

# Inspection of Millcourt School

2 Shelf Mills, Wade House, Shelf, Halifax HX3 7PA

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Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2021

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a school where all staff are deeply committed to the pupils. They want them to be the best that they can be and ready to be successful citizens. Leaders are ambitious for the pupils. They expect them to work hard and to do well in lessons.

Staff care about pupils' well-being. A multidisciplinary team of therapists supports pupils with their mental health and welfare.

Pupils are learning how to manage their own feelings. The pastoral support team plays an important role in helping pupils to make good choices. Staff know pupils well and they deal sensitively with pupils' anxieties. However, some pupils are not able to regulate their emotions and at times this leads to the need for physical intervention to take place.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and they know whom to go to if they have any worries. When talking to pupils about behaviour, they say that sometimes behaviour is not great and sometimes it is okay. Pupils say that there is bullying in the school. They say that when teachers are aware of it, they sort it out.

Leaders know that they need to improve the teaching of reading and further develop subject leadership.

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

Staff have created a curriculum that meets the complex needs of pupils. The main priority for leaders and staff is to get pupils ready to learn. From the minute a pupil joins the school, staff have a detailed picture of their needs. A multidisciplinary team of therapists, psychologist and teachers shares information on each pupil. They use this to plan well for pupils' individual needs.

The curriculum is made up of a broad range of subjects. The curriculum meets the requirements of the independent school standards.

Leaders have planned well what pupils should learn in each subject. They have considered how to lay out the knowledge they want pupils to know and put it in the right order. In mathematics, work on number has been ordered before fractions, so that pupils understand the basics before they move on to more complex concepts. Pupils' knowledge and skills increase as they move through the school.

Teachers break down what pupils need to know into small chunks. This helps pupils to understand more difficult ideas. For example, in science, an experiment was broken down into small steps so that pupils could take part. This helped pupils to remember what colour litmus paper became in acid and alkali solutions.

Teachers check that pupils are remembering subject knowledge. They set questions at the end of a unit of work to check what they know. The progress that pupils are making is assessed regularly. Any gaps in pupils' understanding are quickly picked up and put right.

The teaching of reading is not yet fully developed. A commercial reading scheme has been introduced. However, reading books aligned to the scheme are not in place. Staff have not received the phonics training they need to be able to introduce new words and sounds to pupils accurately. These shortcomings hinder pupils' confidence and progress in reading.

All pupils attending the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have very complex needs. The specialist teams of teachers, therapists and pastoral support staff know the pupils well and respond quickly to their changing needs. Teachers weave targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans into the curriculum. Staff are clear about how to meet pupils' needs.

Leaders provide well for pupils' personal development. Leaders say that the development of self-esteem, resilience, respect, engagement and enjoyment is vital to pupils' success in life. Pupils learn about how healthy and positive relationships contribute to feelings of self-esteem. Pupils develop tolerance and respect through the personal, health, social and economic education (PHSE) curriculum. They learn about hate crime, immigration and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. Pupils engage in learning about jobs and careers to prepare them for their future. They get hands-on experience of what it is like in the workplace, for example while working at an animal rescue provision.

Leaders know that pupils' behaviour is not where they want it to be. The pastoral support team and safeguarding and behaviour team from the Witherslack Group have worked effectively to support pupils and staff. This has had a positive impact on reducing the number of physical interventions that have taken place in the school. However, there is still work to do to continue to reduce these incidents further.

Some pupils said that there are times when bullying takes place. Staff say that pupils do not always understand what bullying is. Leaders have plans to further develop pupils' understanding of accepting differences in people. Leaders plan to promote anti-bullying strategies so that pupils understand what bullying is and how to respond to it.

The governing board checks regularly what is happening in the school. Governors receive extensive information from professionals within the Witherslack Group. They use this information to quality assure all aspects of the work of the school. The proprietors have ensured that there is an up-to-date plan in place to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The proprietors have made sure that all the independent school standards are met.

Staff are supportive of leaders and they work well together as a team. Some subject leaders are new to leading an area of the curriculum. They say that their workload is manageable.

The new school has been refurbished to a high standard. The range of specialist rooms, such as for hair and beauty, science, design and technology, food technology and art, gives pupils opportunities in the future to study for a range of vocational qualifications.

The buildings are well maintained. Checks on the safety of the building are made regularly. Records are well documented. A fire risk assessment is in place and regular fire drills ensure that everyone can leave the premises safely.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are vigilant in their procedures for safeguarding the pupils. Systems are in place for the safe recruitment of staff. There are detailed checks made on new staff before they can take up post. Staff are trained in safeguarding procedures during their induction. The safeguarding policy is available to parents and carers. It is published on the school's website. Seven-minute briefings keep staff up to date on emerging safeguarding issues and changes to statutory guidance. Staff are clear about what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare.

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

- Leaders have recently introduced a reading strategy. However, pupils do not have access to reading books that are matched to their phonic and reading ability. Staff have not been trained in how to accurately introduce new sounds and words to pupils. Leaders should ensure that they provide reading books that are aligned to the reading scheme and that staff are trained to deliver phonics to pupils.
- Some subject leaders are new to post. Leaders should ensure that subject leaders are supported to check how well the new curriculum plans help pupils to know and remember more.
- Leaders have had a positive impact on reducing physical interventions with pupils. Leaders should continue to train and support staff to improve pupils' behaviour and reduce physical interventions further.
- Pupils say that bullying takes place in school. Leaders should continue to promote anti-bullying strategies to develop pupils' understanding of what bullying is and reduce the times that pupils say it happens.

## 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>	147983
<b>DfE registration number</b>	381/6024
<b>Local authority</b>	Calderdale
<b>Inspection number</b>	10202216
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	35
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Witherslack Group Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Phil Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Paula Harris
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£63,375 to £87,621
<b>Telephone number</b>	01539 566081
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school">www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk">millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school is situated in a former office building in Shelf, Halifax. The building has been adapted for school use. The building has been renovated to a high standard.
- The school is part of the Witherslack Group Ltd. The group runs a number of other schools.
- The school is registered to take 56 pupils aged nine to 18 years.
- The school caters for pupils with cognitive learning needs, communication and interaction needs and autism spectrum disorder, and pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school uses an unregistered 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 pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- This was the school's first standard inspection.
- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- Inspectors did deep dives in English, mathematics, science and art. The deep dives involved visits to lessons, talking to pupils about their work, looking at pupils' work in their books, talking to subject leaders and talking to teachers.
- An inspector checked the school's single central record. This is the document that provides information about pre-recruitment checks. Inspectors looked at policies and documents and spoke with staff about safeguarding.
- An inspector reviewed documents and policies associated with the independent school standards. The school building was toured inside and out. Documentation relating to the health and safety of the premises was scrutinised.
- An inspector visited an alternative provision that offers horse-riding to two pupils each week.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, the regional director and representatives of the proprietor body to discuss the work of the school.

## **Inspection team**

Suzette Garland-Grimes, lead inspector      Ofsted Inspector

Gordon Watts      Ofsted Inspector



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