

Inspection of West Midlands Education and Skills

Blue Lane East, Walsall WS2 8HN

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Insufficient evidence

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have experienced a disrupted education before joining West Midlands Education and Skills. They enjoy the calm environment of the school. Pupils feel safe, and, as a result, feel able to make progress in their learning. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Bullying is rare and pupils say that staff listen to their concerns. Parents are positive about the support that pupils receive from the school. One parent said that the school has given her child 'their future back'.

Leaders have made changes to the curriculum. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 now study a broad curriculum that better meets their needs. Pupils in key stage 4 can study a range of vocational and GCSE courses. This curriculum prepares pupils for their next steps in education. However, leaders have not made sure that they have identified the important knowledge that pupils need to know in each subject and at each stage of their learning. As a result, pupils do not yet have a curriculum that meets their needs well enough.

Leaders have started to develop opportunities for pupils to socialise more and to experience learning outside of the classroom. Pupils have attended trips to museums and wildlife conservation areas. Pupils celebrated the coronation together with an afternoon tea.

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

The headteacher took up her post at the start of this school year. She rightly prioritised making sure that pupils had the needs identified in their education, health and care plans met. Most pupils now receive a full-time education. The headteacher reorganised the school to make sure that, as far as possible, pupils work with their peers in small classes. All pupils have an 'individual scheme of work' that identifies the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) needs that tutors must address in their lessons, and leaders review these regularly. Pupils are benefiting from these changes.

The curriculum is too focused on qualifications that pupils may take at the end of their schooling. As a result, pupils in key stage 2 and 3 miss out on important learning that is appropriate to their age and needs. For example, in mathematics, pupils do not have the opportunity to learn problem-solving or to learn about equations. The curriculum is not broken down well enough into the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn and, as a result, sometimes pupils learn things out of order and so they cannot build on what they already know. This stops pupils from achieving as well as they might.

Leaders have introduced a reading programme to support pupils' wider reading. Pupils enjoy reading books that they have chosen. However, pupils at the early stages of reading do not benefit from a systematic approach to learning phonics. This means that they do not gain the knowledge they need to read fluently.

Leaders promote positive relationships between staff and pupils. They make sure that pupils feel safe and are valued and treated with respect. Leaders meticulously identify pupils' behaviour needs and monitor these robustly. They adjust pupils' provision swiftly. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and work hard in lessons.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is new. It is designed to support pupils' needs and to teach pupils about the risks they may face in the community. However, the curriculum is not tailored to the needs of younger pupils and so they do not learn about the important things they need to know to keep safe and to stay healthy. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain. They know that all people are different and celebrate diversity. Older pupils have an effective careers education.

The proprietor and chair of governors are both passionate advocates for the school. The proprietor has made sure that pupils learn in a school building that is suitable for their needs. However, neither the proprietor or chair of governors make sure that they regularly monitor whether leaders are meeting the independent school standards and to ensure that they are meeting all their statutory obligations. Although the school meets all the independent school standards, there were aspects of these that needed rectifying during the inspection. The school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Staff are positive about working in the school. They say leaders provide them with sufficient training and are mindful of their workload. They support the vision of the headteacher and recognise the improvements that she has already made.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leaders are well qualified. They make sure that all staff are trained well and understand the particular risks that pupils may face in the community. As a result, staff report all concerns, no matter how small. Safeguarding leaders have positive relationships with external agencies and this helps make sure that pupils receive the support that they need.

Leaders conduct thorough safeguarding checks for pupils who are tutored in the community or in their home. Tutors meticulously log all contact with pupils and leaders monitor this thoroughly. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for all venues, pupils and tutors.

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

- Leaders have begun work on planning and sequencing the curriculum. However, the curriculum is still over-reliant on examination specifications and as a result pupils, especially those in key stages 2 and 3, do not follow a curriculum that is best suited to their needs. Leaders should make sure that the curriculum clearly identifies what pupils need to know at each stage of their education and sequence this effectively so that pupils can build on their learning from their starting points.
- Leaders have not put in place an appropriate curriculum to teach pupils at the early stages of reading. This means that some pupils do not learn to read fluently quickly enough. Leaders should put in place a systematic approach to the teaching of early reading and ensure that staff are trained to deliver this curriculum well.
- Leaders are developing the PSHE curriculum. However, it does not meet the needs of all pupils and this means that pupils do not learn about the important knowledge they need in an age-appropriate way. Leaders should further develop the PSHE curriculum so that it is well sequenced and planned and appropriate to the age and needs of all pupils in the school.
- The proprietor and chair of governors do not monitor the work of the school closely enough. They do not make sure that leaders are implementing an effective curriculum and that they are following all the requirements that they should. As a result, they do not provide support quickly enough for some aspects of the school's work. The proprietor and chair of governors should make sure that they are aware of all the independent school standards, including those relating to the quality of education, and support leaders to make the improvements that they need.

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	146563
DfE registration number	335/6044
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10267690
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	9 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	1
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Paul Hodgetts
Chair	Jim Ryan
Headteacher	Helen Barber
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,000
Telephone number	01922 643303
Website	www.westmidlandseducationandskills.co.uk
Email address	helen.barber@wmes.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–17 February 2022

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, many of whom have had a disrupted education.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are educated in the school building. Some pupils are educated by their tutors in local venues. A few are educated by tutors in their homes. Leaders visit pupils in these settings to maintain oversight of the quality of education they are receiving.
- The school uses no 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other school leaders, the proprietor and the chair of the governing body. They also held meetings with tutors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and personal, social and health education (PSHE). For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in groups and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of responses to the staff survey, as well as Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance, safeguarding, and health and safety.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in all the subjects they are learning.

- The lead inspector had a tour of the premises with the headteacher to ensure that the school provides an appropriate environment for pupils. The lead inspector examined health and safety documentation.
- Inspectors visited pupils being taught by individual tutors at two venues. Inspectors also spoke to parents of pupils who are tutored at home.

Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mary Maybank

Ofsted Inspector

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