

Inspection of Spen Brook School

(former Hawes Side Library), Hawes Side Lane, Blackpool FY4 5AJ

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 September 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Spen Brook School is a special place to learn. Pupils arrive at the school following substantial periods of disrupted education and quickly begin to flourish. The school takes account of pupils' previous experiences to help pupils to re-engage successfully with their learning. Pupils told inspectors that they quickly feel part of this supportive and nurturing setting when they join the school. This makes pupils feel happy and safe.

The school has high expectations for what every pupil can achieve. It makes sure that staff fully understand the specific special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of each pupil. Staff skilfully adapt learning and support to meet pupils' specific requirements. This ensures that all pupils achieve well.

The school expects the best from pupils with regard to their behaviour. Staff are trained well to know how to meet each pupil's emotional and sensory needs. Pupils' behaviour in and around school is exceptional. Staff intervene swiftly and effectively if any pupil needs guidance or support to regulate their emotions.

The school is relentless in developing pupils' resilience. A multitude of enrichment activities expose pupils to the wider world. These help pupils to develop their self-confidence. These opportunities include group activities, such as den building, to develop pupils' social skills. Pupils enjoy access to extensive activities outside of the formal curriculum. For example, they have raised funds for charities, have used their horticulture skills to create a sensory garden and have visited the beach to go crabbing.

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

The school has designed the curriculum with ambitious end points in mind. It recognises the unsettled previous experiences in education that pupils have been through. Staff act swiftly to carry out assessments and speak to pupils' previous settings to understand pupils' starting points. Staff continually seek out opportunities to enable older pupils to gain suitable qualifications that match their interests, needs and aspirations. This enables pupils to move on successfully to suitable education, employment or training when they leave the school.

The school identifies the key knowledge that pupils need to know and remember in each subject. Staff expertly break down learning into small steps and build up pupils' knowledge over time. Staff frequently check pupils' understanding and adapt lessons to meet their needs. However, links are not always made to prior learning. This means that sometimes opportunities are missed to enable pupils to draw on previously taught content. This hinders pupils from learning as well as they could.

The school has given reading a high priority. Pupils have started to place a high value on reading. Pupils readily read aloud in class. They enjoy the calm, independent reading sessions each day. The school's systems for identifying pupils

who are at the early stages of learning to read are in their initial stages. This means that teachers do not always have an accurate understanding of pupils' reading knowledge. As a result, a few pupils do not receive the support that they need to catch up with their peers. This hinders how well these pupils can access the curriculum.

All pupils in the school have SEND. Leaders have put into place effective processes to assess any additional needs that pupils may have. Staff receive regular training which ensures that they are adept at adapting the delivery of the curriculum. This helps pupils to engage well in learning.

Pupils follow clear routines that help them to settle into lessons each morning and afternoon. The impressive improvements in pupils' attitudes to learning, behaviour and attendance are testament to the positive impact of the school's work. The school systematically supports pupils to improve their behaviour over time. All pupils make significant progress from their varied starting points. If the need arises, staff are quick to support pupils to regulate their emotions and behaviour. This enables pupils to reflect and make positive behaviour choices. Pupils are motivated and eager to learn. There is very little disruption to lessons.

The school's work to support pupils' personal development is exceptional. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is carefully planned. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and the importance of respect for others, regardless of differences. The wider curriculum is well planned to develop pupils' character and social skills. When a pupil needs a bespoke programme to cover sensitive subject matter, staff work with the pupil individually. This ensures that important messages are delivered appropriately.

The school has ensured that careers education, information, advice and guidance are of a very high quality so that all pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. Pupils are extremely well equipped for life in modern Britain.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. Staff value the regular meetings to discuss pupils and their needs. These empower staff to plan effective and engaging lessons for their classes.

The school ensures that there is regular and positive communication with parents and carers. This ensures that parents have the information that they need to support their child's education.

The proprietor body carries out its role effectively in setting strategy, holding leaders to account, and in meeting the relevant statutory obligations around safeguarding and safer recruitment. The skills and experience of the proprietor body mean that it can offer the challenge and support that leaders need to run the school successfully.

The proprietor body ensures that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and consistently meets all the independent school standards ('the standards').

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- In some subjects, teachers do not make explicit links to prior learning. This prevents pupils from drawing on the body of knowledge that they have previously learned. Leaders should ensure that teachers make the connections to previous learning clear so that pupils can build a rich body of knowledge over time.
- Leaders' systems to identify and support pupils who find reading more difficult do not identify and address the precise gaps in pupils' reading knowledge. This means that these pupils do not receive the support that they need to catch up with their peers in reading. Leaders should ensure that teachers are fully equipped to identify and remedy the gaps in pupils' reading knowledge.

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	130902
DfE registration number	890/6096
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	10286392
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Hexagon Care Services
Chair	Caroline Ashdown
Headteacher	Craig Gaskin
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,000 to £67,000
Telephone number	01253 982 974
Website	www.hexagoncare.com
Email address	spenbrook.headteacher@hexagoncare.com
Dates of previous inspection	16 to 18 July 2019

Information about this school

- Spen Brook School is one of a small number of schools which, together with other services, are part of Hexagon Care Services Limited. The school does not have its own website. The proprietor body publishes general information about its schools and services on the company's website.
- The previous standard inspection was 16 to 18 July 2019.
- The school is located in premises at Hawes Side Lane, Blackpool FY4 5AJ.
- Spen Brook School provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Leaders use two unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.

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

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the chair of the proprietor body, the proprietor body's deputy head of education and a range of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The lead inspector also spoke with some parents to gather their views.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents and information relating to the standards. She also made a tour of the school premises.

Inspection team

Rebecca Sharples, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Phill Walmsley

Ofsted Inspector

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