

Ashbrooke School

Ashbrooke Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7JA

Inspection dates

21 October 2020

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b)

- The headteacher promotes a culture of safeguarding across the school that is supported by a comprehensive safeguarding policy and detailed safeguarding records.
- The headteacher has ensured that there is a child protection policy that references current statutory guidance and is accessible from the school's website.
- Staff follow a well-planned programme of induction when they start working at the school. The proprietor monitors completion of this induction programme to ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibility for the health, safety and well-being of pupils in the school.
- The proprietor provides all staff with child protection training. The designated safeguarding lead and his two deputies have completed enhanced safeguarding training.
- The designated safeguarding lead works closely with staff to identify pupils who need support. Pupils are confident about who to go to if they are worried about anything.
- The designated safeguarding lead is experienced in making referrals outside of school. He works effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and families get help when it is needed. The headteacher has ensured that there are procedures in place to record and monitor referrals.
- The proprietor group has a specialist lead for safeguarding who works across all schools in the group. The proprietor's lead for safeguarding brings additional capacity to the leadership of safeguarding in the school.
- Leaders understand when a referral must be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service. One such referral was made during the inspection.
- These standards have been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). These standards are met.

- These standards have also been considered in response to the school's request for a material change. The material change requested is to increase the maximum number of pupils in the school from 80 to 90.
- These standards are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Paragraphs 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c), 10

- The headteacher has ensured that there is a behaviour policy in place. The headteacher monitors the implementation of the policy by staff.
- The proprietor provides staff with training in the school's positive behaviour management system. Staff are confident about what is expected of them and know how to implement the behaviour policy.
- The headteacher has developed systems in school for staff to record concerns and incidents. School leaders monitor these daily reports to identify pupils who may need extra help with their learning or behaviour.
- The proprietor employs a clinical team which includes a clinical psychologist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist. Members of this team advise staff on strategies to support the learning and behaviour of pupils with additional needs.
- Staff have positive relationships with pupils. They interact successfully with pupils whose behaviour is showing that they are anxious or frustrated.
- The headteacher has developed an anti-bullying policy which is published on the school's website. The policy is clear about what bullying is and that it will not be tolerated in school. The policy explains what strategies staff will implement to reduce bullying.
- The headteacher keeps careful records of any bullying and discriminatory incidents and these are monitored by the school board. Staff implement the school policy carefully. School records show a low rate of incidents and describe the restorative steps taken by school staff.
- Pupils are confident that staff always sort out any problems that arise in school.
- These standards have been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the DfE. These standards are met.

Paragraph 11

- The proprietor has ensured that there is a health and safety policy in operation which reflects current legislation.
- All staff receive basic health and safety training as part of their induction. Staff with additional responsibilities for health and safety receive enhanced training. The headteacher is the lead for health and safety in the school. She is well supported by a knowledgeable site team.
- The proprietor monitors health and safety in the school. The proprietor has a team of safety officers who are available to provide additional support to school leaders when needed.

- This standard has been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the DfE. This standard is met.
- This standard has also been considered in response to the school's request for a material change.
- This standard is likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Paragraphs 12, 14

- The proprietor commissions a specialist agency to complete a detailed fire risk assessment and check fire safety equipment. The fire risk assessment is monitored by the proprietor and kept under regular review. The proprietor ensures that appropriate checks of the school's alarm system, fire safety equipment and emergency lighting take place regularly.
- The headteacher ensures that pupils and staff practise evacuating the building so that they know what to do in case of an emergency. The site manager maintains careful records of these drills. School leaders have developed personalised emergency and evacuation plans for those pupils who need them.
- The headteacher recognises the needs of the pupils in the school and understands that they require a lot of support from staff. The school's current policy is to have eight pupils in a class group with a minimum of two members of staff.
- The proprietor has made a request to the DfE to increase the number of pupils in the school up to a maximum of 90. The proprietor has enough staff in the school ready to accommodate this increase if the DfE agrees to this material change request.
- These standards have been checked because the school has requested a material change. The DfE did not ask for them to be checked as part of the emergency inspection.
- These standards are met and are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Paragraphs 16, 16(a), 16(b)

- The proprietor has ensured there is a health and safety policy in place. The proprietor's expectations with regard to risk management in the school are explained in this policy. There are risk assessments in place for a wide range of hazards including environmental risks, use of hazardous substances, off-site activities, allergen awareness and food safety.
- The proprietor has implemented measures in response to the transmission risk of COVID-19 (coronavirus).
- The headteacher ensures that information about pupils is collected before pupils join the school. This information is used to put together initial support plans and individual risk assessments. These plans are kept under review and regularly discussed with parents and carers.
- These standards have been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the DfE. These standards are met.

- These standards have also been considered in response to the school's request for a material change.
- These standards are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3), 20(6)

- The proprietor has a recruitment policy which explains how appointments of new staff are carried out safely and fairly. The child protection policy also refers to the safer recruitment processes followed by school leaders.
- School leaders have been trained in safer recruitment and are clear about their responsibilities when appointing staff.
- The proprietor ensures that pre-employment checks are completed in line with current government guidance.

19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(i)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)

- The proprietor has a system in place to carry out checks on the suitability of supply staff who work in the school.
- The headteacher ensures that careful records are kept of the information sent through from employment agencies.

Paragraphs 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6)

- The proprietor ensures that checks on adults are completed in line with current government guidance. These checks apply to all adults who work in the school and all members of the proprietor group board. The headteacher has support from the proprietor's human resources team when completing these required checks.
- The headteacher maintains a central register of this information which is monitored by the proprietor.
- The standards in this part have been checked because the school has requested a material change. The DfE did not ask for these standards to be checked as part of the emergency inspection.
- The standards in this part are met and are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c)

- There are toilets for pupils in the primary and secondary parts of the school. The toilets are well presented and have private cubicles and several washbasins. There are separate toilets for adults and visitors.

- There is a large sports hall with separate changing rooms and showers.

Paragraphs 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(2)

- There is a medical room with a bed, washbasin and well-stocked first aid box. The medical room is located close to the pupils' toilets.
- The headteacher has ensured that prescribed medicines are stored securely.

Paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b)

- The school is located on a spacious site. There is a large car park and drop-off zone for pupils' transport.
- The school is in a self-contained building with three floors. The primary pupils are based on the ground floor and secondary pupils on the first floor. The second floor of the building has additional workspaces and offices.
- The building is well maintained and decorated throughout.
- The school has a large dining hall, a library and two sensory rooms. There are 11 general classrooms and five specialist rooms for computing, design technology, and art lessons. All rooms have adequate natural light and suitable acoustics.
- Fire doors are in place around the school and emergency evacuation routes are clearly marked. There is external lighting around the outside of the building.
- The site staff have workspaces away from the pupil areas. There is a lockable cupboard for cleaning equipment and hazardous substances.

Paragraphs 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a), 28(2)(b)

- The headteacher is aware of the need for pupils to have easy access to drinking water. There are refrigerated water fountains at various points around the school.
- The washbasins in the toilets and the showers in the changing rooms are fitted with regulators to keep the temperature of the water at a safe level.
- Taps around the school are labelled to show whether water is suitable for drinking or not.

Paragraphs 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b)

- There is a large, outside area for games and social time. The grounds and perimeter fencing are well maintained. The headteacher has asked the proprietor for further investment in the fence near the car park to improve security. This work has been approved and is taking place in the next school holiday.
- The standards in this part have been checked because the school has requested a material change. The DfE did not ask for them to be checked as part of the emergency inspection.
- The standards in this part are met and are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The proprietor has ensured that the child protection policy is published on the school's website. The policy is easy to find and clearly written. The policy is compliant with government guidance for the safeguarding of children.
- These standards have been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the DfE. These standards are met.
- These standards have also been considered in response to the school's request for a material change.
- These standards are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The headteacher is an experienced school leader. She has a strong understanding of how to meet the needs of the pupils who are in the school as well as those who are likely to be referred if the school expands in future.
- The proprietor employs directors with knowledge of corporate leadership, safeguarding, health and safety and school improvement. These directors bring additional leadership capacity to the school.
- The proprietor understands the importance of ensuring that the school meets the independent school standards consistently.
- The proprietor has established a school board that meets half termly. Directors who attend the school board meetings provide support and challenge to the headteacher. Reports from the school board are monitored at the termly proprietor board meetings.
- These standards have been checked as part of the emergency inspection commissioned by the DfE. These standards are met.
- These standards have also been considered in response to the school's request for a material change.
- These standards are likely to continue to be met if the DfE decides to approve the implementation of the material change requested by the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	143532
DfE registration number	394/6000
Inspection number	10146144

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

Type of school	Independent school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	1
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Mr Philip Jones
Headteacher	Miss Joanna Burdon
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,354–£94,006
Telephone number	01539 566081
Website	https://witherslackgroup.co.uk/ashbrooke-school/
Email address	Ashbrooke@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	13–15 March 2018

Information about this school

- Ashbrooke School opened for pupils in the spring term 2017. It is an independent special school for boys and girls aged five to 19, located in Sunderland. Currently, there are 71 pupils, aged between seven and 17, on roll.
- The school was last inspected in March 2018 when it was judged to be good.

- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, and for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils are placed at the school by their local authority. Some pupils may have been excluded from previous schools or had long periods without any education.
- The school uses two alternative education providers, Outdoor Ambition and Right Tracks.
- The school's staff comprises both educational and clinical teams.
- The school is a member of the Witherslack Group of schools.

Information about this inspection

- This emergency inspection was carried out at the request of the DfE, the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to check that the school continued to meet those independent school standards relating to the safety and well-being of pupils.
- The emergency inspection was triggered by safeguarding concerns received by the registration authority. The inspection took place with no notice being given to the school.
- The emergency inspection was the first emergency inspection since the school opened in January 2017. The school's last standard inspection was in March 2018.
- The school has recently applied to the DfE to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.
- The proprietor has applied for a material change to increase the number of pupils on the school's roll from 80 to 90. This is the school's first material change request since the school opened in January 2017.
- During the inspection, I met with the proprietor, the headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead, teachers, pastoral care staff, the site manager and the senior administrator.
- I met with primary- and secondary-aged pupils. I reviewed school documents and policies. I toured the school building and checked the rooms and social areas.
- I reviewed the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils. I checked the school's safeguarding systems and the single central register. I spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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