

# Inspection of The Secret Garden

Shustoke Hall, Moathouse Lane, Shustoke, Birmingham B46 2RJ

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Inspection dates: 15 to 17 March 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

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 school is a tranquil place where pupils' happiness, safety and well-being are important. Pupils feel valued because they are greeted every morning by caring staff. All pupils are treated as unique individuals.

Pupils who have missed long periods of education enjoy coming to school and attend well. They say this is because this school is different, and staff really care about them. All staff provide a safe space where children are happy.

Learning takes place in a peaceful environment, where pupils are surrounded by countryside and animals. Pupils say this reduces their anxieties and helps them to learn.

Leaders and staff have high aspirations for pupils. Pupils generally learn more and remember more of what they have been taught. Expectations around reading and the quality of phonics teaching could be higher in order to encourage reluctant readers to become more fluent and confident in their reading.

Pupils can be themselves because pupils are kind to one another. Bullying is not tolerated. Pupils are confident that staff will resolve issues quickly. Opportunities for social and emotional development are in abundance. Pupils learn to be resilient, tolerant and confident. These transferrable skills mean that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

The proprietor, who is also the principal of the school, has created a calm, nurturing school ethos. This vision is shared by all. Pupils are taught in small groups with a high level of staff support. Sometimes, pupils prefer to learn outside of the classroom, and these choices are respected. Pupils who have missed lots of school enjoy coming to school as all staff understand what works best for them.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders make sure that all staff know how to adjust the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. This means that lessons are carefully adapted to ensure that the content is accessible to all. Pupils therefore engage well with their learning.

Leaders have placed a high emphasis on the teaching of English and mathematics. These subjects are planned logically and taught well. Teachers have thought about the curriculum content and know where pupils need to revise and repeat key learning points. As a result, pupils learn new knowledge and skills that build on what they already know. Their knowledge and skills build progressively over time. Pupils write with increasing creativity and confidence, having learned vocabulary and grammatical techniques. Pupils use their mathematical knowledge to solve different

problems. They apply their skills in practical activities. For example, using weights and measures in cookery and animal care. This helps to solidify their learning.

In curriculum areas that are not as well developed, such as geography, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. This is because teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, and less time has been allocated to these subjects. While pupils are interested in their learning, they do not have enough time, or the benefit of teacher expertise, to learn the subjects in sufficient depth.

A high number of pupils are reluctant readers. A wide range of good-quality resources to support reading are available. The school has invested in a variety of reading materials linked to pupils' interests. However, some pupils are still reluctant to engage. Leaders and staff are keen for pupils to become fluent readers. Where this is most effective, pupils enjoy listening to stories and read aloud with encouragement. Some teachers are skilled in teaching early reading and phonics. This helps pupils to blend and segment words and increases their confidence with reading. However, this is not consistent across all classes.

Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are largely positive. They show a genuine interest in lessons, try hard and ask appropriate questions to deepen their learning. Teachers have carefully linked topics to pupils' interests and hobbies. They also make sure that pupils can practise their skills in other areas of the curriculum. This helps pupils to revisit and deepen their learning.

The collective focus on pupils' well-being means that pupils learn to understand their own feelings and emotions. Pupils are openly encouraged to share how they are feeling. It is okay not to be okay. Staff know their pupils well and recognise when they need additional support. They make sure pupils have access to movement and sensory breaks, and time to relax with the animals. Alongside the more formal curriculum, pupils engage in enrichment sessions, including woodwork, horse riding and golf lessons. These purposeful strategies help pupils to self-regulate and refocus on their learning as well as learning new skills.

The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education helps pupils to prepare for their futures. Pupils actively engage in enterprise projects and develop transferable skills such as budgeting and speaking and listening. Most pupils have ideas for their future careers and say school is helping them to prepare for life after school. Although the curriculum for relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education are new, pupils speak confidently about healthy friendships and relationships.

The proprietor currently oversees the governance of the school. She is aware of her statutory responsibilities. As a result, the school meets all the independent school standards. The school has produced a detailed accessibility plan. The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 through clear adaptations to the learning environment as well as the curriculum.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policy outlines what to do if there are concerns about a pupil. This is written with regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The policy is made available on request.

Staff are trained to recognise the signs of abuse and neglect. They know how to report concerns. Those responsible for the management of safeguarding have robust systems in place to protect children. They take swift and appropriate action and work with wider agencies if needed.

Staff take their responsibilities seriously. No chances are taken when it comes to child safety.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some areas of the curriculum are less developed than others. In these areas, subject leaders have not carefully considered how pupils' knowledge and skills are developed over time. In these subjects, teachers' subject knowledge is less secure. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could in these curriculum areas. Leaders need to review the curriculum to make sure that learning is sequenced and builds pupils' knowledge over time. Leaders need to ensure that teachers have appropriate knowledge of the subjects they are required to teach.
- The teaching of reading is not consistent across the school. As a result, some pupils are not developing their phonics skills well and are not progressing as well as they could in reading. Leaders need to make sure that all staff have the knowledge and expertise to teach phonics effectively, so that pupils read with growing accuracy, fluency and confidence.

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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>	148243
<b>DfE registration number</b>	937/6033
<b>Local authority</b>	Warwickshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10212829
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 14
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	10
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	3
<b>Proprietor</b>	Annette Gadd
<b>Chair</b>	Annette Gadd
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annette Gadd
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£43,000 to £74,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01675 488825
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thesecretgarden.org.uk">www.thesecretgarden.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:agadd@thesecondgarden.org.uk">agadd@thesecondgarden.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The Secret Garden is an independent day school located in the outskirts of Birmingham. It offers places to pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an education, health, care plan. The school opened to pupils in April 2021.
- Places are commissioned by local authorities, including Birmingham, Solihull and Warwickshire.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision. Pupils do, however, engage in horse riding and golf lessons at local venues.

## 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 and have taken this into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the proprietor, who is also the principal, along with the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. A meeting was also held with the school's business manager.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, science and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspector also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders of other subjects, including PSHE and RSE.
- The lead inspector examined the school's safeguarding policy and processes. A meeting was also held with the designated safeguarding leads. The school's single central record was also reviewed along with staff training records.
- Inspectors toured the school to check the suitability of the premises. Several key policies were also reviewed, including admissions, attendance, anti-bullying, behaviour, curriculum, health and safety, and complaints.

- Parental responses to Ofsted’s Parent View questionnaire were considered as well as feedback from staff who completed Ofsted’s survey for staff. No pupils’ surveys were completed.

### **Inspection team**

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector      Ofsted Inspector

Mike Onyon      Ofsted Inspector

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