

Inspection of Park House School

Andover Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 6NQ

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 April 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Too many pupils feel unsafe at this school. Their learning is too frequently disrupted by the poor behaviour of others. Some pupils told inspectors that they do not report bullying or unkind behaviour, because they think it will not make any difference or may make things worse.

Adults want pupils to be happy and to achieve well. They aspire for pupils to achieve academic success that prepares them well for whatever future career they choose. However, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not supported well enough to meet these aspirations.

Leaders do not do enough to assure themselves that pupils are safe. Pupils are too frequently absent from school or lessons. Registration arrangements do not currently enable leaders to be sure whether students in the sixth form are on the school site.

Despite all of this, many pupils conduct themselves well and do their best. They describe and demonstrate respectful relationships with their peers and teachers. They are frustrated by others who do not uphold their values, and the impact it has on their experience of school. They, along with some parents and staff, lack confidence in leaders' work to improve other pupils' behaviour quickly enough.

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

Park House School is in a state of turmoil. Since the last inspection, ongoing changes to senior leadership and governance have impacted negatively on the school's ethos and direction. This is reflected in the significant weaknesses identified during this inspection.

Current senior leaders are temporary in their posts. Since September, they have taken some initial and useful steps to address emerging concerns, such as around health and safety, pupils' behaviour and provision for pupils with SEND. Trust leaders have provided some additional support to leaders, whose work is leading to a few very early signs of improvement. However, a number of significant concerns about standards in the school remain unaddressed or unresolved. An absence of permanent leadership is proving unsettling for pupils, staff and parents.

Governance lacks the rigour needed to bring about rapid improvement. The trust acknowledges that it does not have the necessary capacity to influence change as quickly as is needed. An academy board has recently been put in place, with the aim of increasing school leaders' accountability to the trust. This group is in the process of establishing its role and responsibilities. As such, it is currently having little impact on the governance of the school.

The atmosphere around the school is unsettled. While many pupils conduct themselves well, others do not. At times, this makes their peers feel unsafe. Some pupils are frequently missing from lessons, with leaders not always sure where they

are. Some pupils do not come to school as often as they should, even taking account of illness linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Older pupils, particularly in the sixth form, sometimes have their lessons disrupted by younger pupils who are placed in their classrooms as a sanction. Work carried out with support of the local authority has led to a recent reduction in the number of pupils being suspended from school. Nevertheless, a significant minority of pupils choose to disregard adults' expectations for their behaviour.

Pupils with SEND do not receive the help they need to access the curriculum successfully. For some, there have been delays in identifying their needs or reviewing the impact of support on their progress. In some instances, statutory timescales for annual reviews of education, health and care plans have not been met. While senior leaders have taken steps to address this issue, there is further work to do. A small number of pupils with SEND receive all of their education away from the classroom, impeding access to the more practical aspects of the curriculum. Some staff lack the knowledge and confidence to meet pupils' needs in the classroom. On occasion, this results in pupils not being permitted to access resources or use strategies that have been identified as part of their support plan.

The planned curriculum is suitably ambitious. Most pupils study a broad array of subjects, with large proportions achieving the government ambition to study the full range of English Baccalaureate subjects during key stage 4. Pupils acquire relevant qualifications that enable them to move successfully to the next stage of education, employment or training at the end of Year 11. Students in the sixth form access a predominantly academic curriculum, in line with their needs and aspirations. The small number who need to be are supported in working towards an appropriate English or mathematics qualification. An above-average proportion of students move on to education, employment or training at the end of Year 13.

Teachers have useful knowledge of the subjects they teach. Their planning is heavily influenced by the qualifications that pupils are studying towards, rather than the knowledge that they need to gain. Consequently, teachers' checks on pupils' learning are not precise enough to identify the knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. This impedes the pace with which teachers can address these gaps.

A very small number of pupils receive at least part of their education at an alternative provider. These pupils follow a curriculum that meets their needs. Leaders make appropriate checks on pupils' attendance, welfare and progress. Pupils engage increasingly with their education as a result of attending these settings.

Leaders recognise the importance of prioritising reading. There are deliberate opportunities for pupils to read as part of their curriculum, including through the tutor programme. It is not clear how well reluctant readers are benefiting from these opportunities. Pupils in the earliest stages of reading are helped to learn phonics. This extra help is not always frequent enough to support pupils in rapidly becoming fluent readers.

Leaders' plans for the personal development curriculum are suitably thoughtful and equally ambitious for the future. They provide suitably for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and meet the requirements for relationships and sex education. However, these plans are not lived out well enough in terms of what pupils experience in the classroom. Provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance does not currently meet the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships, because key stage 4 pupils do not get access to a suitably broad range of post-16 providers and employers. In contrast, students in the sixth form do receive this entitlement, including through participation in apprenticeship week. Some pupils say that staff often do not have the knowledge or confidence to teach the character and values curriculum in a helpful, reassuring or informative way.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

High levels of truancy and weaknesses in registration arrangements put pupils at risk, because adults do not know where they are. During the inspection, leaders acknowledged they could not confidently identify which sixth-form students were on site, because arrangements for student registration were not working effectively.

Leaders are suitably knowledgeable about their safeguarding roles. They have ensured that policies and procedures around safeguarding duties are fit for purpose. However, some staff, despite receiving training, do not understand their safeguarding duties well enough. For instance, their knowledge of the potential risks to pupils in relation to harmful sexual behaviours is not up to date. This means that they are not sufficiently alert to when pupils may be at risk from harm. Some support staff report not having been required to attend safeguarding training at the start of the academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The temporary and transient nature of current leadership and governance is preventing swift and effective action from being taken to address significant weaknesses in the school. Consequently, standards of behaviour have declined, pupils' needs are not being met and safeguarding is ineffective. Prompt action should be taken to stabilise governance and senior leadership, so that there is sufficient collective capacity to make the changes needed to improve the school.
- Safeguarding is ineffective. Adults do not know where pupils are, because truancy is high and registration arrangements in the sixth form are ineffective. Staff lack the knowledge to be alert to potential risks to pupils. Leaders should take effective action to reduce truancy from lessons and put appropriate registration arrangements in place for students in the sixth form. They should ensure that all

staff receive and understand sufficient training that enables them to confidently identify potential risks to pupils.

- A significant minority of pupils behave in a way that makes others feel unsafe and impacts on their learning. Leaders should ensure that the school's behaviour policy is implemented consistently, so that the poor behaviour of a significant minority is addressed promptly.
- Staff do not understand pupils' needs well enough, and so do not meet them consistently well. This impacts on how well pupils with SEND and those learning to read are supported across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the knowledge, information and support necessary for them to meet pupils' needs successfully in the classroom.
- When planning the curriculum, teachers do not sufficiently consider the knowledge that pupils need to gain and in what order. Assessments do not help them precisely identify what it is that pupils need to do to improve. Leaders should ensure that staff use their subject knowledge to plan and adapt learning over time, moving beyond the focus of examinations.

Having considered the evidence, the inspectors strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early careers teachers.

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 school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136733
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10231179
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1186
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	145
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Dr Coleen Jackson
Principal	Damian Crabbe (Interim Principal)
Website	www.parkhouseschool.org/
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Park House is a co-educational academy for pupils aged 11 to 18. There are currently 145 students in the sixth form. The school has no particular religious character.
- The interim principal commenced this role in September 2021, when the previous principal left after a year in post. The interim principal's substantive role is that of vice-principal. Currently, a number of other senior leaders also hold interim roles. Currently, no substantive principal has been appointed.
- The school is governed by Transform Learning Trust. This trust was established in September 2020, after evolving from the Achievement for All Education Trust, which previously had responsibility for governance of the school. The chief executive officer is currently absent from work and is leaving her post at Easter 2022, when this role will be filled by an interim postholder. Park House is the only

school in this trust. At the time of the inspection, the school was concluding a consultation about joining the Greenshaw Learning Trust from September 2022.

- An academy board was recently established by the trust, to provide additional local governance. This board is in the early stages of becoming established. It is chaired by the vice-chair of the trust and incorporates staff and parent representatives.
- The school uses three alternative providers to support a small number of pupils with their education. All of these alternative providers are registered with and inspected by Ofsted. In addition, a very small number of pupils are currently receiving their education via the local authority medical tuition service.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspectors deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- The inspection was carried out following a number of complaints made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether safeguarding arrangements were effective, whether standards of behaviour were acceptable, whether pupils with SEND were having their needs met adequately and whether leadership and management were effective.
- This inspection was carried out without notice. The lead inspector telephoned to notify the principal of the inspection fifteen minutes prior to arriving on the school site.
- This was the first inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim principal and with other senior and middle leaders. They spoke with a range of relevant stakeholders, including the chair of trustees, representatives of the academy board and representatives of West Berkshire local authority. Inspectors also looked at a range of relevant information provided by school leaders and available on the school website.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into English, mathematics, history and business studies. This involved meeting with subject leaders, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to teachers and pupils.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements were scrutinised. Inspectors reviewed the school's central record of recruitment checks on adults working in the school.

They looked at safeguarding-related policies, staff training and other relevant records.

- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. They also spoke to pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors took account of survey responses from 77 pupils and 68 staff. They also considered 279 responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire, including 273 free-text responses.

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