

Inspection of Demeter House School

Demeter House, Bigby Street, Brigg, North Lincolnshire DN20 8EF

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 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?

Demeter House is a school which places its pupils at the heart of everything it does.

Leaders and staff have chosen to work here because of their commitment to, and belief in, the pupils who attend. They are determined to support them as well as they can.

Pupils arrive at Demeter House very often at the end of the road, having had difficult school experiences elsewhere along the way. For many pupils and their families, Demeter House provides their first experience of a successful school life. Often, this has had a transformative effect for the better on their lives at home.

The school's approach to carefully building, and earning, the trust of pupils and their families is what sits at the centre of Demeter House. The school takes a nurturing approach to developing these relationships, focusing on what pupils need and then building a tailored curriculum around them.

Recently, leaders have started to plan to extend the academic curriculum as well as the personal development curriculum. There is more to do, but they have made a start.

Pupils feel safe at Demeter House. If bullying happens, or there is something worrying them, they have trusted key workers to tell and sort it out for them.

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

Leaders have started the process of overhauling their curriculum, so that it joins up Year 1 to Year 11 in a continuous way. They have completed this job for English and are about to start on mathematics, followed by the other subjects. At the moment, subject plans are in place, but they do not connect very well between the 'lower' school and 'upper' school. This means that pupils do not learn about subject knowledge or skills in a clear and organised order. Leaders have identified this, hence getting started with planning a new curriculum.

Leaders have rightly made reading a priority. They have started to introduce an expectation that teachers use reading activities as part of their lessons, and that pupils get the chance to read for pleasure. A well-stocked library is available for pupils to use. Pupils told inspectors that they are involved in the choice of books they read.

Leaders know that they need to introduce a system of phonics teaching to help the weakest readers. At present, there is no phonics scheme in place. Leaders are purposefully researching a suitable phonics scheme for their pupils. Different teachers use different approaches to helping pupils with their reading. However, the approaches are not effective in helping the weakest readers with recognising sounds and letters. As a result, they struggle to decode words.

At times, pupils are well engaged because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. This is particularly the case in mathematics, design technology and art. However, this is not consistent across subjects. Partly, this is because teachers' subject knowledge and confidence are not consistently strong. It is also the case that some subject plans are not ambitious enough for what pupils can achieve, with some superficial tasks and activities.

Leaders have started to introduce a new system of assessment. As with the curriculum and reading, they identified that assessment needs a fresh approach. It is early days, but the work is underway. The team with responsibility for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) already make use of a range of assessments to get an understanding of pupils' SEND when they join the school.

The nature of many of the pupils' SEND means that, often, their behaviour can be challenging. However, there are established systems in school to support staff in managing such behaviour. Effective use is made of the ample premises, for instance, to provide 'sensory' and 'reflection' rooms to help staff and pupils with managing behaviour. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour for the large majority of the time was calm. Staff were unfailingly patient in their interactions with pupils. Much work has gone into building trusting relationships between staff and pupils. Some staff say that the behaviour of a small group of pupils in 'lower' school is especially challenging, and this has been acknowledged by leaders. For these pupils, the existing system, including the use of restraint, is not working. Leaders are actively pursuing different approaches to meet the needs of these pupils.

There is a broad range of provision for pupils' personal development. An external scheme has been purchased which sets out the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education and relationship, sex and health education (RSHE). Pupils' opportunities to learn about the world around them is enriched with forest-school opportunities, a physical exercise and team-building programme, 'Cycle-Recycle' and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. These programmes are designed to build pupils' respect, tolerance, resilience, independence and character. There is a rich diet of assemblies to educate pupils about society, covering areas such as Black History. The school is a Holocaust 'Beacon School'. Recently, pupils visited the town's war memorial on Remembrance Day.

Leaders are deeply committed to the school's pupils. They want the best for them. Senior leaders have recognised that they need to make the academic curriculum a priority, and to increase the academic ambition which all staff have for all pupils. Currently, the clarity of the proprietor's and leaders' vision for achieving this is not as sharp as it needs to be to bring about such a culture shift. To a very high degree, staff feel supported by leaders in matters of workload. Leaders are compliant with the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and with the implementation of statutory guidance on RSHE.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that they have trained staff in the necessary safeguarding knowledge. The process for referring cases of concern to external agencies, such as children's social care, are robust. Leaders know what to do to support pupils when worries emerge, and to get them the help they need. There is a wide range of approaches to educating pupils about keeping safe, such as assemblies and in the wider curriculum. Leaders have identified likely and particular risks and have ensured that appropriate risk assessments are in place. They understand the responsibilities for them to communicate with safeguarding bodies, such as the Disclosure and Barring Service, where this is necessary.

The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school website. The policy is in line with statutory guidance.

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

- There is no system of synthetic phonics in place. Teachers are expected to use whatever reading strategies they wish to use. This means there are various approaches to supporting the weakest readers. These approaches do not make use of phonics techniques. As a result, the weakest readers are not taught how to decode words and they struggle to read. As a matter of urgency, leaders should implement a system of synthetic phonics and ensure that staff are fully trained in its use.
- Across almost all subjects, the curriculum is only partially planned. Where it is planned, there is limited connection between years or key stages, especially between the primary and secondary phases. As a result, there is no clarity about what pupils should learn, or in what order. Consequently, pupils' acquisition of subject knowledge, skills and understanding is patchy and does not equip them to achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders should complete the full planning of the curriculum as soon as possible.
- Not everyone shares an understanding that the academic curriculum should be similarly aspirational and ambitious to the personal development of pupils. Leaders' vision for what pupils could achieve is not clear. As a result, some subject planning, some teaching and the mindset of some staff are often too low in the expectations of what pupils could achieve. Leaders should take steps to ensure that all staff have high aspirations for what pupils could achieve in the academic curriculum.

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	135247
DfE registration number	813/6005
Local authority	North Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10205940
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Number of part-time pupils	6
Proprietor	Dr Rodney Wardlaw
Chair	Linda Wardlaw
Headteacher	Melissa Marris
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,000 to £58,000
Telephone number	01652 654251
Website	www.demeterhouseschool.com
Email address	admin@demeterhouseschool.com
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 May 2019

Information about this school

- The school operates across three sites: the 'upper' school at Brigg, the 'lower' school at Appleby, and a site at Castlethorpe. Since the previous inspection, the school has closed The Grove site, and no longer uses the Castlethorpe site for Demeter House pupils. That site is run as an alternative provision for pupils from mainstream schools, who attend for a fixed period of weeks before returning to their home school.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has become co-educational and now admits girls.
- Demeter House school provides education for pupils with SEND, particularly autism spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care 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 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.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out this inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned due to a complaint, and to check the suitability of the school's premises following changes to its site arrangements. At the DfE's request, the inspection was carried out without notice.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and leaders for special educational needs. An inspector met with the proprietor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, design technology and art. For the deep dives, 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 of the checks made on staff employed at the school. An inspector spoke with a school

safeguarding officer and the designated officer at North Lincolnshire local authority.

- Inspectors met with a range of staff employed at the school and spoke with pupils about their experiences of the school.
- Inspectors took into account the 15 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and spoke with two parents on the telephone. They also considered 41 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Steve Shaw, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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