

Inspection of Pontville School

Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, are happy at Pontville School. Staff have forged positive relationships with them. Pupils have adults in school to talk to if they are worried about anything or have any concerns. Leaders deal with bullying effectively. Pupils feel listened to and well supported by staff. This helps them to feel safe.

Leaders are passionate about providing a curriculum that meets the individual needs of pupils. They have high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils experience a rich and varied curriculum. This helps them to gain the knowledge that they need to be successful in their next steps of education and to be better prepared for life in modern Britain.

All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are adept at addressing the barriers that some pupils face when it comes to their learning. Pupils learn how to manage their feelings and emotions more effectively during their time at this school. Staff have established clear and structured routines. Pupils follow these well. Most pupils behave in a positive way towards each other and to staff.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy a wide range of enrichment experiences. They can choose from activities such as golf, climbing, football and outdoor learning. Pupils can also spend time feeding and looking after the chickens, goats and horses that reside in the school grounds. These wider experiences help pupils to develop confidence and resilience.

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

Leaders have constructed a broad and ambitious curriculum from key stage 1 to the end of key stage 5. Leaders have thought carefully about the important knowledge that pupils should learn and when this content should be taught. Most pupils achieve well.

Most staff have the knowledge and expertise that they need to deliver subject curriculums well. They identify the additional needs of pupils quickly and accurately. Staff are skilled at adapting their delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs.

Typically, staff choose appropriate activities to help pupils to learn the content of the curriculum. They check what pupils know and can remember. This helps to shape future curriculum design. However, in some subjects, leaders have not provided staff, particularly those teaching outside their area of expertise, with the support that they need to deliver the curriculum as effectively as they could. On occasions, this can limit what some pupils know, can do and remember.

Leaders have prioritised reading across the school. They have ensured that pupils read widely and regularly in school. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy reading books from a wide range of authors.

Leaders have established an effective phonics curriculum. This is taught from key stage 1, when pupils join the school. Older pupils in key stages 2, 3 and 4 also learn the phonics curriculum when it is appropriate for them to do so. The books that pupils read contain the letters and sounds that they know. Expert staff provide effective support for pupils who need to catch up quickly with their reading knowledge. This helps most pupils to become confident and fluent readers.

Most pupils behave very well. They are respectful and polite. Pupils learn without poor behaviour interrupting their learning. When incidents of negative behaviour occur, staff support pupils effectively and help them to adjust their emotions and conduct.

Leaders have ensured that pupils have a range of purposeful activities to occupy them at social times. This helps pupils to have positive experiences at breaktimes and lunchtimes. However, a small minority of pupils use discriminatory language at times. Leaders are aware of this and are taking appropriate action to educate pupils and to stop this behaviour from spreading. For example, visitors from a race and hate crime charity have delivered sessions to pupils to raise awareness of these issues.

Leaders have deliberately designed an exemplary programme that supports pupils' personal development from key stage 1 to the end of key stage 5. Pupils greatly benefit from a rich and wide set of experiences outside the academic and vocational curriculum. They take full advantage of the enrichment opportunities that they have, such as clubs and trips, and they participate fully. For example, pupils enjoy great success in a wide range of competitions and festivals. Some pupils run a café in school and take responsibility for buying ingredients, taking orders, baking, budgeting and serving pupils and staff.

Leaders place great emphasis on supporting pupils' mental and physical health. For instance, they work closely with other agencies to deliver sessions designed to raise pupils' aspirations and increase their interest in sport. Specialist services based in the school are highly effective in supporting pupils' well-being and social and emotional needs. This exceptional offer helps pupils to become confident, resilient, responsible, and independent members of society.

Pupils are prepared very well for adulthood and their next stages of education, employment and training. Secondary-aged pupils receive comprehensive and independent careers information, education, advice and guidance. This extends beyond their time at school as they continue to access this support after they have left. Pupils and students in the sixth form have wide-ranging experiences with employers and different workplaces. Some pupils complete work experience. Pupils

are very clear about their aspirations. Leaders ensure that pupils acquire the qualifications that they need to realise their ambitions.

The school is well led and managed. The proprietor body has ensured that there is a robust system in place to support and challenge leaders. Members of the proprietor body and governors understand their roles and carry them out effectively.

The proprietor body has ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. Leaders have ensured that they follow health and safety requirements, including fire regulations and risk assessments. Classrooms and other spaces, such as sensory rooms and break out spaces, are bright, clean and well resourced. Policies are available to parents and carers on the website and on request. Leaders have ensured that the school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Most staff feel valued and enjoy working in the school. They appreciate the steps that leaders have taken to prioritise their well-being. However, a number of staff do not feel that leaders are mindful of their workload. Leaders, including the proprietor body, are aware of this and are taking appropriate action to address the concerns of some staff and to reduce the workload of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is an effective safeguarding policy that includes current government requirements. The policy is published on the website and is available on request.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. The proprietor body provides effective support to leaders to ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust. Leaders ensure that staff have the training that they need to identify pupils who may be suffering from harm. Leaders revisit this regularly through briefings and 'spot questions', to assure themselves that staff know what their safeguarding responsibilities are.

Leaders keep comprehensive records of any safeguarding concerns that staff share and follow these up promptly. Leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils get the help that they need. Pupils access a wide range of specialist support within the school. Leaders also secure help for pupils from other agencies when necessary.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

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

- In some subjects, leaders have not ensured that staff have sufficient subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum as effectively as they should. This hinders how well some pupils learn in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that staff receive further subject-specific support so that they can deliver the curriculum consistently well.

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	133540
DfE registration number	888/6050
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10267628
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	148
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Tracey Fletcher-Ray
Headteacher	Justine Sims
Annual fees (day pupils)	£71,302 to £98,586
Telephone number	01695 578734
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/pontville-school
Email address	pontville@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 to 14 March 2019

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection was on 12 to 14 March 2019.
- A material change inspection, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), was carried out on 1 December 2022.
- The school operates on two sites. The main school site is located at Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW. The second site is for the post-16 provision and is located at Paddock Rd, off Pimbo Rd, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 9PL.
- The school caters for pupils and students with a range of SEND, including autism spectrum disorder and social and communication needs. All pupils and students who attend this school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of the Witherslack Group.
- Leaders make use of one registered alternative provider.

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 that 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.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other leaders in the school. They also spoke with staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the school board and the regional director. She also spoke with the chief operating officer as a representative of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to the independent school standards, the curriculum, school improvement, safeguarding and the checks undertaken on newly appointed staff. Inspectors also spoke to staff to check how well they understood safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses from Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and experiences in school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime, in lessons and around the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and physical education. They met subject leaders and teachers and visited a sample of lessons. They also considered the curriculum across other subject areas and looked at examples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a trusted adult.
- The inspector made tours of both of the school sites to check the suitability of the premises against the relevant independent school standards.

Inspection team

Sally Timmons, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kevin Sexton

Ofsted Inspector

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