

The Birches

c/o Hexagon Care Services, Unit 1 Tustin Court, Port Way, Preston, Lancashire PR2 2YQ

Inspection date

3 October 2019

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b), 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and reflects the latest statutory guidance. The school does not have a website. This policy is available to parents and carers on request and is summarised in the school's prospectus.
- All staff have undertaken safeguarding training. Leaders regularly evaluate that safeguarding is given high importance. They effectively monitor and strengthen the system for protecting the welfare, health and safety of pupils. For example, senior staff make sure that staff know all aspects of key statutory guidance on safeguarding by providing detailed training and regular safeguarding updates.

Paragraph 11, 12, 14

- The detailed health and safety policy references a broad range of other safeguarding documents. Together, these provide enough detail to ensure that staff comply with relevant laws. Planned health and safety reviews of the new premises will ensure that health and safety requirements will be met.
- The proprietor will ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Maintenance of firefighting equipment (such as fire extinguishers and the fire alarm) is undertaken annually. During the inspection, paperwork was provided to confirm that such checks have been made in the new premises.
- The fire risk assessment shows that the new premises comply with regulations and meet the required standards. Fire routes are free from clutter and are clearly visible. Clear signage is in place.
- Leaders have planned a high staff-to-pupil ratio for staff to supervise pupils well throughout the school day, both in the building and around the school site. This is to ensure the safety of pupils.

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

- The proprietor has a detailed risk assessment policy. Additionally, risk assessments exist for a range of other educational purposes including curriculum and extra-curricular activities, fire risk assessments, and safeguarding of individual pupils. Leaders will use their detailed risk assessments to identify hazards and to plan and take action to reduce potential risks.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Paragraph 17, 18, 19, 21

- The proprietors and leaders ensure that checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. There is also a high-quality induction programme for new staff. This contributes to the effective safeguarding culture.
- Leaders plan to employ existing staff at the new premises. This ensures that arrangements are in place to support the welfare, health and safety of pupils at the new site.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(1)(c), 24(2)

- Suitable toilet facilities are provided for the use of pupils. Toilets are in individual cubicles provided with suitable locks. They are for the sole use of the pupils. There is an adequate number for the planned increase in numbers. There are also separate toilets for boys and girls to support the change proposed at the new site.
- The school has appropriate showering facilities for both boys and girls to use following physical education.
- Provision is in place for the medical examination and treatment of pupils and for the short-term care of sick and injured pupils.

Paragraph 25, 26, 27, 27(a)

- The school buildings are maintained to an acceptable standard. Classrooms are large, well-lit and with suitable acoustics. The size of classrooms is suitable for the planned number of pupils. The food technology room is well equipped and follows safety guidelines.

Paragraph 27, 27(b)

- There is external lighting to ensure that the premises are safe to access and leave 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)

- Pupils have access to drinking water at all times from taps. Drinking water facilities are clearly labelled. Washing facilities are available for all pupils. Hot water of a suitable temperature is available, so that pupils can wash their hands. The temperature of the hot water does not pose a scalding risk to users. Regular checks are carried out on water temperature.

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

- There is outdoor space for pupils to play in. This is sufficient for the planned increase in numbers. Physical education is provided in accordance with the curriculum and is suitable for both boys and girls.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- Persons with leadership and management responsibility in school demonstrate strong skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. They effectively evaluate the strengths of their overall practice. For example, plans are in place for continued pastoral development and educational provision for the planned increase in numbers.
- Leaders ensure that all the independent school standards are met. Leaders ensure that they tailor policies and procedures to the specific needs of pupils. As a result, these are well thought out and are effective in promoting the school's aims.
- Leaders are aware of how vulnerable pupils are at The Birches. As a result, they prioritise the welfare, health and safety of these pupils and vigilance is high. Leaders demonstrate clear expertise in meeting the needs of pupils. Detailed provision is in place to support all aspects of pupils' well-being at the new site.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	130902
DfE registration number	888/6096
Inspection number	10124478

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Caroline Ashdown
Headteacher	Mr Craig Gaskin
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,000 to £39,000
Telephone number	01253 892305
Website	www.hexagoncare.com
Email address	birches.headteacher@hexagoncare.com
Date of previous standard inspection	16–18 July 2019

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	11 to 17	11 to 17	11 to 17
Number of pupils on the school roll	3	24	24

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Boys	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	3	24

Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	3	24
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	2	24
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	3	24

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	4	8
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	0	0

Information about this school

- The Birches is an independent special school currently registered for boys aged 11 to 17 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties and associated complex challenging behaviour and associated anxiety.
- The school's last inspection was on 16 July 2019. The school was judged to be outstanding.
- The Birches is one of a small number of schools that, together with other services, form part of the Hexagon Care Group. Owing to the vulnerable nature of pupils, the school does not have a dedicated website.

Information about this inspection

- The material change inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) because the school requested a move to new premises and to increase the number of pupils from seven to 24. It also included a request to change the provision from boys only to mixed.
- The inspector toured the new premises, accompanied by senior leaders. The inspector checked the suitability of the premises against the relevant independent school standards.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documents and policies to promote the health, well-being and safety of pupils, including the school's safeguarding policy.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, headteacher and the deputy head of education for Hexagon to discuss all aspects of the material change proposal.
- The inspector scrutinised the single central record.

Inspection team

Simon Hunter, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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