

Inspection of Hall Cliffe School

Dovecote Lane, Horbury, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF4 6BB

Inspection dates: 8–10 June 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

The emotional and social needs of pupils at this school are well met. Pupils feel safe and are happy. Most parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that they consider their child to be safe and happy. Relationships between adults and pupils are respectful, relaxed and happy. Humour and kindness can be seen in relationships around the school. In some areas of the school the behaviour of some pupils is more challenging. Generally, staff implement techniques well to de-escalate situations that occur. Occasionally, pupils do say that disruptive behaviour prevents them from learning.

Pupils told us how adults help them to deal with their anxieties. Adults give pupils resources such as calm boxes and weighted blankets to help them manage their own behaviours. The majority of adults have high expectations of what is acceptable behaviour.

Leaders monitor behaviour and attendance carefully. They use this information well to identify patterns. Leaders take any concerns over behaviour very seriously. They work with outside agencies for advice and support where appropriate.

Pupils do not get the opportunity to achieve as well as they might in their academic studies. The planning and delivery of some aspects of the curriculum are not good enough.

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

This is a school that requires improvement. There has been a great deal of turbulence in staffing at all levels. Over a period of six years the school has had eight different headteachers. This constant state of change has affected pupils' academic outcomes and the ability of staff to deliver a strong curriculum. The current temporary headteacher has accurately identified that the school needs to improve at a faster rate.

Some senior leaders, including those at director level, do not have a robust enough picture of the quality of education at the school. Quality assurance and self-evaluation have not concentrated on the areas that need rapid improvement, for example the teaching of phonics.

Directors and senior leaders have recruited new staff to middle and senior roles to improve the strength of leadership in the school. Some of these staff are new and some due to join the school in September. Directors have ensured that support from other schools in the Witherslack Group, for example in the form of expertise in the teaching of phonics, is ongoing. This support is new, and it is too soon to see the impact on pupils' phonics knowledge.

The quality of education that pupils receive is mixed. Some staff do not have the knowledge and expertise to support pupils' learning well enough. Teachers who

teach their specialist subject do so very well. Some of the new subject leaders, for example the science leader, have recognised what needs to be done and are teaching a well-planned curriculum. Older pupils benefit from a better-planned curriculum than younger pupils, for example in food technology and motor mechanics. There is some confusion over whether subject leaders are class teachers or middle leaders, as roles are not defined. There is a lack of connection between how subjects are taught and quality assured across different age groups.

There is currently a lack of expertise in the teaching of reading and English across the school, particularly for those few pupils who are still learning phonics. Phonics is taught differently by different teachers, and there is no one who currently accurately quality assures the teaching of phonics. Reading books for these pupils are not matched to their reading ability. Pupils who have learned to read fluently get lots of opportunities to practise. A fantastic, enormous new studio gives pupils the space to read and relax, with a wealth of literature to choose from. Older pupils read well and confidently speak of their favourite books and authors. Some teachers encourage a love of reading well, for example, with rich texts used in lessons and the use of class readers which adults read to pupils.

Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning provides clear evidence of how learning is revisited and embedded. Sometimes these assessments are based too much on how pupils do things, rather than the knowledge and skills learned.

Adults at this school take great care in giving pupils the opportunity to develop good personal skills and character traits. Pupils who spoke to us did so with growing confidence. There is a strong enrichment curriculum. The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has meant some activities have not taken place, for example independent travel. However, leaders ensure that pupils are doing other activities, such as working in the media studio and learning about sustainable cooking.

Links with outside agencies are strong. These links, for example with the police, provide pupils with opportunities to learn about British values and the rule of law. These links create a strong and coordinated approach to supporting pupils' emotional needs. This approach is evident as the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lead, the pastoral manager, the behaviour lead and clinical team work exceptionally well to support and manage pupils' emotional and social needs. The clinical team often model strategies on how to manage behaviour to class teachers to support implementation. A careers programme is in place. The visits from the independent careers advisors have, however, been hampered by the pandemic.

Staff at this school are dedicated to meeting the needs of pupils and are proud to work at this school. However, some staff told us that the continual change in staffing has meant that improvement has not been as quick as it could be. They say their workload has increased as a direct result of leadership changes. All staff we spoke with said they felt supported by the current interim headteacher. Some said that she had encouraged them to complete further training, some of this training has not yet taken place.

Leaders have ensured that this school is well resourced. This gives pupils a range of excellent opportunities to gain different skills and knowledge.

Parents recognise what the school does for their children. Most of those who responded to Ofsted Parent View would recommend this school to other parents. Where parents did respond negatively to questions asked, it was around the high staff turnover and how this affected their children.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Health and safety records, including risk assessments, are robust. They show how pupils' welfare is top of this school's agenda. Staff know exactly what to do if they have any concerns. The interim headteacher and designated safeguarding lead take immediate and appropriate action when concerns and incidents are raised. Outside agencies are fully involved when they need to be, and their advice is regularly sought. Records are comprehensive and clear. Staff are well trained and get regular safeguarding updates.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Too often, staff do not have the skills or knowledge to deliver and support the delivery of the curriculum. This has affected how well pupils understand what they are being taught. Leaders should ensure that staff get the appropriate training, so they are better equipped to deliver the curriculum.
- There is lack of clarity about the roles of middle and senior leaders. This has manifested itself in inconsistencies in the quality of the curriculum across the school, meaning that pupils do not achieve as well as they might. Roles and responsibilities need to be made clear so that all subject leaders are accountable for the quality of the curriculum.
- Some of the quality assurance that directors have relied on to evaluate school improvement have not been focused enough on the quality of education. Nor do directors have hands-on experience of what is happening in school. This has given an unrealistic view of where the school is on its improvement journey. Directors need to ensure that quality assurance processes focus on all aspects of pupil outcomes and that they have occasional hands-on experiences of what life is like for pupils in this school.
- Subjects are not well sequenced and planned to enable pupils to know more and remember more across all ages. This prevents pupils from being able to build on prior learning and make connections between what they have learned and what they are going to learn. A sequential curriculum needs to be in place for all subjects when it is taught across different year groups.
- Assessment systems do not take into account enough of the knowledge that pupils are being taught. This means that teachers are not able to clearly judge

what knowledge is being stored in pupils' long- and short-term memories. Assessment systems need to reflect knowledge taught and learned.

- There are inconsistencies in the teaching of reading across the school. A consistent systematic, sequential scheme for teaching phonics is not used. This confuses pupils and prevents pupils from making good progress in learning to read. One system needs to be consistently implemented, with staff trained appropriately to do so.

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	141860
DfE registration number	384/6003
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10181781
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Phil Jones
Headteacher	Sara Roe
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,373–£87,621
Telephone number	01924 663420
Website	witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	hall-cliffe@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–20 September 2018

Information about this school

- The school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good at its last full standard inspection in September 2018. At an emergency inspection in October 2020 the school met all the independent school standards that were inspected.
- The school is located in a large grade II-listed building. The school is situated on the outskirts of Wakefield.
- The school is based on two sites. Pupils on the main site follow a broadly academic curriculum. The second site is approximately five miles away from the main site. It is a purpose-built vocational centre where pupils study a range of vocational courses, including hair and beauty, motor mechanics and hospitality.
- Most pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.
- Since the school opened in 2015, there have been significant changes in leadership. Eight different headteachers have been in post, including the current interim headteacher, since the school opened.
- The current interim headteacher is also the regional director. She joined the school in November 2020 on a temporary basis.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

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.

- This full standard inspection was commissioned early by the Department for Education due to concerns over leadership and management following the emergency inspection in October 2020.
- We met with the interim headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. We met a number of teachers and teaching assistants.
- One of us met with directors of the board who were representing the proprietorial body.
- One of us also met with members of the health and safety management team and we toured both buildings to check on health and safety.

- We conducted deep dives into science, food technology, reading, and personal, social and health education. We met with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke to pupils and studied pupils' work.
- We visited both sites. We completed deep dive activities at both sites and spoke to staff and pupils at both sites.
- We also studied a range of documents to ensure that the independent school standards are still met. These documents related to the planned curriculum and pupils' welfare and safeguarding. Checks on documents relating to staff recruitment, pupils' behaviour and the safety of the building were made.

Inspection team

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Malcolm Kirtley

Her Majesty's Inspector

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