

Inspection of Austen House

Bridge House, 1 Stuart Road, Bredbury, Stockport SK6 2SR

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils know that staff care about them. Pupils develop trusting and supportive relationships with staff and peers. They feel safe and valued at Austen House.

Pupils behave well in school. Their self-esteem and engagement with learning improve considerably due to leaders' high expectations for pupils' behaviour and education. Pupils trust adults to resolve any disagreements that they may have with their friends. This includes any rare incidents of bullying. As a result of leaders' supportive and highly effective approach, pupils develop a renewed sense of pride in their work.

Pupils know that leaders have their best interests at heart. The proprietor body, leaders and staff are ambitious for pupils. They are committed to improving pupils' life chances. Leaders work together effectively, to remove the significant barriers that pupils face. As a result, pupils achieve well from their individual starting points.

Pupils engage well in opportunities to learn about life beyond school. They enjoy using the local gym and playing ten-pin bowling with their schoolmates. This improves pupils' confidence and community engagement. Pupils learn how to prepare healthy food. They raise money for charities. They enjoyed making bird houses to support the local wildlife. Pupils develop as active and caring citizens.

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

Pupils at Austen House have often experienced significant disruption to their education. For example, many pupils have been out of formal education for extended periods. Many have had short-term placements in several settings. Pupils struggle to engage with formal education and have gaps in their knowledge in many subjects. The pandemic has exacerbated this further. On arrival at the school, many pupils have low self-esteem.

Leaders have established a well-designed curriculum that sets out the knowledge pupils will learn and when they will learn it. Pupils study a range of subjects. Pupils learn the curriculum in clear and logical steps. In many subjects, pupils revisit this knowledge often. This helps pupils to remember the curriculum. For most subjects, pupils can achieve an accredited qualification.

Teachers use a range of suitable resources and activities that help pupils to remember the curriculum. Pupils learn in calm, well-organised classrooms that support their learning. For example, pupils refer to helpful displays that remind them of important aspects of the curriculum.

Leaders use a range of assessment systems to monitor the impact of the curriculum. For example, in lessons, staff check that pupils have remembered knowledge from previous learning. Staff use this information to adapt their teaching to meet pupils'

needs. However, in subjects other than English and mathematics, these checks do not pinpoint gaps in pupils' knowledge as well, or as quickly, as they should. This means that leaders are not assured that pupils build new knowledge securely on what they already know and can do.

Leaders are committed to providing pupils with a range of ambitious qualifications. For example, leaders have introduced more vocational qualifications subjects to match pupils' aspirations. If needed, the proprietor body employs tutors to provide specialist teaching.

Leaders, staff and sessional tutors have a suitable subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum. However, leaders' ability to monitor and evaluate the impact of the curriculum has been hampered by the pandemic. In addition, leaders lack the expertise to monitor and improve some subjects confidently.

Leaders identify pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities well. When required, they involve specialists who are employed by the proprietor body to support this process. Leaders work with a range of other professionals, including social workers, to develop individualised plans for each pupil. This effective partnership work helps to ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have their needs met effectively.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading. Many pupils have developed a negative opinion about reading due to their disrupted previous education. Leaders work to improve pupils' perception of reading quickly. Staff ensure that pupils read high-quality texts in a range of subjects. Pupils receive effective support from staff to improve their reading skills. As a result, pupils become more confident readers.

Pupils' behaviour improves significantly over time. Staff work effectively to form caring and trusted relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to settle into school life quickly. Pupils rarely miss a day of school. They engage well with staff in lessons and at breaktimes. Skilled staff resolve any incidents of disruption in a highly effective way. Pupils proudly shared their history work with inspectors. This reflects the dramatic improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning. Social workers who spoke to inspectors described the positive changes in pupils' behaviour as 'remarkable'.

Leaders provide helpful and impartial careers advice and guidance to pupils. This introduces pupils to a range of suitable options. Pupils told inspectors that they have identified ambitious possible careers. When appropriate, leaders support pupils to access work experience opportunities with suitable employers.

Pupils learn about a range of faiths, cultures and people. Leaders encourage pupils to find out about life in modern Britain. For example, pupils discussed the impact of modern prime ministers and how parliament works with their peers and staff. Such activities improve pupils' understanding of democracy.

The proprietor body ensures that the independent school standards are met consistently. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place. All required policies are available on the proprietor body's website, including the safeguarding policy. The

proprietor body and senior leaders ensure that the premises are safe and well maintained. They offer effective support and challenge to leaders. The proprietor body considers staff workload carefully. Staff have access to a range of resources to support their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn how to stay safe. Staff deliver this learning in a way that considers pupils' individual needs carefully. For example, pupils learn how to communicate online and use mobile telephones safely. Close supervision from staff ensures that pupils do this in a well-managed way. Pupils also learn about the risks of drugs, criminal exploitation and knife crime. They know how to report any worries that they have.

The proprietor body and leaders ensure that staff receive regular and appropriate training. Staff know how to raise concerns quickly if they notice any concerns. They work closely with other agencies to provide effective support to pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- A small number of subjects, including vocational courses, are at an early stage of development. Leaders are new to their roles. They have not received suitable guidance on how to monitor the effectiveness of these recently established curriculums. This has been hampered by the pandemic. Leaders should ensure that staff receive suitable support and guidance so that they can lead and monitor their areas of responsibility with confidence.
- In some subjects, leaders do not identify gaps in pupils' prior learning. This means that teachers do not always build on what pupils already know. This hinders the progress that these pupils make. Leaders should ensure that assessment systems allow teachers to check that pupils have remembered prior knowledge before new learning is introduced.

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	142333
DfE registration number	888/6062
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10210356
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Proprietor	Care 4 Children Residential Services Ltd
Chair	Virginia Perkins
Headteacher	Diana Nickson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,000
Telephone number	03455 215 155
Website	www.educ8.org.uk
Email address	d.nickson@care4children.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 March 2019

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the directors of the proprietor body, Care 4 Children Residential Services Ltd, including the appointment of a new chief executive officer.
- A new senior leadership team, headteacher and teaching team have been appointed since the last inspection.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school was closed from March 2021 to October 2021. All pupils at the school have started since January 2022.
- The school received its previous standard inspection in March 2019.

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 with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, history and personal, social and health education. They met with subject leaders, visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. This included documentation and information relating to the independent school standards. Inspectors spoke to the headteacher and other staff throughout the inspection. The lead inspector conducted a tour of the site. Inspectors considered case studies of past and present pupils.
- The lead inspector met with the school's regional headteacher and the head of education. Both are senior leaders employed by the proprietor body. He spoke on the telephone to the chair of the proprietor body. The lead inspector also spoke on the telephone to representatives of local authorities who place pupils at the school. An inspector spoke on the telephone to a therapist employed by the school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and maintaining the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and evaluated staff's understanding of these procedures. The lead

inspector reviewed records of pupils' attendance. Inspectors discussed safeguarding with pupils.

- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. There were no responses to the pupil or staff surveys.

Inspection team

Adam Sproston, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Phill Walmsley

Ofsted Inspector

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