

Inspection of Physis Heathgates Academy

Po Box 179, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 9DE

Inspection dates: 25–27 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This school is a safe haven for pupils and offers them a fresh start after challenges in previous settings. Pupils learn to value the importance of education. With good support, they work towards achieving their personal goals. They acquire the skills to become more independent and make healthy choices. The school provides pupils with hope and alternative pathways to succeed. Pupils show enjoyment in their studies. A wide range of learning opportunities capture pupils' interests. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. The blend of high-quality care and a good education enables pupils to do well.

There is a warm, nurturing atmosphere around the school. Pupils usually get along well together. They know what is expected of them and get on with their work. Most of the time, pupils behave very well. They form positive friendships and learn to start trusting again. Rarely does a pupil's negative behaviour affect others. This is because teachers understand pupils' behaviour and manage it well. The school's response to any reports of bullying is excellent. It is not tolerated. Teachers take time to explore the issues with the pupils involved. Pupils undertake mediation work to try to repair relationships.

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

The school offers a broad and rich curriculum, including provision for post-16 students. This is tailored to the specific needs of each pupil. Teachers' expectations of pupils are high. The longer pupils stay at the school, the better they achieve. Pupils often have large gaps in their learning when they first arrive. Teachers identify what pupils have learned in the past. They rapidly begin addressing any gaps in knowledge. Sometimes, teachers support pupils to continue with coursework started in a previous setting. Teachers adapt their teaching to best meet the needs of all pupils. This includes those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Teachers usually know their subjects well. They use their expertise to provide high-quality learning experiences. Teachers organise the curriculum so that pupils build on what they have learned before. For example, pupils develop their skills in art and become more sophisticated using different techniques. They have produced some fantastic pieces of art work as a result. However, sometimes literacy skills in other curriculum subjects are not planned as well as they could be.

During lessons, teachers listen carefully to pupils' responses. They interject, explain and ask challenging questions. This enables pupils to deepen and develop their understanding. Occasionally, non-specialist teachers do not have the subject knowledge to set the most challenging curriculum goals. However, the headteacher's drive to ensure that teachers are qualified subject specialists is helping to sort this out.

A therapeutic approach underpins the curriculum and the way staff teach. This helps pupils who are vulnerable overcome their barriers to learning. Teachers encourage

pupils to adopt the right mindset to learn. This helps them cope better when they face more difficult work. The school enters pupils for a range of qualifications. In the past, these had sometimes not been demanding enough. But recently this has changed, and more pupils are now entered for GCSE examinations. They are working well towards achieving their qualifications.

Pupils behave well in lessons and during breaktimes. They are usually respectful towards one another and staff. There is a real sense of positivity around the school. Staff have created an environment where working hard is the expected norm. Pupils' attitudes to learning are almost always positive. Poor behaviour, including bullying, is not tolerated. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour consistently. For this reason, issues with behaviour rarely escalate. Most pupils start at the school with a history of very low attendance. However, their attendance usually improves dramatically in a short period of time.

Support for pupils' personal development is excellent and integral to the school's work. Teachers make pupils' mental well-being a top priority. Staff work hard to counter the effects of pupils' past negative experiences. The work on dealing with trauma is a unique aspect of the school's offer. Gradually, pupils begin to restore their self-belief and develop their self-esteem. Over time, pupils grow in confidence and become more resilient. They start to take greater responsibility for their actions. An extensive range of special events and trips help pupils develop valuable life skills.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is an essential element of the curriculum. Pupils cover topics that teach them how to make sensible choices about their lifestyles. They discuss why laws are important and learn about democratic processes. A well-thought-out careers programme prepares pupils for their next steps in education or employment and training. They benefit from work experience and personal action planning. Because this aspect of the school's work is strong, pupils are aspirational about their futures.

The headteacher leads the school very well. She has high expectations of herself and the staff. The headteacher, along with the proprietor and governors, shows drive and ambition. Staff know they are trusted to make decisions and be innovative. The proprietor maintains a good oversight of the school's work. He supports the headteacher effectively. She is also challenged by governors on the school's performance. The school meets all of the independent school standards and relevant statutory requirements. The school has a safeguarding policy that is made available to parents and carers on request. It takes into account the latest government requirements. The school has a current accessibility plan. It complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school is currently registered with the Department for Education (DfE) for both boys and girls. However, the school intends to contact the DfE imminently to request that the school be girls only. The independent school standards would still be met if the DfE agreed to this change.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an exceptionally strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils are safe and feel safe. Pupils learn about how to keep safe through PSHE lessons, assemblies and the quantum LEAP programme. They are taught about the aspects of personal safety that really matter to them. This helps them to recognise risks in and out of the school and when using social media.

Teachers act fast when they have a concern about a pupil. They take the right course of action to get the support a pupil needs. Leaders work expertly with other agencies to get the best support for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Occasionally, non-specialist teachers do not have enough specialist-subject knowledge to set challenging curriculum goals. This means that they are sometimes less clear about what is expected of pupils to enable them to achieve the highest standards. Leaders have already started to address this by providing training for non-specialists. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers receive training in subjects they teach so they have the prerequisite knowledge to plan and deliver lessons that demand the most of pupils.
- Leaders, rightly, prioritise the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. However, the teaching of these skills in other subjects does not always align well with what they have learned in English lessons. This means that pupils are not always able to apply their literacy skills easily. Leaders need to ensure that literacy skills are carefully mapped alongside the English curriculum to enable pupils to apply previously learned skills more easily in other curriculum subjects.

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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	138580
DfE registration number	893/6029
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10112500
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Clifton Supple
Chair	Laurence O'Dwyer
Headteacher	Rebecca Bhageerutty
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,800
Telephone number	01948 841070
Website	www.physisgroup.co.uk
Email address	Rebecca.bhageerutty@physisgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 May 2019

Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection was in February 2018. The school had a subsequent progress monitoring inspection on 14 May 2019.
- The new headteacher took up post in January 2019, after the school went through an extended period without a substantive headteacher.
- The school caters for pupils and students who have experienced significant trauma. The school is part of Physis Group Limited.
- The school is currently registered with the DfE for 10 to 18 year olds. However, the school has contacted the DfE to request that the age range is narrowed to 11 to 18.
- While the school caters for sixth-form students, there were no students on roll at the time of the inspection.
- The school uses one alternative provider – Reaseheath College, Nantwich.
- The school does not have a religious character or ethos.

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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher, subject leaders, the governing body, head of service and the school's sole proprietor.
- We considered these subjects in depth as part of this inspection: English, art, science and PSHE education. We carried out lesson visits to see these subjects being taught and examined pupils' work. We talked to pupils about their learning. We spoke to teachers who taught these subjects and held discussions with subject leaders. An inspector listened to pupils read as they were working in lessons.
- We took into account six responses to Ofsted's staff survey and four responses to the Ofsted pupil survey. There were insufficient responses to consider parents' views from Ofsted Parent View. An inspector held telephone conversations with a social worker and a virtual school deputy headteacher.
- We talked to pupils to gather their views about the school, behaviour, bullying, their safety and learning.
- We explored safeguarding arrangements by reviewing safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, talking to staff and pupils about how they

keep safe, and checking the school's single central record. We met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and the company's safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Tim Hill, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mike Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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