

# Inspection of Stafford Hall

Cheltenham Place, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX3 0AW

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Inspection dates: 28 to 30 September 2021

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Good**

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?**

This is a caring and warm school where the needs of pupils come first. Staff are proud to work here. They are determined to make sure that pupils get the best deal.

The school is founded on the respectful and positive relationships that staff have taken time to build with pupils. This means that staff know their pupils really well. They know what to do to help them and support them in doing as well as they can. Learning activities are all individual to each pupil. There is lots of praise and encouragement. Staff know when to push pupils harder, and when to back off.

Most of the time, the school is calm. There is a purposeful atmosphere. When pupils become agitated, staff are skilled in helping them to become calm. The attractive outside spaces are an important part of helping pupils to self-regulate, such as through using the trampoline and the garden. Pupils feel safe at school.

Staff work together to make sure that pupils' experience of school is a good one. The new leaders have started to rebuild the school after a period of instability, during which the school's ethos was allowed to drift. The staff are behind the new leaders.

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

After a period of substantial turbulence in leadership, the new leaders are steadying the ship. They have quickly and effectively brought together the staff team. Leaders have introduced a new curriculum and tightened up behaviour.

The curriculum is ambitious for pupils. Leaders have thought carefully about how best to create an appropriate curriculum. This is a major challenge. Pupils join the school at different points, leave at different points, and have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum is based on the principle of giving pupils the opportunity to gain qualifications, to help them with their next steps. Work seen in pupils' books shows that they can achieve well from their starting points.

Leaders' aspirations for the curriculum mean that it is not narrowed. Pupils study a range of subjects based around the 'core' of English, mathematics, science, and art and design. Added to this is the 'enrichment' curriculum in the afternoons. This includes physical education, design technology, gardening and cooking. It is planned to introduce the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Through the 'life skills' curriculum, pupils also learn about a broad range of topics to do with society and British values, our place in the world, and career planning.

Curriculum plans in all subjects are based on the awarding bodies' specifications. They have an in-built order and sequence to them, while allowing for teachers to be flexible in how and when to teach them. At times, some plans would benefit from

tighter planning, for example in the frequency with which the separate sciences are studied, or which specific art skills are being taught.

Teachers have sound subject knowledge. They use subject-specific language when possible. Staff make use of careful questions to check how well pupils are understanding the topic. Classrooms are welcoming, well lit and well resourced. Care has been taken not to make the rooms overstimulating, in order to better support pupils. Staff sit with pupils and read with them from books that match pupils' interests.

Teachers use baseline assessments when pupils join the school to check what has been learned. Teachers use this information to help them plan their lessons and to support pupils to make progress. There is a little variability in the extent to which staff know how to use assessments in the most effective ways. Staff use targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to assist with planning where possible. However, the quality of targets in the EHC plans varies widely, which limits their effectiveness. Leaders have started to take action to address this.

There are times when pupils' behaviour can be very challenging. However, staff know their pupils well and use a range of approaches to manage behaviour effectively. Staff feel that behaviour has improved under the new leaders, with a more suitable curriculum in place and a behaviour policy that everyone follows. During the inspection, the school was calm and orderly. Staff were quick to act when pupils started to become distracted.

Leaders' risk assessments are fit for purpose. A clear process is in place, for example if a pupil were to leave the school site without permission. Leaders are working closely with the proprietor body's multidisciplinary team to develop systems of communication with those pupils who are non-verbal.

Leaders have ensured that they are compliant with the requirements of the independent school standards. They are meeting their responsibilities under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The teaching of relationships, sex and health education is planned in the life skills curriculum.

The overwhelming majority of staff feel well supported by leaders. They value the training and career development opportunities provided for them by leaders. Staff also appreciate the concern for their well-being shown by leaders, such as the policy of no emails after 5pm or at weekends.

Over time, the proprietor body has not done enough to maintain a clarity of vision and a school strategy. Considering the specialised nature of the school, it was especially important that it did not lose sight of its vision and strategy during the turbulent leadership issues following the previous inspection. However, during this time, the quality of EHC plans was not monitored and action was not taken to remedy any weaknesses. The curriculum did not support pupils' needs and led to an increase in challenging behaviour. While new leaders have done much to get the school back on track, there is no documented, overarching school strategy by which

the proprietor body can support and challenge leaders. A governor school advisory board is planned, and members know what they need to do, but it has not met yet.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are alert to the specific safeguarding vulnerabilities of pupils, and are vigilant. Leaders are working in partnership with the proprietor body's multidisciplinary team to ensure that everything necessary is done to meet pupils' safeguarding needs. There is an open and reflective culture of safeguarding, such as in the routine discussion of any learning following the use of physical restraint. Further training in the use of restraint is booked for all staff who require it. There are several trained designated safeguarding leads on site. The required checks on the suitability of staff are made.

The school has a safeguarding policy published on its website, which includes the required current guidance from government.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- The proprietor body has not exercised sufficient strategic oversight of the school over time. As a result, the new leaders are in the process of a school turnaround. While they have acted quickly to sort out the curriculum and behaviour, there is currently no formal means by which the proprietor body can support and challenge leaders for their delivery of any strategy for the school. The proprietor body should ensure that it establishes a means of evaluating the impact of its strategy, so that it can support, challenge and hold leaders to account.
- The proprietor body has failed to ensure that there has been effective quality control of the standard of EHC plans during a period of leadership instability. Consequently, staff are having to make do with what they have got, which in too many cases is poor. As a result, teachers face a challenge in fully tailoring their plans to pupils' needs. The proprietor body should ensure that it establishes an effective process for supporting and challenging leaders in their work with local authorities, so that EHC plans are of sufficient quality.
- While the curriculum in all subjects is sequenced and has been carefully planned to provide necessary flexibility for the school's context, in places this could be improved further. In science, for example, the 'carousel' arrangement means that pupils have a gap of two terms between studying each of the separate sciences, during which important learning will be lost. In art, the ambitious curriculum could be made even better by greater specificity about which art skills are being taught. Leaders should work with subject leaders to further refine their curriculum plans.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	142324
<b>DfE registration number</b>	381/6016
<b>Local authority</b>	Calderdale
<b>Inspection number</b>	10202441
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	10
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Young Foundations Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Niall Kelly
<b>Headteacher</b>	Amran Suleman
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£234,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01422 740041
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://youngfoundations.com/stafford-hall-school/">https://youngfoundations.com/stafford-hall-school/</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:amran.suleman@youngfoundations.com">amran.suleman@youngfoundations.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	19 to 21 March 2019

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been five headteachers at the school. Since July 2021, the school has been led by an executive headteacher who is on site for two days a week, and a head of school. In September 2021, 10 new staff members were appointed.
- The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

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

- The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out this inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, and leaders for the quality of education, behaviour and SEND.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and scrutinised safeguarding documentation. Inspectors reviewed the single central record for the checks made on staff employed at the school.
- Meetings were also held with the regional director of the proprietor body, the school's consultant for school improvement, the school's consultant educational psychologist and a member of the proposed governor school advisory board.
- An inspector spoke with the designated officer for Calderdale.
- Inspectors held meetings with a substantial number of staff.
- Inspectors took into account the 22 responses to Ofsted's staff survey, and the three responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Parent View.

## **Inspection team**

Steve Shaw, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Suzette Garland-Grimes

Ofsted Inspector



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