

Inspection of Trax Academy

Clifton Drive North, Lytham St Annes, Lancashire FY8 2PP

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Far too many pupils do not attend school regularly. Leaders have failed to improve pupils' rates of attendance. When pupils are not in school, leaders cannot be assured that pupils are safe. Pupils' poor attendance means that they do not learn well.

Pupils do not benefit from a consistently well-planned curriculum. The range of activities and learning experiences that pupils used to enjoy as part of their curriculum has reduced. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are not high enough.

More recently, new leaders have made some effective changes to how pupils learn. They have improved the range of qualifications that are available to pupils.

When pupils attend, staff manage behaviour around school well. Pupils experience trusting and caring relationships with adults. However, some pupils find it difficult to engage in many lessons and they are quick to give up. This is unsettling for other pupils and disrupts their learning.

Pupils said that bullying happens occasionally but is dealt with effectively. They also said that, when in school, they feel safe and able to talk to adults if they have any worries.

The regular extra-curricular activities that the school offered to broaden pupils' development and experiences have decreased. This wraparound curriculum offer is what made the school unique.

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

Until recently, senior leaders, including the proprietor body, have lost sight of this school. This has led to a decline in the quality of education for pupils. Newly appointed school leaders recognise the serious deficiencies throughout the school. However, the proprietor body has not addressed widespread problems with sufficient urgency. For example, the proprietor body has allowed the quality of the curriculum to decline. Added to this, the future of the school is uncertain. Pupils are confused and anxious about where they will be educated next year.

Over time, pupils' attendance has dropped significantly, and some pupils' rates of attendance are worryingly low. This is all the more concerning as the pupils on roll at the school are highly vulnerable. Leaders' efforts to increase the attendance of all pupils regularly has been ineffective. As a result, leaders cannot assure themselves that these vulnerable pupils are safe when they are not in school.

Recently appointed leaders are beginning to improve the curriculum. Leaders have ensured that a range of subjects is taught so that the curriculum meets the

independent school standards. The new headteacher has wasted no time in creating an increasingly ambitious curriculum. This is most evident in subjects such as English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). For example, in mathematics, pupils' work builds on prior knowledge. There is a logical structure to the curriculum and pupils revisit their learning. They have opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge. Consequently, pupils learn more and remember more.

The curriculum in some other subjects remains shallow and unambitious. In some subjects, pupils are asked to complete a series of tasks rather than focusing on building up the essential knowledge pupils need to know in a subject. In these subjects, curriculum plans do not contain in enough detail the core knowledge that pupils must know and remember.

Leaders have begun to complete detailed assessments on pupils' individual needs when they start at the school. For example, leaders identify what pupils can do in mathematics and English. However, teachers do not always use this information as effectively as possible to adapt the curriculum for pupils. As a result, pupils' progress through the curriculum is hindered. Day-to-day assessments are sometimes based on examination criteria. This means that teachers are not as well informed as they could be on what pupils need to know next in their subjects. Teachers do not know how much of the curriculum pupils have remembered. Added to this, some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not achieve as well as they should.

Teachers are willing to turn their hand to the teaching of any subject. However, few are experts in the subject that they teach. Leaders do not ensure that teachers have the confidence, subject knowledge and the understanding about the subjects that they teach. The proprietor body offers a range of training on curriculum subject specialisms to the school within the group, but participation is voluntary.

Pupils are well supervised around school, and if behaviour incidents occur, they are managed well by adults. Pupils generally conduct themselves appropriately around school and adults act as supportive, calm role models. However, pupils find some lessons and activities boring because they are not matched well enough to their ability or interest. Consequently, pupils can be easily distracted and begin to disrupt lessons. This negatively affects other pupils' learning. In turn, they also begin to disengage and join in the disruption.

The revised PSHE curriculum has only recently been introduced, but it supports pupils well to appreciate differences. It helps pupils to have a secure understanding of equalities. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to share their thoughts and understand other people's views and opinions. For example, pupils thoughtfully discussed racism in football following the European final at the weekend.

Some recent improvements in the careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that pupils have been offered ensure that it is matched more effectively to pupils' interests and aspirations. However, the quality of CEIAG remains

weaker than it should be. That said, most pupils go on to post-16 destinations, such as college or apprenticeships.

The broader curriculum offer, such as the chance to work on the maintenance of motor vehicles or participate in go-kart racing and wind sports, has been significantly reduced. This was a distinctive feature of the school and one that was highly valued by pupils. The withdrawal of some of these extra-curricular experiences has had a direct negative impact on pupils' attendance in school.

The building is well maintained, clean and resourced. However, many of the learning resources have been packed away ready for the site closure at the end of the month. There is ample outdoor space for pupils to get fresh air at breaktimes, including easy access to the beach. The outdoor space is also suitable for at least twice-weekly physical education sessions.

Leaders ensure that they follow all health and safety requirements, including fire regulations and risk assessments on the building. Leaders keep the children's homes informed about the work of the school. A school brochure and policies, including the safeguarding policy, are available to parents, carers and others on request to the school. The complaints policy is fully compliant. The school has a suitable plan that describes how pupils with a disability can fully take part in the school's curriculum.

The proprietor body has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. Members of the proprietor body have not fulfilled their duty to hold senior leaders to account for the quality of education. This is because they have not provided them with enough support, nor seen the urgency required to effect school improvement.

All of the unmet standards relate to statutory duties that have not been fulfilled. This includes the proprietor body's responsibility to safeguard pupils. Leaders, including the proprietor body, have not done enough to promote the attendance of the school's highly vulnerable pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders and the proprietor body do not ensure that pupils on the school's roll are safe because of pupils' high level of absence. Leaders and the proprietor body have failed to recognise that this is a potential safeguarding issue. They have not acted swiftly to make sure that very vulnerable pupils are attending school.

Leaders have detailed policies and procedures in place. The record that outlines the checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils is complete and fully compliant.

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

- Pupils' attendance is poor. Leaders have not challenged pupils' absence rigorously enough. The strategies that leaders employ to get pupils into school lack urgency. As a result, leaders are not sure that these pupils are safe. Too many pupils are not accessing education and they are not learning as well as they should. Leaders must take immediate action to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.
- Some curriculum plans are not developed as well as they should be. Pupils do not achieve as well as they could across the curriculum. Leaders must develop curriculum plans in all subjects, so that these are ambitious and include the essential knowledge that pupils must learn.
- In some subjects, assessment strategies are based too much on examination assessments and qualifications. Also, teachers do not use the information that they have about pupils when they arrive at school as effectively as they should. This hinders pupils' learning. Leaders should refine their assessment strategies and use the information that they have about pupils to adapt the curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils, including those pupils with SEND.
- Leaders do not ensure that some teachers have sufficient subject knowledge in subjects. As a result, they are not always clear about what exactly they want pupils to learn and remember. Leaders should provide all staff with the professional development they need to improve their subject knowledge.
- There has been a significant reduction in the wider activities that pupils once used to learn. This has had a negative impact on pupils' enjoyment and attendance in school. Leaders need to rethink the wider curriculum they offer to pupils and consider ways to recapture pupils' enjoyment and interest in education at the school.
- The proprietor body has not ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards. The proprietor body should ensure that all the independent school standards are met, especially with regard to safeguarding, attendance and holding leaders to account for the quality of education.

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	131563
DfE registration number	888/6093
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10193273
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Virginia Perkins
Chair	Virginia Perkins
Headteacher	Sharon Murphy Shaun Redgrave (Regional Headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£24,000
Telephone number	01253 781445
Website	None
Email address	sharon.murphy@care4children.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 to 19 October 2017

Information about this school

- The proprietor body used to operate the school from two sites in Lytham St Annes and Preston. The site in Preston, which provided a vocational-based curriculum and containing a motor vehicle centre, go-karting and a racetrack, has now closed. The Lytham St Annes site no longer specialises in wind-sport activities.
- The lease at the Lytham St Annes site expired at the end of July 2021. The proprietor has found another site for the school, but this will not be ready for occupation until November 2021. The proprietor has sought approval for this change from the Department of Education.
- The current headteacher was appointed in May 2021. There is a regional headteacher who oversees Trax Academy alongside a number of other schools under the proprietorship of Care4Children.
- The school use two alternative providers, Preston Vocational Centre and Redbox.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.

- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the headteacher and the two regional headteachers. Inspectors also spoke to staff focusing on safeguarding arrangements.
- An inspector spoke to the proprietor representative, who is also the chief executive officer for Care4Children.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to the independent school standards, the curriculum, school improvement, safeguarding and the checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.
- An inspector spoke to a manager of one of the children's homes and the managers of the two alternative providers that the school uses.
- Inspectors considered the three responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors spoke to members of staff about safeguarding, well-being and workload during the inspection.

- There were no responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their work and school life.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in English, mathematics, art and design, and PSHE. For each of these subjects, inspectors held discussions with leaders and teachers, visited lessons, looked at samples of pupils' work and talked to pupils. Inspectors also considered other subjects across the curriculum.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Steve Bentham

Her Majesty's 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.
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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