

Inspection of Gust Independent School

1 Haldane Street, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 8SF

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 February 2022

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?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils say they enjoy coming to this small school. They feel safe. One pupil commented, 'This school helps me a lot because staff give me time to think in class, and this makes me less anxious.' This reflects pupils' appreciation of the care and support given by staff.

Pupils behave well in school. Pupils say bullying is not a problem 'because we are friends and understand each other's problems and needs'. Pupils say staff are always available if they have any concerns. Older pupils say that it is important to work hard even when you feel anxious that you might not get it right. Pupils say that staff never give up on them. Pupils feel they achieve beyond their expectations as the staff have such belief in them.

School leaders make sure every pupil has an individual timetable. However, leaders do not ensure all subjects taught are covered in as much detail as they should be. This means it is not possible for pupils who are able to study for exams to do so in some subject areas. This shows that leaders do not always have sufficient ambition for a small number of more able pupils.

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

Leaders have a clear vision for the school. They understand pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. They know how to support them when in crisis. Pupils behave calmly inside and outside the classroom despite their very high levels of need.

Leaders have designed a curriculum that gives pupils the experience of a broad range of subjects. The mathematics, English and personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculums help pupils to achieve well. Vocational subjects such as hair and beauty, construction and motor vehicle maintenance are also sequenced effectively. This helps pupils build secure knowledge.

However, leaders have been too slow to make necessary curriculum changes. Not all subject areas are sequenced effectively to help pupils retain knowledge. For example, subjects such as geography, history and art are often taught as 'one-off' lessons or linked to a topic area. When this happens, pupils are not able to build on previous learning and do not acquire the knowledge and skills they should. Some pupils recognise this and comment that they would like to study more subjects and be able to sit examinations in them where possible. This approach also reduces older pupils' access to some career choices as they miss out on crucial subject content. Some subjects are at an early stage of development. Science will be taught as a single subject next term, and history and geography from next year.

Staff who teach primary-age pupils know that reading is a priority. The reading curriculum ensures that most pupils are able to read fluently. Pupils often start school with limited knowledge of letter sounds. Phonics is taught regularly, and the

curriculum is closely tailored to pupils' knowledge. Pupils are starting to develop a love of reading. However, other areas of the curriculum for primary-age pupils are not as strong. Pupils who are able to are not securing the knowledge they need to successfully move back into mainstream education.

The majority of pupils have additional needs other than SEMH. Some pupils find being with others difficult to cope with. As a result, leaders make sure that pupils benefit from a range of experiences. Activities such as badminton, swimming, cycling and forest school have helped pupils to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. They also help pupils build relationships with their peers.

Leaders make sure that careers guidance is of high quality. An independent careers adviser works with the pupils. This has helped pupils to aspire to a range of possible careers, including becoming a financial adviser or training as a gamekeeper.

Pupils talk openly about the impact of the school's relationships and sex education programme. Pupils say, 'Staff have taught us how to recognise red flags in relationships.' The curriculum is helping pupils develop an understanding of positive relationships and how to stay safe.

Leaders make sure that pupils develop an understanding of diversity, difference and respect. Leaders are aware of the need to provide pupils with real-life learning experiences. Activities that are part of the wider curriculum support pupils' personal development. For example, pupils now visit the library and recognise this as a public building which they enter respectfully and treat their library books with care.

The proprietor and the newly formed board offer challenge and support to senior leaders. However, not all of the independent school standards were met at the time of the inspection. The recording of accidents was not undertaken diligently. Some incident records were incomplete. The numbering of incidents was not consistent, and it appeared that staff other than those who were first-aid trained administered first aid and signed accident sheets.

Leaders have created a caring, nurturing environment. Staff's and pupils' well-being is a priority for leaders. They make sure that everyone is listened to, and that all opinions are valued.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know how to log an incident and spot signs of concern. Record-keeping is detailed. It includes precise notes and demonstrates how appropriate actions are taken to resolve issues. Referrals to other agencies are carried out when appropriate. Strong links with the early help team are in place.

The school's PSHE curriculum enables pupils to learn how to keep safe both inside and outside school. For example, pupils are taught how to keep safe online and know not to give out personal details when using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- The curriculum is not designed effectively. In too many subjects, there are gaps in knowledge content. This means that pupils are not acquiring the knowledge base they should. Expectations for pupils are not always high enough. Leaders need to continue to review the curriculum and ensure that specific knowledge content is sequenced successfully.
- Primary-age pupils who are able to are not sufficiently well prepared to return to mainstream schools. The curriculum does not currently equip them with the knowledge they require to reintegrate successfully. Leaders need to ensure that an appropriate curriculum is in place so that those pupils who are ready to can access mainstream education.
- The quality of recording of first-aid incidents is not sufficiently robust. Not all incidents are recorded fully and oversight by leaders is not sufficiently vigilant. This has led to a dip in standards in the accuracy of incidents recorded. Training for staff on how to record first-aid incidents needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency. Also, a system for monitoring the quality of recording incidents needs to be put in place as soon as possible.

How can I feed back my views?

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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	137385
DfE registration number	929/6002
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10212948
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Philip Gallagher
Headteacher	Karen Gibb
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,000 to £40,000
Telephone number	01670 850943
Website	www.gustschool.com
Email address	info@gustschool.com
Date of previous inspection	1 to 3 May 2018

Information about this school

- The school's last standard inspection took place in May 2018. An emergency inspection as the result of a complaint took place in April 2019. A monitoring visit took place in October 2020.
- The head of school became the headteacher in September 2021. The previous headteacher became the proprietor at the same time.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Most pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with SEMH and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. There are also a number of pupils with an autism spectrum disorder. The school has section 41 approval from the Department for Education.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the proprietor, subject leaders and class teachers.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with four parents.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at the curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at the vocational curriculum, visiting classes in hair and beauty, motor mechanics and building skills. Curriculum plans and pupils' work were looked at in these subject areas.
- Inspectors looked at the single central record and spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding. Inspectors carried out a tour of the school premises to check on the school's compliance with part 5 of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Garry Stout	Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 13 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is-
 - 32(3)(d) particulars of arrangements for meeting the standards contained in paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 13.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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