

Inspection of Northern House School (Solihull)

Lanchester Way, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, West Midlands B36 9LF

Inspection dates: 27–28 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a caring and friendly school for pupils with diverse special needs. Most lack confidence and find relationships difficult when they start school. Leaders and staff work very hard to change this. Many pupils are thriving by the time they leave.

Staff are ambitious for their pupils, but most pupils have large gaps in their basic knowledge and skills. The curriculum does not fill these gaps quickly or help pupils learn enough. Leaders and staff are beginning to think more about this.

Pupils behave well once they have good relationships with staff. Some pupils are strikingly polite. Some are unkind to others but staff deal with this.

Around a quarter of pupils have been at the school for less than 12 months. Many staff are very new too. These staff are still building relationships with pupils. This has led to some unsettled behaviour.

Once pupils get used to school life, they enjoy lessons. They love learning outside of the classroom. They enjoy the many exciting visits they go on, including a fantastic trip to the Hebrides.

Most parents and carers are delighted with the school. Many believe the school has transformed their child's life.

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

Most pupils are behind in their reading when they join the school. Specialist staff teach the youngest pupils how to read as soon as they arrive. They work hard to develop pupils' interest in reading.

Some older pupils still have difficulty reading. New staff have brought fresh ideas about how to help these pupils more. Most pupils now read with staff every day. They read a range of texts together in class. Pupils take their fiction and non-fiction books home to read.

Leaders have set out what topics pupils will cover in English. However, lessons are sometimes 'one-off' activities. They do not build pupils' learning up over time. Many pupils still have poor speaking and writing skills.

Pupils enjoy physical education. They learn different skills by playing a variety of sports, but they do not practise their skills enough or develop them as they grow older. Teachers know the subject well. School football teams are successful. Pupils show excellent sportsmanship when they both win or lose.

Leaders and staff give pupils many opportunities to develop personally. They work with each pupil to build self-belief. They show pupils how to interact well with others.

Leaders and staff involve parents and offer them valuable help and advice. Tutor time each day creates a friendly and positive ethos. Pupils enjoy their personal and social education lessons. Teachers choose what to teach and this usually meets the needs of pupils.

Pupils enjoy practical learning. They learn well outside of the classroom. For example, they recently built and raced an electric car at Silverstone. Many pupils play chess. Staff encourage all pupils to take part in out-of-lesson activities.

Most pupils leave school with maturity. They make positive decisions about their future. By the time they leave Year 11, nearly all pupils leave school with the basic qualifications they need for further study at college.

Some new pupils are disrupting lessons. Currently, leaders and staff contain this poor behaviour instead of improving it. Not all staff are consistent in their dealings with these pupils. Pupils usually behave better the longer they are in this school.

Leaders have had difficulties focusing on long-term aims in recent months. Their focus has been on dealing with the poor behaviour of a few pupils. They know that the curriculum needs more work. At times, the school assessment system defines the content of lessons rather than the other way around. They recognise that pupils' basic skills need even more attention.

Leaders work hard at being inclusive. They act with integrity. They show great care for the well-being of staff and pupils. Training for staff is very regular. All staff are highly committed to supporting pupils. The school has improved since it was last inspected.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils feel safe in the school. They know who to speak to if they are in difficulty. Staff know pupils very well. They show pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Pupils learn how to protect themselves when they are in their local community.

Staff know what to do if they have concerns about pupils. They are well trained. They are vigilant and report any issues as soon as they arise. Communication between staff is effective. Senior leaders liaise effectively with relevant authorities. The school keeps adequate safeguarding records. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum and its delivery do not always ensure that pupils achieve the best possible outcomes given their different starting points. Leaders should improve the curriculum by:
 - setting out in more detail what pupils should learn in each subject
 - ensuring that assessment is tailored to content rather than the other way around
 - identifying and filling gaps in pupils' basic skills and knowledge as early as possible
 - organising all lessons so that they build up pupils' knowledge more systematically.
- Expectations of pupils' behaviour are not consistent in every classroom. This means that some new pupils get mixed messages about what is acceptable. Leaders should ensure that staff are more even in the way they manage the behaviour of pupils.
- The arrival of pupils from a recently closed pupil referral unit, and the intake of new staff, has meant that senior leaders have been occupied by a spate of behaviour issues. Alongside uncertainty about the trust, this has led to delay in making strategic improvements to the curriculum and slowed the implementation of wider plans to improve the school. Leaders and the trust should ensure that there is enough capacity among leaders to tackle this issue so that the school continues to move further forward.

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

Unique reference number	141171
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10111681
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Powlett Smith
Headteacher	Trevor Scott
Website	www.northernhousesolihull.org/
Date of previous inspection	17–18 May 2017

Information about this school

- A small number of pupils access alternative provision for part of the week only. Three pupils learn about motorcycle maintenance at Right Trax at different venues in Birmingham. One pupil learns at The Secret Garden, which is a farm and educational centre in rural Shustoke, near Birmingham.
- The school is part of Northern House School Academy Trust. Since the last inspection, trustees have announced their intention to close the trust. The trust is working with the Department for Education to re-broker all the schools in the trust.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We visited pupils in lessons and observed them around the school. We spoke with pupils about their learning and wider experiences since joining Northern House.
- We spoke with leaders and staff about the curriculum. We looked at what pupils should learn. We scrutinised pupils' work to check if they were learning well enough. We looked particularly closely at early reading, English, physical

education, and personal, social and health education (citizenship). We also sampled learning in other subjects, including mathematics and mechanics.

- We considered a range of written information, including key safeguarding documents. We visited an alternative provider and spoke with staff about the work being done by pupils.
- We spoke to leaders, staff, pupils and parents about the pupils' personal development, behaviour and attitudes. We looked at the opportunities offered to pupils, behaviour records, attendance figures, destinations data and the qualifications achieved by pupils.
- We took account of four written responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We also looked at the results of a recent parental questionnaire conducted by the school. We looked at testimonials and letters from parents. We also took account of 18 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mike Cladingbowl, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Linda McGill	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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