

# Inspection of Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

1 Hall Flat Lane, Balby, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN4 8PT

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Inspection dates: 5–7 November 2019

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**No**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Sycamore Hall is a nurturing and caring school. The atmosphere is calm and harmonious. Relationships between staff and pupils are based on respect. Pupils learn about and value differences between people, and they are kind to each other.

Leaders have high expectations and ambitions for pupils. They ensure that every pupil knows the basics of reading, writing and mathematics well. As a result, pupils achieve well in these subjects. However, the overall quality of education the school provides is not yet good.

Pupils behave well and enjoy coming to school. They say that they feel safe and know that teachers are there for them if they need help. Bullying is rare. When bullying does happen, staff act quickly to sort it out.

Parents are hugely supportive and have lots of good things to say about the school. They believe it provides a safe place, where children enjoy learning and achieve well. One parent said, 'School is like a family, and students learn in a happy homely environment.' However, leaders know safeguarding policy and staff training need to be brought up to date with the latest requirements.

Leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards have been met.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders want to prepare pupils well for secondary school and life beyond. Nevertheless, leadership and management is not good enough. Leaders are dedicated to providing the best for each pupil and are absorbed in all aspects of the school day. But, they do not make the time to reflect on what is going well and what could be improved further. Leaders do not check on policies or the independent standards routinely. Not all areas identified at the last inspection have improved. Leaders do not evaluate the quality of education. They do not make plans for improvement or check the progress towards improvement priorities.

The curriculum includes a range of interesting experiences. Pupils say that they love it in history when they recite Victorian literature. In English they read the classics and Shakespeare. Pupils have daily conversations in French, helping them to remember vocabulary. They practise speaking in sentences about the weather, colours and animals.

The curriculum in the early years helps children to be confident and successful learners. Relationships between staff and children in the early years are strong. Children respond well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour. Leaders work closely with parents to help them to support their children at home.

The curriculum caters well for pupils who need extra support. These pupils are fully

involved in lessons. Teachers know pupils well, and they use this information to plan work that meets individual needs. However, the quality of education is not good enough. Although teachers have curriculum plans, they are not detailed enough to show how knowledge and skills are coherently planned and sequenced across the full range of subjects.

Leaders make sure that the youngest children learn to read well. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to help pupils to gain a firm grasp of sounds and letters. Pupils quickly learn to read, and they enjoy a wide range of books. They talk about their favourite authors, and it is clear that teachers are encouraging pupils to develop a love of reading.

Pupils say that they love coming to school. They rarely miss a day. Their behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Pupils listen carefully to teachers, and they are keen to answer questions in class. They work hard and produce well-presented work, of which they are rightly proud.

Leaders develop pupils' social skills and resilience. Pupils learn how to be more resilient by having a go at a difficult task before asking for help. They are given gold stars for showing initiative. Pupils' confidence is built by reciting poetry, such as 'Leisure' by WH Davies, to classmates from memory. Pupils are taking part in the school's production of the Nutcracker suite. This experience develops essential life skills of working together in a team and performing to an audience.

Leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards have been met. The school's safeguarding policy is out of date. Although staff know about safeguarding, their training is not up to date. An up-to-date safeguarding policy is not available to parents and carers.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Positive relationships underpin the school's work, and staff show a lot of care towards the pupils. Staff have a good understanding of pupils' individual needs. They use this well to promote pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional well-being.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. They know how to recognise risks. They understand that a stranger can pretend to be someone else when using social media.

Leaders accept that they must review and update their safeguarding policy urgently to meet the current guidelines. They know that the training of staff in aspects of child protection and safeguarding must be addressed quickly.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders should ensure that the content of all subject plans is well chosen and carefully sequenced so that pupils build their knowledge and understanding systematically from the early years to Year 6. Planning should show how pupils' learning in each school year builds on what they have learned before.
- Part 3. Paragraph 7(a) and (b) of the independent standards was not met. Part 6 Paragraph 32(1) and 32(1)(c) was not met. This was because leaders did not have an up-to-date safeguarding policy, and an up-to-date policy was not available to parents. Leaders must ensure that the school's safeguarding policy reflects the current guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2019', which is available to parents via the school's website.
- Leaders must ensure that all staff undertake appropriate safeguarding and child protection training, as set out in the current government guidance. Staff should receive refresher training at least annually.
- Leaders must ensure that safer recruitment training is undertaken to make sure that new staff or volunteers are suitable to work in the school.
- Part 8. Paragraph 34, 34(1)(a) and 34(2)(b) was not met. This was because leaders had not ensured that all of the independent school standards had been met. Leaders should address the outstanding area for improvement from the previous inspection. This is 'developing the arrangements for evaluating the educational provision, making plans for improvement, and checking regularly the progress made towards improvement priorities'.

### How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

### Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	106816
<b>DfE registration number</b>	371/6010
<b>Local authority</b>	Doncaster
<b>Inspection number</b>	10110585
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	29
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Jane Spencer
<b>Chair</b>	n/a
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Spencer
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£4,890
<b>Telephone number</b>	01302 856 800
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sycamorehallschool.co.uk">www.sycamorehallschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk">sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1–3 May 2018

## Information about this school

- Sycamore Hall Preparatory School is a non-selective independent school for boys and girls between the ages of two and 11 years.
- The school is registered for up to 45 pupils. Currently, there are 29 pupils on roll between the ages of three and 11.
- The proprietor is also the headteacher and the teacher of the senior class. Her sister is the only other full-time teacher, and she teaches pupils in the infant class.
- The proprietor manages before- and after-school care for pupils attending the school.
- Children in Reception are taught as part of the infant class.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- We spoke with parents and analysed the text responses from parents.
- We met with pupils to discuss their views of the school and talked to pupils informally about the school.
- We evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of reading, mathematics, French and history. We discussed the curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils about the curriculum.
- We reviewed the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe. I met with the leader responsible for safeguarding and spoke to the pupils about their safety. I spoke with the local authority designated officer about safeguarding.
- We took account of a wide range of information, including the school's website and policies.
- We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection.

## Inspection team

Suzette Garland-Grimes, lead inspector      Ofsted Inspector

Julia Norton Foulger      Ofsted Inspector

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

### **The school failed to meet the following independent school standards**

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

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
  - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

#### **Part 6. Provision of information**

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
  - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school’s internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.

#### **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; and
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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