

Inspection of Huckleberry Therapeutic School

Manor Farm, Manor Road, Wantage OX12 8HJ

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have not prioritised pupils' safety and well-being. Significant weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements have left some pupils at risk of harm. In addition, pupils do not feel safe at this school. They do not trust that adults will address incidents of bullying and harassment. Pupils told inspectors that they are worried about other pupils' racist, homophobic and derogatory sexualised language. A culture of disrespect pervades this school. One pupil told inspectors, 'You would not feel happy here if you were Black or gay.'

Staff treat pupils with kindness and warmth. However, their expectations of pupils' behaviour are extremely low. Staff do not intervene to address incidents of very poor behaviour. Pupils often exit lessons, roam around the school grounds, damage property and hurt others. They do not take responsibility for their actions and therefore put themselves and others at risk of significant harm. One pupil rightly described the school's atmosphere as 'chaotic'.

The quality of education is inadequate. Leaders have not implemented a well-planned, coherent curriculum. They have not ensured that staff have had the training they need to provide for pupils' educational, social and mental health needs. As a result, pupils do not achieve as they should.

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

Pupils do not get a good deal at Huckleberry. Leaders' aspirations of what pupils can achieve are extremely poor. They have not implemented an ambitious, well-designed curriculum. Leaders have not provided teachers with clear guidance about what pupils need to learn and the order in which pupils need to learn new content. Currently, learning is typically centred on disconnected, superficial experiences. As a result, pupils struggle to recall important ideas and knowledge. Across many subjects, pupils do not achieve well. They are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Leaders have not prioritised reading. They have not ensured that all pupils learn to read quickly and fluently. Younger pupils are not introduced to phonics quickly enough. Staff have not been trained to deliver the school's phonics programme effectively. They do not provide pupils with books that match the words and sounds that pupils know. As a result, pupils are not able to practise their developing reading skills and some lose confidence. One pupil said, 'I don't like reading because it is too hard.'

Leaders have not trained staff to enable them to provide well for pupils' complex needs. Staff do not use the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to help pupils learn as well as they should. They do not carefully check and help pupils to embed the knowledge that they need to learn and remember. Staff are often very preoccupied with taking photographs to showcase evidence of learning and progress. Too often, teachers provide pupils with activities and

resources that overwhelm them. As a result, pupils become easily distracted and disengaged. This often leads to dysregulated and very poor behaviour.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are inadequate. Often, pupils show little respect towards their work or towards others. Staff are not well trained in the school's specialist therapeutic approaches. Behaviour records show that staff do not address serious breaches of the behaviour policy in a consistent manner. Many pupils told inspectors that staff do not deal with incidents fairly or efficiently. One pupil said, 'If I were worried, I would not talk to staff because I don't think they know what to do.'

Pupils are not well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders and the proprietor do not fulfil their legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. They do not teach pupils to respect people who are of a different sexual orientation from themselves, or from other cultures and communities. Some of the school's learning activities about religious festivals and celebrations perpetuate stereotypical and prejudicial views.

The proprietor does not have rigorous oversight of the quality of education or safeguarding arrangements at the school. The proprietor too readily accepts what leaders say and has not provided effective challenge to leaders. The proprietor has not ensured that the independent school standards (the standards) are met.

Staff say that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being. However, they feel that leaders have not invested in their training. This includes training to develop their subject knowledge and the specialist approaches required to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders and the proprietor have not ensured that there is a culture of vigilance. Safeguarding record-keeping, including concerns about pupils and leaders' actions, is wholly inadequate. Safeguarding records are full of omissions, inaccuracies and inappropriate responses. Leaders are too quick to report that the school has no concerns about pupils. Additionally, leaders assess safeguarding concerns as primarily relating to matters outside school and refer information back to parents and carers. Leaders do not refer their concerns to external agencies when they should. Consequently, pupils do not get the help that they need.

Leaders and the proprietor have not made sure that staff understand and are able to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. They have not ensured that all staff know how to make referrals appropriately or escalate safeguarding concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders do not always make safeguarding referrals to external agencies when they should. This means that pupils are potentially at risk and do not get the help and support that they may need. Leaders must ensure that concerns about pupils are referred to external agencies promptly.
- Leaders have not ensured that all staff are well trained and knowledgeable about safeguarding arrangements and their responsibilities. As a result, staff are not clear about their responsibilities and the steps they should take to keep pupils safe from harm. Leaders need to provide training to ensure that staff fully understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities to keep pupils safe.
- Safeguarding records are not sufficiently clear or detailed. Some records are inaccurate, and important information is missing. Leaders must ensure that safeguarding records are sufficiently detailed and clear. All safeguarding information must be added to pupils' safeguarding records so that this can be reviewed, assessed and shared with external safeguarding partners in an appropriate and timely way.
- The curriculum is not well designed or coherently sequenced. This means that teachers are not clear about the essential knowledge pupils should learn and the order in which new content should be taught. Consequently, pupils do not achieve well and are not well prepared for the next stage of their education. Leaders should ensure that they identify clearly the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn and remember in each subject. They need to make sure that new content is well sequenced coherently towards the school's identified, clear end-points.
- Leaders have not made sure that teachers use the information in pupils' EHC plans to identify the best way to help pupils learn the curriculum. In most subjects, teachers do not plan activities that meet pupils' individual needs well enough. As a result, pupils are not achieving well and many pupils struggle to retain their focus in lessons. Leaders need to provide training for teachers so they can implement the school's curriculum and therapeutic approaches consistently well and meet the needs of all pupils.
- Leaders have not ensured that the teaching of reading and phonics is effective. The books pupils read do not help them to practise the words and sounds that they are learning. This means that pupils do not learn to read quickly and fluently. Leaders must make sure that all staff are well trained. They need to ensure that the weakest readers are introduced to phonics as soon as they start school and that the books that pupils read match pupils' reading abilities.
- Staff do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour. Their expectations are typically very low. Staff and leaders do not deal effectively or consistently with incidents of unacceptable and dangerous behaviour. This includes discriminatory incidents, harassment and intimidation. As a result, behaviour is inadequate, there is a culture of disrespect, and pupils do not feel safe in school. Leaders need to raise staff's expectations. They need to provide

training to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge they need to implement the school's systems for managing behaviour consistently well.

- Leaders and staff do not teach pupils to respect people who are of a different sexual orientation from themselves or from other cultures and communities. Some learning activities perpetuate stereotypical and prejudicial views. As a result, pupils do not have a secure understanding of life in modern Britain. Leaders need to ensure that they provide pupils with a well-considered personal development curriculum. This will enable pupils to develop their understanding and appreciation of the fundamental British values and protected characteristics. Leaders must also make sure that the curriculum enables pupils to learn about how keep safe and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- The proprietor does not have rigorous oversight of the quality of education, safeguarding arrangements or leaders' actions. The proprietor too readily accepts what leaders say and has not provided effective challenge to leaders. Additionally, the proprietor has not made sure that the standards are met. The proprietor needs to ensure that they challenge leaders more robustly and carefully and keep rigorous oversight of all aspects of the school. The proprietor needs to ensure that the school meets the standards.

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	148625
DfE registration number	931/6025
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10232335
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	Sukhbir Singh and Harvinder Singh t/a Calcot Services for Children
Chair	Sukhbir Singh and Harvinder Singh
Headteacher	Louisa Skinner
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,750 to £77,000
Telephone number	01235 639511
Website	www.huckleberrytherapeuticschool.co.uk
Email address	huckleberrytherapeuticschool@csfc.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Huckleberry Therapeutic School is an independent school for pupils aged five to 11. Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority, which funds their place. All pupils have complex social, emotional and mental health needs. Many have a medical diagnosis, such as for autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The proprietor is Calcot Services for Children Limited, which also runs a number of children's homes across Berkshire, south Oxfordshire and Hampshire. Huckleberry Therapeutic School is one of three schools belonging to the proprietor.
- The school was registered by the Department for Education in June 2021. The school accepted its first pupils in September 2021.
- At the time of this inspection, the headteacher had been in post for a week.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 and senior leaders. The lead inspector spoke with the proprietor via a telephone call. She also spoke over the telephone with an officer from one of the local authorities that places pupils at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, design technology and personal, social and health education as part of the inspection. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum design, visited lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. For the deep dive in English, the lead inspector listened to some pupils read to staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during visits to classrooms, during breaktimes, and as pupils moved around the school. They met with a range of pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to pupils informally during social times and in lessons.
- Inspectors considered responses to the confidential staff survey and spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school.

- Inspectors took account of responses to Ofsted Parent View and the additional free-text comments.
- The lead inspector checked the single central record of recruitment checks and talked with leaders responsible for safeguarding. She also considered safeguarding documents and records.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including policies and documents associated with the independent school standards. The lead inspector reviewed the school's website.

Inspection team

Shazia Akram, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
 - 2(1)(b)(ii) do not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are–
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
 - 2(2)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which–
 - 2(2)(d)(i) reflects the school’s aim and ethos; and
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(f) where the school has pupils below compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their educational needs in relation to personal, social, emotional and physical development and communication and language skills;
 - 2(2)(g) where the school has pupils above compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their needs;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–

- 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly;
 - 3(i) does not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs; and
 - 3(j) does not discriminate against pupils contrary to Part 6 of the 2010 Act[10].
- 4 The standard in this paragraph is met where the proprietor ensures that a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
- 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
 - 5(b)(i) enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;
 - 5(b)(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
 - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those

living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;

- 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
- 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England;
- 5(c) precludes the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school; and
- 5(d) takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils–
 - 5(d)(i) while they are in attendance at the school,
 - 5(d)(ii) while they are taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised by or on behalf of the school, or
 - 5(d)(iii) in the promotion at the school, including through the distribution of promotional material, of extra-curricular activities taking place at the school or elsewhere,

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.

- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.

- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
- 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 29(1)(a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and

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.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

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