

Inspection of The Robert Ogden School

Clayton Lane, Thurnscoe, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S63 0BG

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 May 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Staff meet the social and emotional needs of pupils exceptionally well. Teachers plan learning that enables each pupil to access knowledge in a way that is best for them. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils are better prepared for their future.

School leaders ensure that a wide range of extra-curricular activities are planned to develop character. Pupils look forward to activities such as overnight residential stays and enterprise projects. Teachers have made links with over 25 different local employers to give pupils every opportunity to develop personally and help prepare them for 'life beyond education'.

The atmosphere in the school is calm and orderly. Teachers create a fantastic environment in which pupils want to, and are able to, learn. The personalised support team work exceptionally well with teaching staff to support the pupils with additional needs. Lessons are built around pupils' emotional needs. Consequently, pupils behave extremely well. Many pupils spoke assertively to inspectors during the inspection, clearly demonstrating how they are developing resilience and confidence.

Parents' responses to the Ofsted questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. For example, parents wrote comments including 'because of this school, my child has a better future ahead of them', '[this school has] given my child a chance to feel that they belong, they are good enough and they can achieve', 'this school is everything a school should be', '[this school is] a place where children feel valued and safe' and 'there should be more schools like this'.

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

Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their life and education as they experience a rich and broad curriculum. Curriculums are organised so that pupils gain knowledge and skills over time. Teachers are good at ensuring that the curriculum pupils receive is flexible as they respond quickly and effectively to meet pupils' needs. Teachers keep track of the progress pupils make through the 'standards' in each subject. These 'standards' are then translated into individual targets in pupils' individual learning plans (ILP). In some subjects, these standards are too broad and therefore there is a risk of pupils missing some of the building blocks they need to understand future learning. Consequently, some subject leaders struggle to accurately articulate what comes next and what pupils have previously learned.

Teaching pupils to read and communicate well is prioritised across the school. The teaching of communication and language for those pupils with sensory and pre-phonics learning needs is a strength. The support of clinical staff, teachers knowing pupils particularly well and staff knowledge mean that these pupils' needs are particularly well catered for. However, senior leaders recognise that the teaching of reading could be even better. Consequently, leaders have invested in a new phonics scheme. They have planned training for all relevant staff. Speech and language therapists play an important role in supporting pupils in developing reading and

comprehension knowledge and skills. They work closely with teaching staff to ensure that ILP targets and activities in the classroom are focused on the knowledge each pupil needs. Teachers adapt activities to ensure that pupils can access learning.

Pupils are given the opportunity to demonstrate that they are capable of excelling in a subject. Many pupils, often sixth-form students, access local colleges to complete further studies in subjects such as drama, music production and advanced level mathematics and computer science. Leaders go to great lengths to give pupils every opportunity to achieve in life skills and academic subjects.

All staff have a comprehensive induction programme and ongoing training in meeting the needs of pupils with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Staff commented on how this helps them manage behaviours and learning needs. In turn, this enable pupils to learn strategies to manage their own behaviours. Pupils who spoke to inspectors during the inspection all said that they enjoyed coming to school. Staff use positive strategies with confidence and pupils behave exceptionally well as a result. The views of over 52 members of staff were sought during the inspection. The vast majority of staff commented how they felt well supported by senior leaders.

The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards are consistently met. The governing body has been severely depleted since the COVID-19 pandemic. The governing body lacks the capacity to challenge and support the school. Those responsible do not have a clear vision for how they are going to improve this support. Large numbers of staff absences due to COVID-19 have impacted on the schools' improvement journey, with some staffing issues still remaining. Difficulties in recruiting new staff have also affected improvement. The proprietor has taken decisive action in improving pay conditions to try and remedy problems with recruitment.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a priority every day. The ethos in the school encourages staff to speak out. Daily staff briefings and weekly safeguarding meetings mean that any issues, such as changes in pupil behaviours, are quickly considered and appropriate action taken. Staff get regular safeguarding training. Safeguarding checks are made on all staff and visitors to the school. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has an in-depth knowledge of all pupils who may, for some reason, have been brought to her attention. The DSL works closely with the local authority designated safeguarding officer to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken. The members of the school leadership consider that the support they receive from external sources has been impacted by the pandemic, consequently increasing the workload of school leaders.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some foundation subjects, the sequential steps in the curriculum journey are too vague. For example, sometimes the building blocks of knowledge that pupils need appear in documentation as choices. This means that subject leaders cannot clearly articulate what pupils will learn next. This also causes some confusion in assessing pupils' progress and quality assuring the curriculum in some subjects. Consequently, pupils are not being taught things in a logical sequence in all subjects. This sometimes makes it difficult for pupils to use prior learning to help them better understand what they are being taught. Leaders need to make sure that curriculum plans are free from ambiguity. They need to ensure that subject leaders have a clear idea of exactly what knowledge and vocabulary pupils need to help them build subject knowledge and disciplinary knowledge in all subjects. Subject leaders need to then use these plans to more methodically quality assure the curriculum and report this quality to those responsible for governance.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the governing body has the skills and knowledge to support and challenge school leadership. A clear strategy and vision for improvement is not communicated at governance level. Those responsible for governance have not been taking the right steps to ensure they know that what is happening in school is as good as it can be. Therefore, school leaders have not received appropriate challenge and support that could help them in their desire to make this an outstanding school. The proprietor needs to establish a clear skilled and knowledgeable structure of governance which will offer high-quality support and challenge through carefully considered strategies.

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	106965
DfE registration number	370/6004
Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	10212928
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	130
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	National Autistic Society
Chair	Janet Corcoran
Headteacher	Lorraine Dormand
Annual fees (day pupils)	£64,224 to £94,085
Telephone number	01709 874443
Website	www.robertogdenschool.org.uk
Email address	robert.ogden@nas.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 to 15 March 2018

Information about this school

- The school received its last full standard inspection in March 2018, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- An emergency unannounced inspection which took place in January 2019 found all of the independent school standards that were checked were met.
- The school caters for pupils who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder between the ages of five and 19. Pupils are currently placed at the school by 16 different local authorities.
- The school uses four alternative provisions, three are registered with Ofsted, one is unregistered.
- The school chose to remove itself from the Department of Education, section 41 approved list, from 1 April 2022. The school website notes this is 'to have better control over their admissions process'.

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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with members of the senior leadership team, including the principal, regularly throughout the inspection. They also met with curriculum teams, teaching staff and support staff. A virtual meeting was held with a representative of the National Autistic Society who is also the chair of governors.
- Responses to the staff Ofsted online questionnaire and the parental questionnaire, Parent View, were considered.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in reading, physical education, mathematics and science. They looked at curriculum plans and pupils' work, and they visited lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during lessons and during the day.
- Inspectors studied a range of documentation, including safeguarding documentation, to ensure that the independent school standards are met.
- The lead inspector toured the building to ensure that the premises meet the requirements of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Penny

Ofsted Inspector

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