

# Ashbrooke School

Ashbrooke Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7JA

**Inspection date**

21 June 2023

**Overall outcome**

**The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)*

- Safeguarding systems at the school are strong. Information about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is shared with staff. This ensures that staff are aware of the risks and vulnerabilities of the pupils in front of them.
- Regular training takes place to ensure that staff are confident in school policies related to safeguarding. All staff whom the inspector spoke with have a very clear understanding of how to report concerns, including concerns about adults.
- Records of actions taken, including working with external agencies, show that timely interventions are in place to identify and support the most vulnerable pupils.
- This inspection was carried after concerns were raised with the Department for Education (DfE) about the timeliness with which school leaders are reporting concerns about adults. The evidence from this inspection showed that leaders are aware of their duty to report concerns about staff to relevant authorities. Advice is taken from, for example, local authority safeguarding officers, where school leaders have concerns. Referrals are made as soon as leaders have cause for concern about adults working with children. Strong systems are in place to ensure that any concerns about adults come to light quickly.
- These independent school standards (these standards) continue to be met.

#### *Paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c)*

- The behaviour policy makes clear the rewards and sanctions that adults will use to promote good behaviour. This policy is well understood by staff at all levels.
- During the inspector's visit, the school site was calm. Relationships between pupils and teachers were respectful and warm. Pupils told the inspector that there were adults they could talk to.
- Leaders keep clear records about the sanctions imposed on pupils. There are well-developed systems in place to ensure that all adults learn from serious incidents of misbehaviour. For example, a post-incident learning document is completed when

physical restraint is used. The views of staff, parents and carers, and pupils are taken after every use of physical restraint. This allows for a better understanding of how to support pupils and de-escalate situations. Use of physical restraint is low and falling.

- These standards continue to be met.

#### *Paragraph 10*

- The anti-bullying policy at the school is clear. Pupils whom the inspector spoke with know that adults will help them if they are concerned about bullying.
- This standard continues to be met.

#### *Paragraph 11, 14, 15, 16, 16(a), 16(b)*

- At the time of the previous inspection, the health and safety policy was found to meet the standards. This continues to be the case. The policy takes account of the potential risks and hazards related to the work of the school.
- There are high ratios of staff to pupils in the school. Staff are deployed effectively to support pupils in lessons. They are given information about pupils to ensure that they understand, and are able to meet, pupils' needs.
- The admissions register is maintained in accordance with the relevant legislation. It is clear and well maintained.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the need to identify and mitigate risks to pupils. The risk assessment policy and its application provide for leaders to constantly review and improve systems in place to ensure the safety of pupils and the minimisation of risk.
- Daily debriefs and learning reviews after serious incidents ensure that leaders regularly collect information to help them understand and mitigate risk. Adaptations to risk assessments are made following the collection of this information.
- These standards continue to be met.

### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

#### *Paragraph 18(1), 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3)*

- The single central record is a meticulous document. Checks on staff are thorough and, in some areas, go beyond statutory requirements. It is well maintained and understood by those with responsibility for oversight.
- Personnel files are readily available and show that all checks recorded on the single central record have been carried out.
- Leaders ensure that checks are completed before staff start to work at the school. It is a clear condition of employment that staff must provide satisfactory information related to the checks on suitability that school leaders carry out.
- Staff at the school talk about the support they receive as they join the school. This ensures that any medical needs are met and adjusted for so that they can perform their roles successfully.

- These standards continue to be met.

*Paragraph 19(1), 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(i)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)*

- Where letters of assurance are needed about staff who come to work at the school, these are sought, and relevant records are kept. Staff take care to check the identity of the people who arrive at the school to work with pupils.
- These standards continue to be met.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

*Paragraph 33, 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 33(d), 33(e), 33(f), 33(g), 33(h), 33(i), 33(i)(i), 33(i)(ii), 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii), 33(k)*

- The complaints policy is clear. It provides routes for complaints to be considered on an informal basis before progressing to formal routes.
- There are clear systems outlined to ensure that independent panels can be convened to hear complaints.
- Record-keeping in relation to complaints, as in other areas of the school, is clear and shows that complaints are considered within the timelines related to the policy.
- During this inspection, records were readily available for the inspector to scrutinise.
- Actions to be taken as a result of the consideration of complaints are clearly recorded.
- These standards continue to be met.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)*

- Leaders at the school have developed effective systems related to safeguarding, behaviour and the other independent school standards that were in scope for this inspection.
- Information is stored and shared effectively with relevant members of staff. This means that staff feel well supported to enact the policies that leaders have put in place.
- A strong culture of safeguarding is evident across the school. This puts pupils at the centre of all decisions that are made.
- Behaviour policies, and their implementation, ensure that pupils' needs are constantly assessed and reviewed. Adaptations are made as necessary. Pupils' well-being is therefore promoted in the school as a matter of policy and practice.
- These standards continue to be met.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

## School details

Unique reference number	143532
DfE registration number	394/6000
Inspection number	10297061

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Richard Wilkins
Headteacher	Clare Read
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,540 to £92,000
Telephone number	0191 607 5610
Website	<a href="http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk">www.witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:ashbrooke@witherslackgroup.co.uk">ashbrooke@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	5 to 7 July 2022

## Information about this school

- Ashbrooke School is an independent special school for pupils aged 5 to 19. It is part of the Witherslack Group.
- Since the previous inspection in July 2022, the deputy headteacher has become the headteacher. The chair of the proprietorial body has also changed.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in July 2022, when it was judged to be outstanding. The DfE commissioned an emergency inspection and a material change inspection on 21 October 2020. The DfE approved an increase in the school's capacity from 80 to 90 pupils following the October 2020 inspection. On 13 August 2021, the

DfE approved a further change to the number of pupils the school could take with an increase from 90 to 126.

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Some pupils have a learning disability. Almost all pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The number of staff in the school has grown significantly in the last year as the number of pupils on roll continues to rise.
- The school currently uses two unregistered alternative education providers.

## Information about this inspection

The inspector 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 inspection was commissioned by the DfE as a result of concerns raised relating to the way the school reported concerns about adults.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was conducted over one day and took place with no notice to the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and representatives of the proprietorial body.
- The inspector conducted a tour of the school and visited classrooms on both the primary and secondary sites.
- The inspector met with leaders responsible for safeguarding and scrutinised the single central record and other records associated with safeguarding. He spoke to representatives of the local authority about safeguarding at the school. The inspector also scrutinised records related to how leader make referrals where they have concerns about staff.
- The inspectors spoke with leaders responsible for behaviour and scrutinised records related to behaviour.
- The inspector met with pupils and staff and spoke to them about their experiences of the school, including in relation to safeguarding and behaviour.
- The inspector scrutinised policies related to behaviour, anti-bullying, risk assessments, and health and safety.

## Inspection team

Matthew Vellensworth, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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