

Inspection of Hope Corner School

70 Clifton Road, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 4TD

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 November 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?

Pupils enjoy attending Hope Corner School because of the support they receive from caring staff. Pupils feel safe and they are safe. They have developed warm and trusting relationships with adults in the school. Pupils believe that the school is a 'place where everyone matters'. They respect each other and staff. Pupils typically behave well. Pupils are confident that staff will deal effectively with any bullying that might occur.

Leaders expect pupils to achieve well, and they do in some, but not all, subjects. Pupils study a wide range of subjects and have opportunities to achieve some nationally accredited qualifications. However, curriculum planning in some subjects does not always build on what pupils already know. This means that pupils do not make as much progress as possible through the planned curriculum. This limits their achievement in some subjects.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities to broaden their experiences beyond the academic curriculum. These include cultural visits, adventurous activities and charitable work, which help to develop pupils' self-confidence, communication skills and teamwork. Pupils develop a secure understanding of fundamental British values. This is because the teaching that they receive models expected behaviours, such as tolerance and fairness, and sharply focuses on the key pieces of knowledge that pupils need to know about British society.

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

The planned curriculum supports the school's ethos. The proprietor body and leaders aim to help pupils to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. The curriculum is designed to ensure that pupils study an appropriate range of subjects.

In some subjects, curriculum plans enable pupils to steadily develop their knowledge and understanding. Curriculum plans for some subjects in the wider curriculum are not precise enough. They do not set out the key knowledge that should be taught and in what order. This limits pupils' achievement. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, pupils have limited time to practise the knowledge they have been taught before moving on to new learning.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), overcome some considerable barriers to re-engage in formal education. Pupils typically complete nationally accredited qualifications in English and mathematics by the time they reach the end of Year 11.

All teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. Teachers routinely check that pupils understand what is being taught. Some teachers use this

information to make appropriate changes to their lessons that help pupils understand ideas they find difficult.

Pupils enjoy reading. They become fluent readers because of the precise teaching and help that adults provide. Pupils confidently use their phonics knowledge to help them read difficult words.

Leaders carefully consider the needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers make appropriate amendments to the curriculum so that all pupils can learn. This includes the provision of additional resources that take account of pupils' individual needs. Teachers also make effective use of teaching assistants to help all pupils to learn. The proprietor body has ensured safe access to the school building for any staff and pupils with disabilities. The building is purpose-built to meet disability access needs.

Pupils' benefit from a wide range of personal development activities. These include learning how to budget for and cook healthy meals, and how to look after their own health, including their mental health. Pupils experience different cultures through educational visits to museums, theatres and places of religious worship. Visitors, including those from different countries, promote pupils' understanding and tolerance of diversity. Pupils benefit from a well-considered relationship and sex education curriculum. Rock climbing is a core part of the school's physical education curriculum. It enables pupils to build not only their physical strength but their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Pupils receive appropriate impartial guidance to allow them to make informed choices about their next steps in life. All pupils in recent times have gone on to study courses at local colleges.

Leaders have established clear expectations about behaviour. Typically, pupils behave well and are engaged in their learning. Occasionally, pupils' emotions or mental health issues can get the better of them so that they disengage from learning. Staff manage pupils' anxieties effectively so that emotional outbursts are rare.

There are well-established systems in place to record pupils' admission and attendance. These adhere to the most up-to-date regulations. Leaders routinely analyse pupils' attendance to identify emerging trends and plan appropriate support. Nearly all pupils have excellent rates of attendance.

The proprietor body has ensured that all the independent school standards are met. Members have ensured that the school's relationship and sex education policy is published on the school's website alongside the school's up-to-date safeguarding policy.

The proprietor body takes swift action to rectify any weaknesses. New members to the governing body have brought valuable skills to strengthen governance. Governors hold leaders to account for all aspects of the school's work.

Senior leaders' monitoring ensures they have a realistic understanding of how well the school is performing. However, some staff do not have the knowledge to lead their curriculum area of responsibility. Senior leaders have acted to provide appropriate training and guidance. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work.

Staff are proud to work at Hope Corner School. Staff welcome the training that the proprietor body provides. Staff said that leaders are considerate of their workload when introducing improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a secure understanding of safeguarding procedures and use this knowledge to swiftly identify when pupils may be at risk of harm. Staff share any concerns they have with leaders using well established procedures. Leaders keep their knowledge of how to manage safeguarding concerns up to date through regular training. They ensure that all concerns they receive are followed up. Leaders work well with outside agencies to ensure that pupils get the support they need in a timely manner.

The school internet connection is appropriately filtered and monitored to help protect pupils from online harms.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Curriculum plans for some subjects do not clearly identify the key knowledge pupils should learn and the order that they will learn it. As a result, pupils sometimes do not build on what has been taught before to enable them to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Leaders must ensure that all curriculum plans clearly identify the essential knowledge that pupils must learn and the steps in which it is to be taught.
- Pupils have limited planned opportunities to practise using new knowledge in English and mathematics. Leaders should ensure that pupils receive appropriate opportunities to practise new learning.
- Some staff who are responsible for leading areas of the curriculum have limited experience and knowledge of curriculum leadership to ensure pupils achieve the best they can. Senior leaders must ensure that those responsible for leading a subject or areas of the curriculum are well trained and knowledgeable.

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

Unique reference number	138597
DfE registration number	876/6014
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10206005
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	3
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Hope Corner
Chair	Theresa Worrall
Headteacher	Maria Houghton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,000 to £46,317
Telephone number	01928 580 860
Website	www.hopcornerschool.co.uk
Email address	maria@hopecorner.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 to 31 January 2018

Information about this school

- A new chair of governors took up their role in August 2021.
- One new governor has joined the governing body in September 2021.
- 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 standard inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils about their work and school life. Inspectors spoke with the chair of the proprietor body, the chair of governors and another governor. Inspectors also spoke with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, and other senior staff. The lead inspector toured the school to evaluate compliance with the independent school standards.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, personal, social and health education and physical education. For each deep dive, an inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, spoke with teachers and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils read in class. Some subjects did not have lessons being taught so inspectors focused on other aspects of the deep dive.
- Inspectors also scrutinised curriculum planning from other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation related to the work of the school, and scrutinised documentation relating to safeguarding.
- There were no responses to Parent View or the pupils' online questionnaire. Inspectors considered the responses to the online questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

John Nixon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Colin Bell

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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