

# Inspection of Millcourt School

2 Shelf Mills, Wade House, Shelf, Halifax HX3 7PA

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Inspection dates: 3 to 5 October 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

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The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

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?**

Staff at this school make it their mission to meet the individual needs of every pupil who attends. Pupils settle into the routines of school life well when they join the school. The school can demonstrate dramatic improvements in attendance and behaviour of pupils. Pupils learn that this is a safe place to be. They are taught how to manage their own behaviours positively.

Building good, strong personal characteristics with pupils is central to everything that happens in school. Skilled pastoral staff manage expectations of what pupils can do and should do. They ensure that all staff are kept up to date with pupils' changing needs.

A comprehensive personal, social and health education and spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum are planned, alongside a strong careers curriculum, to give pupils the opportunities to succeed in life after school.

Expectations of behaviour and what pupils can achieve academically are high. In core subjects, the curriculum that pupils study is relevant and well sequenced. This helps pupils remember what they need to know. In some subjects, school leaders need to make the expectations of exactly what pupils need to know, and in what order, more precise.

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

School leaders at all levels, including the proprietor, know their school well. Everybody understands their roles and responsibilities, including those in governance roles. This means that staff know who to turn to for advice and support. Staff work well as a cohesive team. The feedback shared by staff was 100% positive. Staff are proud to work at this school.

Routines and systems are well embedded. Procedures around health and safety checks, including fire risk and the handling of medications are meticulous. This attention to detail enables leaders to consistently meet all the independent school standards and the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The school's strong routines support and encourage pupils to learn independently. Staff are skilled in recognising when pupils need them to intervene and when they can step back. Pupils are given every opportunity to manage their own emotions and actively participate in their learning. Pupils are given the tools and experiences to help them in their future lives. Around the school, there are various safe places where pupils can take themselves. This allows pupils to manage their own behaviour. For example, soft cushions in a corner of an office or a beanbag in a quiet dark room. Every aspect of the school environment is managed to make it the best place for pupils to learn. Staff know which pupils respond well to having time in their own space and those who would benefit more from a constructive

conversation. This excellent management of behaviour means that pupils are rarely off task in lessons. Disruption to others is minimal.

Teaching pupils to read is a key focus in school. Pupils are able to access a variety of books and texts for information and enjoyment. Well-trained staff support those pupils who need specialist phonics support. Daily reading and story sessions happen every day. Staff ensure that pupils who are learning to read get appropriate support in all subjects so that this does not become a barrier to their learning.

The curriculum, including extra-curricular experiences, is planned to meet individual needs. Every opportunity is provided to pupils to support them in becoming more confident and able in their community. Staff accompany pupils when they attend an alternative provision. This supports pupils to feel safe. This also allows staff to check whether these settings are a positive environment for their pupils. Work experience and careers events are similarly selected to meet individual pupils' needs. Links have been made with both small and larger providers to give pupils the opportunity to have a range of experiences. In school, opportunities such as 'Millcourt Marvels' help pupils to take on responsibilities in a safe and familiar environment.

Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. They use key vocabulary to build pupil's understanding of the subject being taught. In some subjects, there is a heavy emphasis on the skills that the school wants pupils to learn. However, the school's curriculum has a limited focus on the knowledge that pupils need. In some lessons, pupils are unclear about what they have learned. Links are not made with what pupils know already or what they will be learning in the future.

Parents are highly positive about the work the school does to support their children both emotionally and academically. Comments explaining that this school has 'changed the life of my little boy' and sharing how 'staff go above and beyond' were shared with inspectors.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- In some foundation subjects, the curriculum does not clearly state what pupils must learn or what associated vocabulary the school expect pupils to understand and retain in their long-term memory. Learning in some subjects is focused on an activity rather than on what the school want pupils to learn from this. This prevents pupils from being able to build reliably on prior learning and secure their knowledge in these subjects. The school must ensure that subject leaders get the support and guidance they need to create curriculums that clearly identify what pupils need to learn and in what order. This should include the language that will further support pupils to talk about what they know and remember.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	147983
<b>DfE registration number</b>	381/6024
<b>Local authority</b>	Calderdale
<b>Inspection number</b>	10286474
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent day school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	53
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Witherslack Group Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Tracey Fletcher-Ray
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Bourke
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£63,375 to £87,621
<b>Telephone number</b>	01274 924661
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school">www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk">millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 to 11 November 2021

## Information about this school

- The school was last inspected in November 2021 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be requires improvement.
- The school provides education and care for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and autism.
- The school uses four alternative providers, three are unregistered.

## 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.

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

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 senior leadership throughout the inspection. They also had meetings with the regional director and the board chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, science, humanities and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, 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 visited one of the unregistered alternative providers and spoke to another.
- 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 conducted a tour of the school and studied numerous documents and policies to ensure that the independent school standards are met.
- The lead inspector spoke to parents by telephone and considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire for staff.

## **Inspection team**

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Liam Colclough

His Majesty's Inspector

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