

# Inspection of Highcroft School

Highcroft, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Aukland, County Durham DL13 5AG

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Inspection dates: 28 to 30 March 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

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?**

Pupils learn to enjoy learning again at Highcroft. They benefit from leaders' strong focus on developing personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Pupils are supported by dedicated staff who live out the school's mission of building positive relationships, developing social and independence skills and equipping young people to thrive in the outside world. As such, pupils at Highcroft School feel understood and nurtured by the skilled and caring staff. They thrive in this school's calm environment.

Pupils strive to meet the high expectations that leaders have of them. They show a tangible eagerness to learn and are resilient when facing challenges. Pupils learn to self-regulate their behaviour and improve their communication skills. Consequently, their self-esteem grows. Pupils attend school regularly and often. They want to be in school and they work hard. Pupils rarely fall out with each other, because leaders are adept at spotting any signs of tension between pupils.

Pupils enjoy being part of a community. They actively engage with village-wide initiatives such as working in the church garden and supporting local food banks. Pupils relish taking part in carefully chosen events such as visits to museums, as well as exciting once-in-a-lifetime opportunities such as skydiving.

Pupils show deep respect and understanding for one another's differences. These skills are enhanced by the rich experiences that pupils have in their PSHE education programme.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. They ensure that pupils gain knowledge and skills so that they are well prepared for their next steps. Each pupil receives a bespoke offer which caters specifically for their academic and pastoral needs. In most subjects, leaders have identified the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn. However, leaders know that there is more work to do to ensure that the curriculum is planned with precision in all areas. By the end of key stage 4, pupils achieve well in examinations. Many pupils move on successfully to courses at further education colleges.

In most subjects, teachers have the knowledge that they need to deliver the fundamental curriculum effectively. They choose activities and resources that motivate and excite pupils. Teachers check pupils' prior knowledge and address errors and misconceptions before moving on to new learning. However, leaders know that subject leaders need further training. Subject leaders have not yet developed the expertise to move their curriculum to the next level.

Typically, teachers check how well pupils remember the important knowledge that they have been taught. This helps teachers to identify where pupils are learning well and where their learning is less secure. Pupils' individual special educational needs

and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. The comprehensive advice from external agencies is fully implemented by the caring staff. Some key staff have not currently received the targeted professional development in SEND that they need, including how to identify additional needs as they emerge.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have instilled a genuine love of reading in pupils. Pupils read a wide range of texts, both in lessons and out of school. Leaders ensure that pupils' reading is closely tracked and monitored. They identify gaps in pupils' reading knowledge, including with comprehension and phonic knowledge. Staff deliver effective support to struggling readers. This helps them to become confident and fluent readers.

Leaders have ensured that behaviour in the school is exemplary. Pupils throughout the school are motivated, polite and courteous. They are highly attentive in lessons. Staff deliver subject content in a way that truly appeals to pupils' interests. Pupils are motivated to learn because teachers help them to recognise the relevance of their studies to everyday life. There is a joint commitment to success.

Leaders have designed a comprehensive PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum. Staff teach this thoughtfully and are sensitive to the needs of pupils. Pupils are well prepared to become independent and resilient members of society. Staff teach pupils important skills for life, such as how to cook healthy meals and how to budget. They take pupils to visit places of cultural importance, including places of worship. Pupils learn how to be respectful and tolerant of other beliefs, faiths and cultures. Staff arrange many opportunities for pupils to be physically active and to develop their wider talents and interests.

Leaders ensure that pupils are given impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance. Furthermore, leaders enable pupils to experience workplaces and to visit further and higher education settings. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education, employment or training.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They told inspectors that leaders are mindful of their well-being and workload. The proprietor body and leaders have ensured that the school complies with the independent school standards. The school also complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have fully implemented the Department for Education's statutory guidance on RSE and health education.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is an effective safeguarding policy that includes the current government requirements. The policy is published on the website and is available to parents on request. Leaders work with key central staff to undertake and maintain accurate records detailing the checks that are made on the appointment of staff.

Leaders are tenacious in tracking and recording any safeguarding concerns. They maintain strong relationships with local authorities across the country to ensure that pupils are safe.

Leaders have ensured that staff receive regular and relevant training. This enables them to identify any issues that pupils may be suffering from. Leaders are aware of any additional safeguarding vulnerabilities of the school's pupils and ensure that staff are alert to these.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Middle leadership is not fully established. This limits leaders' ability to strengthen their curriculums further. Senior leaders should ensure that subject leaders develop the expertise and subject-specific knowledge needed to further improve the quality of education.
- Leaders have not planned with precision the long-term learning in all areas of the curriculum. This means that in a few areas, teachers deliver the curriculum less effectively, and pupils do not develop what they know as well as they might. Leaders should identify and sequence the key knowledge all pupils, including those new to the school, must learn in all areas of the curriculum so that pupils build up a rich body of knowledge.
- Most pupils arrive in school with a well-established SEND plan in place. Staff are able to implement the provision detailed. However, they have not had the necessary training to identify any additional SEND. Therefore, some pupils move through school with any further needs being unidentified and unmet. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained to identify SEND and put appropriate adaptations in place.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136748
<b>DfE registration number</b>	840/6012
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10254659
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	7
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Keys QTC Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	David Manson
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Laheney
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£40,950
<b>Telephone number</b>	01388 710753
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.keys-group.co.uk">www.keys-group.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin.highcroftschoo@keys-group.co.uk">admin.highcroftschoo@keys-group.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16 to 18 October 2018

## Information about this school

- The school caters for the needs of pupils who have a diagnosis of social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional needs, including autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The school is operating within its registration agreement with the Department for Education.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school is part of the Keys Group, which provides care and education services to children and young people.
- There are currently seven pupils on roll, most of whom reside in the residential setting.

## 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspection team met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the company's regional manager responsible for the school and the company's chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to 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 and met with the PSHE coordinator about the school's offer for pupils' personal development and RSE education.
- The inspectors checked the single central record and met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the school's safeguarding provision. Individual pupil's safeguarding records were looked at to check the quality of safeguarding practice in the school.

## **Inspection team**

Marcus Newby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jenny Thomas

His Majesty's Inspector

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