

Wennington Hall School

Lodge Lane, Wennington, Lancaster, Lancashire LA2 8NS

Inspection dates

3–4 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected in the residential provision	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Until this year, frequent changes of leadership, uncertainty about the school's future and financial concerns took leaders' attention away from improving the standard of education. Staff morale has been low.
- Despite some recent improvement, teaching is inadequate. Teachers' expectations are too low, their subject knowledge is weak and time in lessons is not used well.
- Teaching does not enable pupils to become resilient and perseverant learners.
- The school does not meet all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- Ineffective curriculum planning exacerbates weaknesses in teaching and learning, including in English and mathematics. Pupils do not perform well at the end of key stage 4. They are not sufficiently well prepared for their next steps.
- Leaders' strategies to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not based on a clear understanding of the barriers that these pupils face.
- Assessment is weak. Teachers do not know or understand how to assess pupils' learning in their subjects. As a result, neither leaders nor teachers have the essential information they need to evaluate pupils' performance.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has accurately identified the school's weaknesses and gained the support of staff. Leaders have already taken some effective action to secure improvements.
- The head of care has taken urgent action to improve the quality of residential provision. Residential pupils are well cared for, happy and safe.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders have ensured that robust systems and procedures are in place so that pupils feel safe.
- Most pupils attend school every day and on time. Pupils' behaviour has improved. The number of exclusions has decreased considerably.

Compliance with national minimum standards for residential special schools (if RSS)

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the national minimum standards for residential special schools (and associated requirements). The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make strong progress and achieve the qualifications that they need to be successful by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations of what pupils should and could achieve
 - use time purposefully to secure pupils' learning
 - plan interesting and purposeful lessons which help pupils to develop the essential qualities for learning, including resilience, independence and perseverance
 - focus on improving pupils' skills in reading comprehension and writing composition
 - provide opportunities for pupils to investigate and solve problems, think for themselves and develop fluency in the fundamentals of mathematics.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - planning a cohesive curriculum which meets the needs of pupils and enables teachers to build on pupils' prior learning across the full range of subjects
 - ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge to assess pupils' learning in the subjects that they teach
 - providing suitable, high-quality training and support for teaching staff so that they acquire the subject knowledge that they need to do their jobs well
 - ensuring that leaders and governors have up-to-date and reliable information about key aspects of the school's performance, including valid assessment information, so that they can evaluate the impact of their actions to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes
 - further building the capacity of the governing body, including through relevant training and support, so that all governors have the skills, experience and expertise to further support senior leaders in bringing about school improvement
 - ensuring that leaders' strategies to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are based on a precise understanding of pupils' barriers to learning.

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- Every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to

supply the information to the child) and add personal statements or statements correcting errors. (NMS 22.1)

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
The effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected in the residential provision	Good

- Governors and senior leaders have only recently focused their efforts on much needed improvement to teaching and pupils' outcomes. There is much to do to ensure that pupils at this school receive an acceptable standard of education.
- Staff morale has been low. Uncertainty about the school's future has caused some staff anxiety about job security. Staff have not benefited from effective support and training to help them do their jobs well. Consequently, the quality of teaching, despite showing some signs of improvement, remains inadequate.
- Leaders have put in place stronger systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school's work. Nonetheless, weak assessment systems mean that they are not able to gauge how well pupils are learning across the curriculum and throughout the school. This means that leaders and governors are not able to check the impact of their work to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The curriculum offer is poor. It lacks cohesion. Curriculum plans do not set out what leaders and teachers expect pupils to learn in each subject and year group. As a result, pupils are not able to build on what they already know and can do. Leaders have not routinely checked on whether pupils are acquiring the essential knowledge set out in the national curriculum and examination specifications.
- The ad hoc approach to curriculum planning, coupled with weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge, is a key reason why pupils' academic outcomes have not improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' progress is weak across the school. Pupils are not sufficiently well prepared for the end of key stage 4 examinations. Consequently, standards remain extremely low.
- Leaders have not ensured that they have sufficient understanding of the barriers to learning faced by those pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding and those with SEND. They have not pinpointed the strategies which could have real impact in improving outcomes for these groups.
- The appointment of a substantive headteacher in January 2019 proved to be a turning point for the school. The school's decline has been arrested. While there are still many failings in the standard of education offered to pupils who attend this school, the necessary building blocks for securing future improvement have been put into place. The headteacher has, for example, successfully addressed pupils' poor behaviour and attendance. Pupils now display attitudes that enable them to learn.
- The new headteacher's honest evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses means that actions for securing further improvement are realistic and accurate.
- The headteacher has secured the confidence and respect of most of the staff and pupils. He has made himself approachable to them. He has listened to his colleagues'

ideas and shared his views. Recent access to counselling services is providing much-needed support for staff.

- Leaders provide clear direction and set high expectations in relation to standards of care. The headteacher and head of care have a good working relationship. Staff report feeling more included in developing this aspect of the school's work.
- While improvements have been made to the standards of care, there are still unmet national minimum standards. This is because leaders do not have sufficient evidence of residential pupils' progress. For example, written evidence is not available for those pupils undertaking their independence programme. A new outcomes tracker document to capture pupils' progress is in place, but this has not been implemented quickly enough. Consequently, staff are not yet sufficiently clear about their roles and responsibilities when undertaking key worker sessions with the pupils.
- Staff encourage pupils to contribute to their community. Those pupils who are working towards the Duke of Edinburgh's Award take part in voluntary work, for example planting seeds in the local village. Pupils raise money for charities by taking part in events such as Comic Relief.
- Pupils relish the wealth of extra-curricular and enrichment activities they take part in. They talked enthusiastically to inspectors about their frequent trips and visits. During the inspection, some pupils played in an inter-school football tournament, while others went kayaking and quad-biking.

Governance of the school

- Following the resignations of most of the governors in 2017, there was a considerable period when the membership of the governing body was depleted. New governor appointments have since ensured that the governing body has the range of skills and expertise needed to take the school forward.
- Governors have recently shifted their focus to the education of current pupils. They have started to challenge and support leaders more appropriately. For example, they have made sure that weaknesses in safeguarding have been resolved. Moreover, they have secured the appointment of a permanent headteacher.
- The lack of relevant and reliable information about pupils' performance makes it difficult for governors to hold leaders to account.
- Governors have not ensured that they have paid sufficient heed to the concerns of staff, pupils, parents and carers. This has led to considerable frustration, as well as complaints from both staff and parents.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have made sure that rigorous checks are carried out on all staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Since the previous inspection, leaders have made sure that there are robust systems and procedures in place to keep pupils safe. All staff have received up-to-date, relevant training so that they understand their roles

and responsibilities. Staff routinely record and report any concerns, which are followed up diligently by the designated safeguarding leads. The safeguarding leads work well with other agencies to support pupils and their families.

- Pupils who spoke to inspectors are confident about speaking to adults in the school about any worries or concerns they may have. They trust adults to take swift and decisive action when needed.
- Pupils learn about potential risks and how to manage them, for example child sexual exploitation and cyber bullying. They report that they feel safe at school.
- The school and residential provision have a fully integrated approach to promoting the safety and well-being of pupils. Both groups of staff are highly vigilant. Staff communicate concerns effectively so that nothing is missed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching has not improved enough since the previous inspection. Teachers' weak subject knowledge, poor planning and low expectations have led to pupils' inadequate achievement.
- Teachers do not plan learning which builds up pupils' knowledge over time or fosters their interest in different subjects. Too often, teachers set pupils tasks which do not help them to acquire relevant knowledge. These activities are 'time fillers', with little academic value.
- Teachers do not use assessment information well to evaluate pupils' prior learning. For example, there are considerable missed opportunities when pupils join the school in Year 7 to capitalise on the wealth of information available from primary schools. Instead, time is wasted carrying out further tests at the start of key stage 3. Additionally, staff do not use this information well to inform their planning, and as a result lessons do not take into account what pupils already know and can do.
- Teachers' lack of specialist knowledge means that some pupils do not have their additional needs identified, assessed or met during their time at the school. For example, a number of pupils have some unidentified speech, language and communication needs which are impacting on their learning and behaviour.
- Few pupils have developed a love of reading. The library has many high-quality books, but pupils do not routinely access this resource. Moreover, leaders and teachers do not prioritise support for those pupils who lack the literacy skills they need. As a result, pupils' weak literacy skills remain a barrier to them accessing the curriculum during their time at the school.
- Teachers' decisions about the content and sequence of teaching in mathematics are haphazard. Despite pupils' different abilities, all pupils revisit the same learning from key stage 2 when they start in Year 7. This pays no regard to each pupil's security of understanding of the different concepts. Pupils have few opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solving problems and reasoning about their work. Consequently, they do not understand or master the topics they cover.
- Teachers provide pupils with more specific feedback now, which is in line with the school's new marking and feedback policy. This gives all pupils more precise

information about how well they are getting on in their lessons.

- Leaders have recently put in place training and support for teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers benefit from the opportunities to work with colleagues in local schools as well as attending subject-specific training. Moreover, leaders are using information from a recent teaching and learning audit to put in place targeted support for individual teaching staff. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy lessons and make better progress now in some subjects, such as personal, social and health education and computing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The vast majority of pupils who join the school have a history of educational failure. Many have not routinely had access to lessons and so have considerable gaps in their learning. Despite these challenges, most pupils settle well and enjoy coming to school.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem, particularly through their outdoor-education programme. However, a lack of challenge in lessons means that pupils do not transfer qualities such as perseverance, resilience and confidence to their academic work.
- Pupils are not sufficiently well prepared for their subsequent move to college or employment. The school provides them with a wealth of advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their next steps. However, there are limited planned opportunities to help them develop the essential skills they will need. For example, they are not helped to travel independently, organise their own books and equipment or develop study skills.
- Trips and visits, for example to a Buddhist temple, provide opportunities for pupils to find out about different religions. However, they have few opportunities to mix with the diverse group of young people who make up modern British youth.
- Pupils' general knowledge is weak. They do not keep up to date with significant national and international news. They do not have enough knowledge to inform their views on politics, justice or the environment.
- Leaders and staff are determined to make sure that all pupils can make a success of their time at Wennington Hall. The pastoral team works well with different partners to create a personalised programme for each of these pupils. This is exemplified by the swift responses put in place by the team when a pupil's circumstances change. Individual case studies testify to the positive impact of this work on pupils and their families.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The appointment of the substantive headteacher has had a very positive impact on pupils' behaviour, following a period of decline after the previous inspection. Recently, the numbers of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion has decreased considerably. In addition, few of these pupils have repeat exclusions. The number of days lost to exclusion has decreased substantially. When pupils are excluded, the school makes sure that this time is used well to put in place suitable reintegration plans to support the pupil.
- After the previous inspection, pupils' attendance declined. This year, leaders have arrested this decline. Most pupils attend school every day and on time. Leaders have introduced effective systems and procedures to follow up all absences. They make sure that pupils and parents are in no doubt about the importance of good attendance. The pastoral team works closely with families who are struggling to get their children to school.
- Staff explained to inspectors how frequent changes in leadership and uncertainty over the school's future created anxiety among pupils and staff, which resulted in little or no improvement in pupils' behaviour. Staff cite regular changes to school systems and a lack of direction and consistency as key reasons why behaviour remained very poor.
- The headteacher ensures that there is a more consistent response to poor behaviour across the school. Incidents are less frequent, as intensive support has been put in place for those pupils with the most challenging behaviour. Leaders now use information from online recording and reporting to help them to identify patterns and trends in the behaviour of groups and individuals.
- Pupils told inspectors that staff deal well with any bullying incidents. Some pupils are upset by name-calling but feel that this is usually done 'in jest'. Pupils feel that those pupils who do call other pupils names do not intend the upset this 'jesting' may cause. Again, staff challenge this behaviour when it happens.
- Leaders make sure that the academic progress, attendance, behaviour and welfare of the very small number of pupils who access alternative provision are monitored closely. Staff respond quickly to address any emerging issues.
- Staff ensure that the small number of pupils who attend off-site alternative provision are well supervised.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils often join the school after a period of significant turbulence in their education. When they start, most are working below the standards expected for their age. Although the school carries out baseline assessments of pupils when they start at the school, these provide teachers with limited useful information. Moreover, this information is not used well to plan teaching. A lack of specialist screening means that some additional needs, such as those relating to speech, language and communication, go unnoticed. This further inhibits the progress of these pupils.
- Pupils make limited progress from their starting points across the curriculum. Lack of curriculum planning, weak teaching and low expectations mean that too much valuable learning time is wasted. Teachers do not give pupils the help that they need to retain

the knowledge that they have been taught.

- Assessment is weak, so it is difficult for leaders and teachers to accurately measure the progress that pupils make from their starting points. Leaders and teachers can make generalised statements about pupils' achievement, but a lack of robust and reliable information calls into question the accuracy of these assessments.
- Most pupils settle into school, build good relationships with staff and take part in a wealth of activities. However, pupils remain overly reliant on adult direction and supervision. They do not develop the essential skills which they need to be successful in adult life.
- Pupils do not learn to read and write as well as they should. The school does not have a systematic approach to teaching reading and writing. Lessons do not build on what pupils already know and can do. Moreover, opportunities to practise reading and writing are insufficient to enable pupils to make the rapid progress needed. As a result, they do not perform well in external examinations at the end of key stage 4.
- Pupils' grasp of mathematics is weak. Their mathematical learning is not consolidated effectively and they do not become fluent with basic mathematical operations. As with English, they do not achieve as well as they should in external mathematics examinations at the end of key stage 4.
- Pupils gain both academic and vocational qualifications. However, the standards achieved are low. This means that the choices available to them when they leave the school are limited.
- Although the vast majority of pupils move on to education, employment and training when they leave the school, some do not sustain these choices as they are insufficiently equipped to deal with the challenges that they face in different environments.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

Good

- Leaders have not ensured that the residential provision consistently meets all the national minimum standards to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Leaders have not ensured that they have an accurate, permanent record of each pupil's progress.
- Frequent changes of senior leadership, both in the school and in the residential provision, have had a negative impact on the quality of provision for residential pupils since the previous inspection. However, both staff and pupils are positive about the new residential management arrangements. Staff told inspectors that they now feel supported, listened to and well trained to fulfil their responsibilities. Their morale has improved significantly. They said that leaders and managers are now a frequent and visible presence in the residential houses.
- Residential pupils make sustained personal progress over their time at the school. For example, these pupils develop lasting relationships with their peers, and their school attendance improves.
- Pupils build secure and trusting relationships with staff. The organisation, experience and expertise of these staff mean that they are able to effectively meet the different

needs of residential pupils.

- Pupils enjoy their day-to-day lives at the school. The residential houses are comfortable and well maintained. Pupils appreciate both their indoor and outdoor space that facilitates both communal activity and privacy well.
- The staff work with the pupils to support them in moving on from the residential provision. This work includes giving pupils access to work experience.
- Staff carefully oversee the approach to pupils' healthcare. They communicate with health professionals promptly if they have any concerns. This ensures that pupils receive appropriate, timely medical support.
- All medication is stored securely and in accordance with the pharmaceutical guidance for residential and children's homes. Controlled medication is stored securely in a locked cabinet in a locked room. All medication is administered and recorded in appropriate formats.

School details

Unique reference number	119873
Social care unique reference number	SC035805
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10057900

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Number of boarders on roll	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Laura Brennan
Headteacher	Marc Peart
Telephone number	01524 221333
Website	www.wenningtonhall.lancs.sch.uk
Email address	head@wenningtonhall.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7-8 December 2016

Information about this school

- Wennington Hall School is a day and residential school situated in a former country house in Wennington, a village in Lancashire.
- A small proportion of pupils attend on a residential basis. The number of boarders has declined since the previous inspection.

- A high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding.
- All pupils are identified as having social, emotional and mental health needs and have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has a high adult-to-pupil ratio.
- There have been four interim headteachers since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has been in post since January 2019. The head of care was appointed in November 2018. Most of the governors have been appointed since the previous inspection, including the chair.
- Following the previous inspection, the Department for Education issued the school with a directive academy order. A suitable sponsor has not been found.
- A small number of key stage 4 pupils have access to alternative provision. These pupils study off site, following online learning programmes leading to GCSE, level 1/2 and functional-skills qualifications.
- The previous full integrated inspection was in December 2016. The last inspection of residential provision was in May 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors toured the school, including the residential areas.
- The inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school and made joint observations with the headteacher.
- The inspectors checked work in a range of pupils' books.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, a representative of the local authority and the chair and members of the governing body.
- The inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, school improvement planning and assessment information.
- The inspectors spoke both formally and informally with pupils and observed them during the school day.
- The inspectors also considered the 22 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey.
- There were two responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.
- The inspector considered the 69 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and spoke formally and informally with both care and education staff.

Inspection team

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