

Inspection of Hartwell School

Yarm Road, Stockton TS18 3TN

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 February 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

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 good school. Pupils who come to Hartwell have often struggled to cope in their previous setting. Many have not attended their previous school for some time. Once settled at Hartwell, pupils attend well. Pupils are generally calm around the school and behave well in lessons. Each pupil has their own key worker, whom they can speak to if they are worried about anything. Pupils feel safe and trust adults in the school to help them.

Pupils enjoy the small classes and the wide range of subjects they study. Leaders check what pupils know and can do. Each pupil has a 'pathways' plan that describes their individual needs. Teachers use this information well. There are a lot of activities aimed at developing pupils' confidence and social skills. These activities include rock-climbing, guitar lessons and yoga with llamas.

Leaders recognise how important it is that pupils become independent readers. Primary-phase staff teach phonics well and this helps younger pupils develop as readers. However, staff who teach older pupils are not confident in teaching phonics. This means that older pupils who are still at the early stage of reading are not getting the help they need to become independent readers.

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

The curriculum offer is ambitious and matches the national curriculum. Pupils can gain a wide range of qualifications. Subject plans for primary and key stage 3 pupils are strong. These plans are well structured and show how pupils will revisit essential learning. At key stage 4, most subject plans are based on the content of examinations. It is not clear in these subject plans how pupils will relearn and master key concepts.

Teachers use questioning well in lessons to check what pupils have understood. Teachers regularly use class discussion to broaden pupils' understanding of the world around them. Pupils learn to write at length. In English, for example, pupils were proud to show how they had written about characters from the Dickens' novella 'A Christmas carol'.

Reading is prioritised by leaders across the school. Secondary pupils enjoy the book space in their common room and primary pupils use their reading room well. Reading is taught well in key stages 1 and 2. However, secondary-phase staff are not confident in delivering phonics. Some pupils who join the school as secondary pupils need phonics lessons because they are still at the early stage of reading. Leaders' monitoring identified this issue. Their improvement plans include the need for all staff to learn how to deliver phonics well.

Leaders collect a lot of information on pupils before they start at the school. The school has its own clinical team, which includes psychologists and therapists. The clinical team completes a range of checks with pupils to identify any additional

needs. Leaders design what they call a 'pathways' plan for each pupil. These plans explain what approaches staff need to use in order to maximise pupils' learning. Staff implement these plans well.

Leaders' expectations and routines are well established and followed by pupils. The staff-to-pupil ratio is high and reflects the needs of the pupils in the school. Most pupils' attendance increases once they settle at the school. For the very small number of pupils who continue to struggle to attend, leaders design bespoke support plans. Incidents of bullying are rare. There is an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils told the inspectors that if someone upsets them, staff sort it out quickly.

Leaders recognise that their pupils need a broad personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. There is a specialist subject teacher for PSHE and three lessons a week on the timetable. Pupils learn about themselves and people from different faiths and cultures. Pupils know that everyone has the right to be different. Staff teach relationships and sex education confidently. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and can talk about sensitive topics.

Pupils learn about careers, how to apply for jobs and the skills they need for the workplace. There is an independent careers adviser who helps older pupils plan their next steps into further education or employment with training.

The proprietor has ambitious plans for the school. These include improving the outdoor facilities and opening new classrooms for practical subjects. The proprietor has submitted a material change request to the Department for Education (DfE) so that the school can admit more pupils in the future. The headteacher recognises the importance of recruiting appropriate staff who can meet the special educational needs and/or disabilities of pupils in the school. The proprietor is clear that, if the DfE agrees to an increase in pupil numbers, the necessary staff would be in post before additional pupils were admitted.

Staff are pleased with the training provided to them. Most staff say that leaders are considerate of their workload and support them well.

Most parents and carers are very pleased with the school and how their child is doing. One parent said, 'This school is amazing and has helped my child love school again.' However, a small number of parents are unhappy with the quality of communication between school and home. These parents feel frustrated and worried that their child's needs are not being met fully.

The proprietor has set up a school board to govern the school. Board members use their skills and experience to support and challenge the headteacher. The board meets half-termly and scrutinises detailed reports provided by school leaders. The proprietor employs specialist advisers to carry out regular checks on safeguarding and health and safety in the school. The proprietor ensures that leaders fulfil their duties as required by the Equality Act 2010.

The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards are met. It is likely that these standards would continue to be met if the DfE were to decide to approve the material change requested by the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are aware that pupils have additional needs that make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe in their community and online.

The proprietor ensures that all staff receive training in safeguarding and child protection. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and his deputies have enhanced training. The DSL regularly provides staff with safeguarding updates and checks that staff retain essential safeguarding information. The DSL is quick to identify pupils who need help. He makes prompt referrals to external agencies when these are necessary. The DSL maintains accurate and secure records of all referrals and their outcomes.

Leaders are trained in safer recruitment. The headteacher makes sure that all required checks are completed on any adult who works or volunteers at the school. The proprietor ensures that the school's buildings, facilities and equipment are well maintained and safe to use.

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

- School leaders have ensured that subjects in the primary and lower secondary phase have well-developed, sequential plans. However, the long-term plans for most subjects at key stage 4 are heavily reliant on examination specifications. This means that the supporting medium-term plans are not consistently showing how essential learning will be revisited over time. This is affecting pupils' mastery of key concepts and methods in some subjects. Leaders have already taken action to improve curriculum planning, although COVID-19 has delayed some of this work. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied. Leaders should continue their review of curriculum planning and ensure that all plans detail essential learning and are robustly sequenced.
- Reading is taught well in the primary phase. Staff in the secondary phase are not trained in phonics. This is limiting the progress of older pupils who are at the early stage of reading when they join the school. Leaders should embed their whole-school reading strategy and ensure that all staff who need it are trained in how to teach reading and deliver the school's chosen phonics scheme.

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	146733
DfE registration number	808/6005
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10214160
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Phil Jones
Headteacher	Peter Ewart
Annual fees (day pupils)	£67375 to £87621
Telephone number	01642 130320
Website	https://witherslackgroup.co.uk/hartwell-school
Email address	hartwell@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 December 2019

Information about this school

- Hartwell School is an independent special school for pupils aged five to 18. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan, but this is not a requirement for admission.
- Hartwell School is part of the Witherslack Group. The school is located in Stockton-on-Tees, but takes pupils from a number of local authorities across the north of England.
- The school is registered for 80 pupils, with 79 pupils on roll at present. The proprietor has applied to the DfE for a material change to increase the number of pupils that the school can take from 80 to 120.
- The proprietor has a school board that provides the function of governance.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative education providers.

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.

- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than had previously been planned. This was because of a concern received by the DfE about how effectively the school was safeguarding its pupils.
- This inspection was carried out with no notice. The lead inspector phoned the school shortly before going onto the school's site to ensure compliance with the school's COVID-19 protocols.
- The school has recently applied to the DfE to make a material change to its registration. The proprietor wishes to increase the number of pupils that can be admitted to the school from 80 to 120. At the DfE's request, inspectors checked whether the school is likely to continue to meet the independent school standards if the DfE were to decide to approve the change. This is the school's first material change request since the school opened in September 2019.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, including the DSL. They also met with a range of other staff.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor's representatives, including the chair of the school board.

- Inspectors undertook a tour of the school's site and visited the classrooms and social areas. They checked the school buildings and grounds against the independent school standards.
- Inspectors looked at the proprietor's plans for new classrooms as part of the request submitted to the DfE to increase the numbers of pupils in the school.
- Inspectors checked staffing levels in the school, including the proprietor's plans to increase staffing as part of the material change request.
- Inspectors did deep dives into English (including reading), mathematics, art and PSHE. The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, meetings with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited lessons of other subjects taught at the school and looked at plans and pupils' work from these subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the school day, at lunchtime and in lessons. They spoke with pupils and observed them reading to their teacher.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included checking the school's safeguarding systems and the single central record of recruitment checks, meeting with the DSL and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors had contact with parents through telephone calls and written comments sent in during the inspection. Inspectors looked at 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors considered surveys completed by 25 staff.
- Inspectors spoke to providers who work with the school and with the local authority designated officer to get his views on safeguarding procedures at the school.

The school's proposed change to maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the DfE to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, inspectors checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Garry Stout

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022