietor has ensured that the admissions register is ready and legally compliant. All pupils attending the school will be placed on the school roll. The school has in place an electronic system for recording attendance and has a system ready to analyse attendance information in line with that in the headteacher's current school.

*Paragraph 16, 16(a), 16(b)*

- The headteacher has ensured that there is a risk assessment policy in place. This details when staff use risk assessments and what they should contain. There is a clear format for producing a risk assessment in line with company policy.
- Risk assessments available during the inspection show that the headteacher is proficient at measuring and identifying possible risks.
- The standards in Part 3 are likely to be met.

**Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

*Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(2)(f), 18(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c)*

- The proprietor has ensured that all appropriate checks have been carried out on leaders, staff and the trustees who form the proprietor body. The checks were carried out prior to staff beginning their roles.

*Paragraph 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(6)*

- All checks that have been carried out are recorded appropriately on a single central register.
- The standards in Part 4 are likely to be met.

**Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

*Paragraph 22, 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c)*

- The school is a new purpose-built building. The building is small with two teaching areas and one disabled toilet, which is a lockable room. At the time of the inspection, the door would not shut due to swelling of the wood. However, the proprietor is confident this will be rectified before the school is due to open.
- There is sufficient space for pupils to change for physical education (PE). Plans looked at during the inspection showed that PE for younger pupils was to be delivered in the area outside the school. However, it is intended that, for older pupils, PE will take place off site and will use a local sports facility. Younger pupils will go home for

showers.

*Paragraph 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(1)(c), 24(2)*

- At the start of the inspection, the proprietor suggested that if pupils were sick or injured, they would return home. By the end of the inspection, it was proposed that medical accommodation was to be in a small room very close to the toilet. Leaders have put in place an appropriate bed for the medical examination and treatment of pupils.
- There is a first aid kit with appropriate contents to treat minor injuries.
- It is planned that prospective staff will all have completed first aid training. Those coming from other schools owned by the company have already completed their training.

*Paragraph 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b)*

- Overall, the building is clean and newly painted but is very small. This is because the proprietor expects pupils' length of stay at the school to be defined by the success of their treatment. Few resources were available at the start of the inspection, so it was not possible to judge what leaders intend to put in place. For example, the headteacher suggested that pupils will use a form of handheld, electronic tablet to access information technology (IT). At the time of the inspection, no electronic tablets were in place or any other IT equipment.
- The sound and lighting in each classroom are suitable for teaching.
- External lights are in place and were in working order. They light the entrance steps, ensuring that pupils can enter and leave safely when it is dark.

*Paragraph 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a), 28(2)(b)*

- It is planned that pupils can access drinking water in a purpose-built kitchen area in a building close to the school. This is labelled appropriately. Access to water is readily available.
- The disabled toilet and sink are new and are in working order. Soap and hand-drying facilities are available for handwashing.
- The temperature of the hot water is regulated so that it does not pose a scalding risk to pupils or staff.

*Paragraph 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b)*

- There are two areas outside the school which, at the time of the inspection, were not finished to a good enough standard for them to be used by pupils for the intent described in the school's plans. Soil and weeds with some grass were present, however, no turf had been laid on either area.
- While plans were in place for PE to be carried out for older pupils at a local sports centre, plans showed younger pupils are to receive PE on site. At the time of the inspection, the area outside was not ready for pupils to undertake the planned PE lessons, nor for pupils to play on at break or lunchtime.
- Adjacent to these areas was a further concreted area with capped utility pipes sticking out for water and electricity. The headteacher was unsure what the proprietor intended to do with this area, but it seemed likely it would be a further building in

time.

- The standards in part 5 are not likely to be met.

#### Part 6. Provision of information

*Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(1)(f), 32(1)(g), 32(1)(h), 32(1)(i), 32(1)(j), 2(3), 32(3)(a), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(c), 32(3)(d), 32(3)(e), 32(3)(f)*

- At the start of the inspection, the proprietor had ensured that all required information relating to the independent school standards was readily available to parents and the local authority through a learners starting pack.
- The school had designed a website and it was ready to go live. It is planned that the website will link directly with the company's own website. All policies and required information will be available to parents via the pupils' starting pack.
- The headteacher plans, in line with company policy, and the practice in his current school, that there will be regular reviews of the progress and attainment made by pupils. This will be communicated to parents or social workers via regular written reports. The headteacher plans that pupils who have an education, health and care plan will have regular review meetings scheduled in line with legal requirements.
- The proprietor has ensured that a system is in place to report income and expenditure to the local authority.

*Paragraph 32(2), 32(2)(a), 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii), 32(2)(d)*

- Contact information for the principal and proprietor body will be available on the school website.
- At the time of the inspection, the proprietor had not put in place a governing body.
- The standards in Part 6 are likely to be met.

#### Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

*Paragraph 33, 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 33(d), 33(e), 33(f), 33(g), 33(h), 33(i), 33(i)(i), 33(i)(ii), 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii), 33(k)*

- The proprietor has ensured that a complaints policy is in place and meets the requirements set out in the independent school standards.
- The policy is clear and sets out the timescales for the management of a complaint by the school. The policy describes clearly the stages a complaint will go through and what will happen once the complaint has been completed.
- The standards in Part 7 are likely to be met.

#### Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)*

- The headteacher is an experienced school leader who will bring to the post a wealth of knowledge and information.
- The proprietor and wider proprietor body bring vast and varying experience to the school. Their range of skills should enable them to hold school leaders to account for the progress pupils make.

- The proprietor has appropriate plans in place to ensure that most of the ISS are met consistently. However, the proprietor is also of the opinion that it is not necessary to have all aspects of the ISS met at the time of a pre-registration inspection. As a result, it was not possible to gain the required evidence to ensure that all standards were likely to be met at the time of the inspection.
- The proprietor and headteacher have ensured that pupils' welfare is a priority. Through the PSHE curriculum and SMSC education and time spent with the therapy team, pupils will learn how to value themselves and develop resilience and heightened self-esteem. These skills, it is planned, will prepare them well for the next stage in their lives.
- The proprietor has also ensured that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training.
- The standards in part 8 are not all likely to be met.

#### Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school leaders have an accessibility plan which details how the school seeks to improve access to the curriculum, the building and information for pupils with a disability. The plan is over three years and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school is unlikely to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements, as set out in the annex of this report.



## Proposed school details

Unique reference number	146824
DfE registration number	808/6006
Inspection number	10104143

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Limited
Chair	Mike Barrow
Headteacher	Alistair Sidgewick
Annual fees (day pupils)	£74,000
Telephone number	01539 566081
Website	Not yet
Email address	<a href="mailto:Lynne.nixon@witherslackgroup.co.uk">Lynne.nixon@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	NA	7–16	7–16
Number of pupils on the school roll	NA	6	6

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	NA	Girls
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	NA	6

Number of part-time pupils	NA	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	NA	6
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan		6
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	0	6

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	NA	3
Number of part-time teaching staff	NA	1

## Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is a very small unit situated in a rural location close to Stockton-on-Tees.
- The school will be part of the Witherslack Group of schools and will meet the needs of a small group of vulnerable girls. It is planned that pupils will access support from a team of clinical psychologists during their time at the school.
- The company also proposes that when girls are considered by the therapy team to be fit to do so, they will return to a more mainstream educational setting.
- The school will consider pupils referred by the local authority for admission. School leaders are clear that day pupils will not be admitted in the future.
- The school intends to cater for pupils with a variety of special educational needs, including behavioural, emotional and social difficulty and autistic spectrum disorder as well as their initial vulnerabilities.
- The school will not have a religious character.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with the headteacher and members of the proprietorial board, including the proprietor
- The inspector analysed documents provided by the headteacher. These included safeguarding documentation and documents relating to the proposed curriculum.

## Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

**The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school standards**

### **Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable—
  - 29(1)(a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and
  - 29(1)(b) pupils to play outside.

### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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