

Inspection of Stonegate School

13 Main Street, Low Bentham, Lancaster LA2 7BX

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Stonegate is a very small school where staff and pupils work closely together. Pupils often feel worried and alone when they first arrive. Other pupils recognise how this feels and work with staff to welcome and support new pupils. Over time, this helps pupils to settle into school routines and to feel safe and happy.

Staff at the school get to know pupils well. They believe that despite past difficulties, pupils can achieve and do well. Pupils, once settled, begin to believe in themselves and this gives them the confidence to learn successfully.

Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said bullying rarely occurs in school. They also said that pupils take time to settle, but when they do they behave well.

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

From the point at which pupils start at school, staff, leaders and the school therapist focus on re-engaging pupils with learning. A carefully crafted plan is put in place to help each individual pupil to adjust to school life. This often starts with a careful observation of a pupil's mood and demeanour on arriving at school. A decision is then made as to whether planned work starts straight away or whether a lighter touch is needed at the beginning. This successful approach has a clear focus on pupils' mental health as well increasing their academic achievement.

The curriculum is carefully designed to ensure that pupils attain as much as they can in the time available to them. Staff are skilled at identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Work is planned on an individual basis to ensure that pupils catch up quickly.

Pupils make strong progress in both English and mathematics. Work in folders demonstrates that the curriculum in both of these subjects challenges pupils as well as helping them to catch up on missed learning.

Staff are ambitious for all pupils, no matter their starting points. The wide range of subjects in the curriculum reflects this well. For example, an inventive approach to an art award has seen pupils developing skills in a range of areas, including information technology and cake decorating. Activities also include working with primary school pupils and talking to groups of adults. These help pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem.

Staff recognise that reading is a key skill. Much is currently in place to support and develop pupils' reading. One pupil has organised the highly successful 'drop everything and read' sessions for the school. Pupils now visit the local library and have a well-stocked small school library and a range of, often hard-hitting, fiction. Pupils take turns to read these books aloud with staff each day. At the time of the inspection, most of the pupils were confident, fluent readers.

Because of the small numbers of pupils in school, staff are able to assess pupils' progress closely. This enables staff to recognise any areas of concern and address them quickly and accurately. This ensures that the highly individualised curriculum matches the needs of individual pupils well.

Pupils who attend the school are vulnerable, often due to their previous experiences. Pupils attend regular therapy sessions which help them to understand and manage their behaviour. Staff also work closely with the therapy team, seeking advice and support when needed. As a result, pupils feel well supported. In the main, pupils demonstrate high levels of self-control despite their high levels of need.

Pupils develop positive and persistent attitudes to their work. This helps them to overcome difficulties. Pupils recognise the challenges which others face. They show kindness and support for each other in times of crisis. For example, they check in to see how other pupils are feeling when they know they are facing a challenge. Pupils' attendance improves dramatically when they join this school.

This positive attitude extends to the local community, where pupils who attend the school are held in high esteem. For example, pupils have helped support a community lunch club for the elderly in the village, receiving much praise for their work.

School leaders are determined that pupils will experience as broad a range of opportunities as possible. The curriculum is enhanced with a very wide range of activities and experiences. This includes trips to theatres, a wide range of places of worship and art galleries. Pupils undertake country walks and sports activities, including bowling and badminton. School leaders support pupils to work in the community, including supporting a food bank. This helps pupils to develop resilience and character as well as supporting them to develop a strong understanding of British values.

Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards have been met.

Leaders are ambitious for all of their pupils. The curriculum is closely tailored and sequenced to meet pupils' needs and enables them to gain accreditation in a wide range of subject areas.

The chair of the proprietorial board is the head of education. This ensures that board members understand both their role and the context of the school. The deputy head of education works closely with the chair of the board and is effective in holding the headteacher to account.

Staff spoken to feel that their workload is not excessive. However, sometimes there is not sufficient time or opportunities for them to develop their knowledge of the curriculum. For example, neither staff member has updated their knowledge and understanding of human and social education.

Leaders have put together a school development plan which focuses on improvement in some areas of the school. However, it does not have a clear enough focus on developing the curriculum further. This omission hampers school development overall.

The school promotes and develops pupils' awareness of the protected characteristics within the 2010 Equality Act. Pupils are knowledgeable and show respectful attitudes to individual members of the groups protected by the Equality Act.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Although the school does not have a website, the safeguarding policy is available to parents and carers directly from the school. The safeguarding policy meets current legislative requirements and makes it clear what action staff should take if a pupil raises a concern.

Leaders have ensured that there is always a member of staff on the school site who has completed the designated safeguarding lead training (DSL).

The headteacher is the DSL for the school and is knowledgeable about her role. She ensures that safeguarding incidents are carefully recorded. The DSL also works closely and confidently with appropriate outside agencies to support pupils when required.

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

- Leaders have not ensured that members of staff focus their professional learning on developing the curriculum enough. Staff do not have sufficient opportunity to develop subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills, particularly in areas of the curriculum in which staff do not have specialist knowledge. Leaders need to review the current planned curriculum carefully and identify key areas in need of further development. Then, using this knowledge, develop effective targets for improvement with associated training and development for staff.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	135292
DfE registration number	815/6098
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	10210346
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Hexagon Care Services Ltd.
Chair	Carolyn Ashdown
Headteacher	Tessa Tyndall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,000 per year
Telephone number	01524 965010
Website	www.hexagoncare.com
Email address	stonegate.headteacher@hexagoncare.com
Date of previous inspection	9 and 10 January 2018

Information about this school

- Stonegate school is a small independent school situated in the village of Low Bentham.
- The school caters for the needs of up to 10 vulnerable girls who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some have other associated special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school does not have a religious denomination.
- The school does not use alternative education 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The inspection team met with the head of education, the headteacher and a member of staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, physical education and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to a group of pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders in other subject areas. Inspectors also toured the building to gather evidence for part 5 of the independent school standards. The inspection team met with the head of school to discuss the curriculum and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Debbie Redshaw

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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