

Inspection of Hall Cliffe School

Dovecote Lane, Horbury, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF4 6BB

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 October 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a friendly school where pupils are safe. Many pupils who join Hall Cliffe School have struggled to settle in their previous school. At this school, pupils build positive relationships with staff. Pupils attend well. Bullying is very rare and, if it happens, staff respond to it quickly and effectively.

The school has a highly ambitious subject offer. All pupils follow national curriculum subjects. Pupils also study car maintenance, land-based studies, catering, and hair and beauty. Pupils sit a wide range of qualifications. These qualifications include entry-level certificates, GCSEs and vocational awards. There is a strong focus on preparing pupils for life outside of school. In recent years, all pupils who left the school after completing Year 11 progressed to a further education or training course.

There is a lot on offer to pupils outside of the taught subjects. All pupils participate in a daily, lunchtime activity. These activities include games, computer time or helping out in the library. Pupils also spend one afternoon each week on an enrichment activity. This is an activity which pupils identify as something new they would like to try. The activities help pupils develop new interests and talents. Some pupils choose to go fishing, for example, while others work on a short film in the school's media centre.

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

All subjects, have long- and medium- term plans. In most subjects, these plans are detailed and well sequenced. The plans show how pupils revisit key concepts and skills. In these subjects, pupils confidently learn more complicated ideas over time. In a small number of subjects, however, the long- and medium- term plans are underdeveloped. They are not as detailed or well sequenced as they need to be. Leaders are aware of this. The school is partway through a curriculum review. The school's work to review those subjects with weaker plans is not completed.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They regularly check what pupils know in lessons. Teachers are quick to pick up on, and address, any misunderstanding pupils may have. However, how the school checks what pupils can remember at the end of a topic or a series of lessons is variable. In the small number of subjects where plans are underdeveloped, the checks on what learning pupils have retained is not done as thoroughly.

Reading is a top priority at the school. Pupils at the early stage of reading have phonics lessons regularly. Trained staff teach these phonics lessons very well. All staff know which pupils are at the early stages of reading. Across the school, staff reinforce the teaching of reading in subject lessons. The school library is a delightful space. It is well used by pupils. Pupils love their time in the library. They enjoy the comfy chairs and the wide choice of books and magazines.

Staff's understanding of pupils' needs is a strength of the school. The school's clinical team, made up of specialist therapists and health professionals, is highly effective. There are prompt assessments of pupils' specific needs. Each pupil has a personalised plan which details the strategies and resources they need. Staff skilfully adapt lessons, and other activities, in response to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils behave well. Sometimes a pupil may struggle to keep calm and focused on learning. When this happens, staff provide immediate and reassuring support. There is no disruption to the learning of others.

There is a well-organised programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils learn about themselves and the world around them. This includes learning about how to stay healthy and safe. Relationships and sex education is woven through the PSHE programme well. The school has well-resourced citizenship and careers programmes. These contribute strongly to pupils' personal development. In citizenship lessons, for example, pupils learn about democracy, British values and the importance of human rights. In careers lessons, pupils learn about different places to work and the skills needed for employment. Older pupils meet with an independent careers adviser to discuss possible next steps into education, training or employment. The school has, what it calls, the 'independent plus' programme. Pupils learn how to travel independently, manage money and cook healthy meals.

The proprietor has established robust governance systems. There is a school board which meets half-termly. The board members are experienced and knowledgeable. The school board reports directly to the proprietor. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. All school policies and protocols promote equality and diversity.

The proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school standards (the standards) are met. Some of the standards were previously unmet. The proprietor took prompt action to address the issues that had led to these unmet standards. These standards are now met. The proprietor has employed specialist leaders of teaching and learning, health and safety, and safeguarding. These leaders regularly check that the school is meeting all of the standards consistently.

The majority of staff speak warmly about the support they get from leaders in terms of training and for their well-being. Early careers teachers follow an appropriate induction programme.

Many parents and carers speak highly of the school. Leaders promote community partnerships well. For example, pupils at the vocational centre are reclaiming an area of wasteland near to the site in liaison with the local community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- The long- and medium- term plans in a small number of subjects do not make the key knowledge to be learned clear. They do not outline how this knowledge is to be revisited and built on over time. These shortcomings limit pupils' ability to make secure connections between what they have learned previously and what they are learning now. The school should complete its curriculum review promptly and ensure that all subject plans are sufficiently detailed and sequenced, and make an effective contribution to pupils' learning.
- In a small number of subjects, the link between planned learning and summative assessment is not as clear as it needs to be. This limits teachers' ability to plan for pupils' learning incisively and affects pupils' retention of key learning in these subjects. The school should complete its curriculum review promptly to ensure that the summative assessment points on each subject plan are clear and that the content of the assessments matches the planned learning.

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	141860
DfE registration number	384/6003
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10267671
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Richard Wilkins
Headteacher	Vicky Prosser
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,373 to £87,621
Telephone number	01924 663420
Website	witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	Hall-Cliffe@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 to 10 June 2021

Information about this school

- The school's overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement at its last standard inspection in June 2021. At the standard inspection in June 2021, the school was judged to have met all of the standards. At an emergency inspection in January 2023, however, the school was judged to have some unmet standards. The school submitted an action plan to address these unmet standards. The Department for Education (DfE) rejected this action plan in June 2023.
- Since the school opened in 2015, there have been significant changes in leadership. Ten different headteachers have been in post, including the current headteacher, since the school opened. The new headteacher has been in post since the start of September 2023.
- The school is based on two sites. The school's main site is a large, Grade II-listed building near Wakefield at Dovecote Lane, Horbury WF4 6BB. Pupils on the main site follow a broadly academic curriculum. The second site is approximately five miles away from the main site at Jubilee Way, Grange Moore WF4 4TD. It is a purpose-built vocational centre where pupils study a range of vocational courses, including hair and beauty, motor mechanics and hospitality.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Some pupils have moderate learning difficulties or speech, language and communication needs. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- The school is registered to take post-16 students up to the age of 17 years. At the time of this inspection, there were no post-16 students on roll.
- The school does not use any alternative education 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.

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

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, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers and the proprietor. They also met with a range of other staff.

- Inspectors undertook a tour of the school and visited the classrooms, social areas and other facilities. They checked the school buildings and grounds against the standards.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), mathematics, science and art. The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and meetings with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed the curriculum plans of all other subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school throughout the day, including breaktimes and in lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included meeting with the designated safeguarding lead, and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- The lead inspector checked the school's fire risk assessment, evacuation protocols, fire safety equipment and evacuation routes.
- The lead inspector checked the school's first-aid boxes and implementation of the school's first-aid policy, including the consistent monitoring of first-aid supplies.
- The lead inspector checked the admissions and attendance registers.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's risk assessment policy, spoke to staff about risk assessment completion and checked a number of risk assessments. These included risk assessments on the storage of hazardous substances, all classrooms and outdoor areas, and individual pupil risk assessments.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's health and safety policy. Inspectors checked the site for any damaged or broken items that could pose a risk to pupils' safety. The lead inspector checked the equipment and resources used for science practical experiments and the science preparation room.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and surveys completed by staff. The lead inspector spoke to representatives of the local authorities who commission places at the school. The lead inspector gained the views of the local authority's designated officer.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

- During the inspection, inspectors checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at an emergency inspection on 23 January 2023.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: the school now meets the previously failed standards.
- At the emergency inspection in January 2023, inspectors found that, while much of the school's safeguarding practices were robust, there were aspects of leaders' work to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils which were not effective. Specifically, inspectors found that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the first-aid policy were not implemented effectively. National, statutory guidance in terms of admissions and attendance, namely The Registration (Pupil Registration) regulations 2006, were not followed. Risk assessments were not completed adequately and, where risks were identified, leaders were not taking swift action to mitigate the risks. As a result, pupils were at risk of harm.
- During the current inspection, the lead inspector found that the school's fire risk assessment had been reviewed by a certified officer in February 2023. The fire risk assessment judged the building to be low risk but did identify remedial action was required with regard to two fire doors. All remedial actions required by the fire risk assessment are now complete. All fire doors have clear and well-signed access routes. All fire doors are able to be opened immediately by any user if needed in the case of an emergency evacuation.
- All first-aid boxes are correctly filled and all resources were within their use-by-date. School records indicate that monthly checks of the first-aid boxes are completed.
- The school's admissions register is maintained correctly. For example, all leavers' destinations are recorded fully. All pupils at the school have EHC plans. Any decision for a pupil to be moved off the school roll is planned in advance with the placing local authority. Where a pupil leaves the school without the knowledge of the commissioning local authority, the school is quick to make contact with appropriate agencies.
- The school's attendance register is completed twice daily using the DfE's registration codes. The attendance register is completed promptly each day. If a pupil leaves the school site temporarily, for example for an appointment or activity, this is noted on the school's signing in and out sheets. Staff use these sheets, if needed, in the case of an emergency evacuation.
- Risk assessments are up to date and detailed. The actions directing how to mitigate identified risks are understood by staff. Staff are clear, for example, on what to do if a pupil leaves the site without permission. There are risk assessments in place for all classrooms and other areas that pupils use, such as the quadrangle and play area. Staff do daily checks of each area and its equipment. School records indicate that these daily checks are completed consistently. There is a chapel on the Horbury site. At present, there is no use of the chapel by pupils or anyone from the local community. Leaders know to complete a new risk assessment if the use of the chapel changes.
- In the January 2023 emergency inspection, inspectors found that leaders had not ensured that the necessary health and safety checks were consistently carried out. The school's health and safety policy was judged to lack detail of roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, at the school's Horbury site, inspectors found

potential risks in a number of classrooms. These included broken items with sharp edges. Further, the storage of dangerous chemicals in the science laboratories and preparation room was not secure.

- There is now a comprehensive health and safety policy. This policy is also supported by a health and safety site statement. The proprietor's expectations about health and safety systems, and who is responsible for what, are clear. There is a site team. The team checks both sites throughout the day for any maintenance issues or breakages. Inspectors found the buildings on both sites to be well maintained and safe.
- The school's science preparation room is in a secure space with no pupil access. Furthermore, the fume cupboard and the storage cupboards within the preparation room are securely locked. The keys for these cupboards are kept in a key safe with a key code that is changed regularly by leaders.
- At the emergency inspection in January 2023, inspectors judged that leaders had not demonstrated good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the standards were met consistently. They had not fulfilled their responsibilities effectively so that the school consistently met all of the standards and actively promoted the well-being of pupils.
- Through their actions in meeting the unmet standards relating to safeguarding and health and safety, leaders have demonstrated knowledge and skills appropriate to their role. The proprietor has ensured that all of the standards are now met effectively and monitored consistently.

The school now meets the following standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 13 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–

- 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
- 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Florence	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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