

Castlefell School

Silverhill Brake, Rudgeway BS35 3NS

Inspection date

2 February 2024

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(i), 2A(1) to 2A(2)

- The school has designed the curriculum to ensure that pupils learn from a broad range of subjects based on the national curriculum and the requirements of the independent school standards (the standards). Schemes of work for each subject show what the school intends pupils to learn. The curriculum design is likely to enable all pupils to make progress.
- School leaders anticipate that pupils will likely have significant gaps in their learning or have been out of education for periods before joining the school. They propose to assess each pupil's needs when they arrive. School leaders and the clinical team plan to use this information, alongside pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plan), to construct a relevant and ambitious curriculum pathway for each pupil.
- The proposed curriculum prioritises pupils' acquisition of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. A validated phonics programme is in place for pupils who find learning to read difficult. Staff have been trained in how the agreed scheme helps pupils learn to read. The proposed timetable shows that pupils will have daily English and mathematics lessons.
- A comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and economic education, including relationships and sex education, has been planned. The content aims to help broaden pupils' experiences of the world. Specific topics include healthy relationships, personal safety and consent. The intended curriculum pays due regard to knowledge of the different protected characteristics as specified in the Equality Act 2010.
- The school has developed plans for pupils to study a range of qualifications, including English, mathematics and science, to entry-level, functional skills level or GCSEs. It has high expectations for all pupils to achieve relevant qualifications by the time they leave the school. Pupils will also study vocational options so they can pursue a range of interests.
- The school has a well-considered programme for pupils' careers education. Plans outline how pupils will work with local colleges and employers. The school intends to

provide pupils with impartial advice so they can make informed decisions about their future careers. The careers programme is in line with the Gatsby benchmarks.

Paragraphs 3 to 3(j)

- The proprietor has already recruited experienced senior leaders and teaching staff with appropriate subject knowledge to teach the planned curriculum. The school plans to use an 'I do, we do, you do' approach to help pupils understand what needs to happen now and next in lessons. Teachers will present information clearly and teach knowledge in small steps to help pupils learn and remember more over time. School leaders, including regional directors, plan to monitor the quality of teaching to make sure that pupils' needs are being met.

Paragraph 4

- Procedures are in place to help staff assess pupils' learning continuously. For example, lessons will include recall and retrieval tasks to check what pupils know and remember. Staff will review pupils' performance regularly, and this will inform EHC plans.
- If the curriculum is implemented effectively, the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- The proprietor has adopted a secure framework to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, through weekly assemblies and whole school events, pupils will learn about gender equality, mental health and racial discrimination. The proposed curriculum includes teaching pupils about a range of faiths and cultures. Pupils are likely to be encouraged to respect differences, including the characteristics that are protected by law.
- There are well-considered policies in place to support staff with teaching positive behaviour strategies. Pupils will be encouraged to manage their behaviour, follow school rules and work well with others. The school intends to forge strong relationships between staff, pupils and parents.
- Pupils will have opportunities to apply for roles of responsibility such as school councillors. The school aims to prepare pupils to transition successfully into the next stage of their education.
- The school has policies in place that include details on preventing the promotion of partisan political views, both in school and when engaged in extra-curricular activities. Curriculum plans show that teachers will offer pupils a balance of opposing viewpoints.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7

- The proprietor has written a safeguarding and child protection policy that reflects the most recent statutory guidance. The policy is available on the school's website. A dedicated and experienced safeguarding team is in place. They demonstrate a secure knowledge of their duties to keep pupils safe. The school has considered contextual safeguarding across the local authorities they intend to serve. Senior leaders have completed statutory safeguarding training, including appropriate safer recruitment training. The induction programme for new staff includes information about safeguarding procedures, whistleblowing and managing allegations against staff. Leaders will be expected to network with and learn from safeguarding teams from other Witherslack schools.
- The proprietor has developed an electronic system for staff to record concerns or disclosures about pupils' welfare. School leaders and directors will use this system to monitor safeguarding incidents closely.
- School leaders intend to hold daily briefings to ensure that all staff are well informed of any safeguarding risks pupils may face.

Paragraphs 9 to 10

- The school has developed appropriate behaviour and anti-bullying policies. These set out the school's approach to rewards and sanctions, including expectations of staff in managing pupils' behaviour. Bullying is clearly defined. Staff are expected not to tolerate it. The headteacher will report cases of bullying to the proprietor body.
- The school aims to create a calm, safe environment based on trust and mutual respect. The staff induction programme includes training in de-escalation and physical intervention techniques. The policy makes clear that physical intervention is a last resort. Through monitoring, the school will identify pupils needing additional support to manage their emotions and behaviour.

Paragraphs 11 to 16(b)

- The proprietor takes health and safety seriously. Suitable health and safety policies are in place. Staff will complete first-aid training. All first-aid equipment is stocked and accessible for staff to use as necessary. There is an appropriate risk assessment policy, supported by dynamic risk assessments. For example, leaders have assessed the risk of ligature cutters, site security and transportation. The school plans to write individualised risk assessments for pupils once admitted to the school. A systematic schedule of daily, weekly and monthly checks will help maintain the good condition of the proposed premises.
- The proprietor has quickly rectified the high-priority actions on the external fire risk assessment. One task remains incomplete. The school is waiting for the new fire alarm system to be operational. There is currently a temporary system for raising the alarm in the event of a fire. The proprietor has scheduled this work to be completed before the end of February 2024. If the proposed school is approved, the proprietor will ensure that the school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- The supervision of pupils will be a priority for the school. Staff will greet pupils when they arrive each morning. Class sizes will be restricted to six pupils with a minimum of two staff. Throughout the school day, staff will supervise pupils closely. The proprietor

intends to increase pupil numbers gradually to ensure that appropriate staffing is in place.

- Attendance and admissions registers have been tested in other schools and are fit for purpose. They follow the latest guidance from the Department for Education. The school understands the importance of regular attendance. It plans to hold a weekly attendance meeting to identify and act on any concerning patterns of absence.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 18(2), 18(2)(a) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2), 19(2)(a) to 19(2)(d), 19(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a) to 20(6)(c), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(b), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(c), 21(6)

- The proprietor and school leaders have a detailed understanding of the requirements of part 4. They know what statutory checks need to be made to ensure the safe recruitment of staff.
- An electronic single central record (SCR) is in place and complete at the time of the inspection. It includes details of all appointed staff, including the directors and head office staff. The SCR is clearly organised. Relevant information, such as checks on staff who have lived and worked abroad, is completed before employment starts. Staff monitor the SCR weekly to ensure that it is compliant.
- The school does not intend to use supply staff. However, should the need arise, it is knowledgeable about the procedures to follow.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a) to 23(1)(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a) to 24(1)(c), 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b), 28(1), 28(1)(a) to 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a), 28(2)(b), 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b)

- The proposed school will occupy a two-storey building that was formally used as an office and school. The building now comprises attractive classrooms, a science laboratory, design technology and art spaces, a dining area, therapy rooms and office space. It is suitable to educate the proposed number of pupils.
- Classrooms are well lit and have suitable acoustics and ventilation. Windows have locks and are fitted with restrictors.
- The outdoor space and grassed areas are suitable for pupils to play and socialise. The school intends most of the physical education to take place on site. Some activities, such as swimming, will take place off site.
- The school has separate toilet facilities available for staff and pupils. There is a sufficient supply of cold and hot water. Hot water does not scald. Pupils will have access to drinking-water throughout the day from recessed fountains.
- A dedicated medical room is in place. It contains a bed and appropriate washing facilities and is adjacent to a toilet. There is also a lockable cabinet to store

medication.

- At the time of the inspection, the school is in the final stages of refurbishing the new site. It is not currently ready to admit pupils. For example, the professional kitchen, staff car park, multi-use games area and showers remain unfinished. The proprietor will ensure that unfinished work is completed and complies with the standards before admitting pupils.
- Once the building work has been completed, the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(4)(c)

- The proposed school's website provides parents with the required information, including contact details of the headteacher and the proprietor body. The website has a separate area for parents. This gives information on relevant policies and procedures such as admissions, curriculum and safeguarding.
- The school has produced a report to provide parents with termly progress on pupils' progress, effort and attainment.
- As an experienced provider of education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the proprietor is fully aware of the requirement to supply details of income and expenditure for pupils funded by local authorities, public funds or an EHC plan.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)

- The proprietor has written a complaints policy. It is published on the school's website. The policy encourages any concerns or complaints to be resolved at the earliest stage possible. The stages for managing a complaint, including the timeframe in which complaints will be dealt with, are easy to follow for parents.
- The school will keep records of any complaints securely. These will be made available for inspection.
- It is likely that the requirement of this standard will be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor has considerable expertise in opening and leading specialist education provision. An experienced regional team will provide extra support and challenge for school-based leaders through on-site visits and monitoring. All levels of leadership share the same ambitious vision. They are sharply focused on providing high-quality education at the school.

- Systems are in place to ensure regular and impartial quality assurance of the school's work. For example, the headteacher reports to a regional director, who, in turn, reports to the proprietor body. Well-tested systems hold leaders accountable for the provision pupils receive and compliance with the standards.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school has written a suitable accessibility plan. The plan indicates how the school will consider access to the premises, the curriculum and school life for pupils with a disability.
- The school is likely to meet the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 150377 |
| DfE registration number | 803/6012 |
| Inspection number | 10314565 |

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School status | Independent day school |
| Proprietor | Witherslack Group Ltd |
| Chair | Richard Wilkins |
| Headteacher | Wendy Yeo |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £98,827 to £130,751 |
| Telephone number | 01454 801890 |
| Website | www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/our-locations/our-schools/castlefell-school/ |
| Email address | castlefell@witherslackgroup.co.uk |

Pupils

| | School's current position | School's proposal | Inspector's recommendation |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Age range of pupils | Not applicable | 8 to 16 | 8 to 16 |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | Not applicable | 50 | 50 |

Pupils

| | School's current position | School's proposal |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Gender of pupils | Not applicable | Mixed |
| Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age | Not applicable | 50 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----|
| Number of part-time pupils | Not applicable | 0 |
| Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities | Not applicable | 50 |
| Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan | Not applicable | 50 |
| Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan | Not applicable | 50 |

Staff

| | School's current position | School's proposal |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff | 7 | 11 |
| Number of part-time teaching staff | 0 | 0 |
| Number of staff in the welfare provision | 5 | 6 |

Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school intends to offer specialist provision for pupils between the ages of eight and 16 years with social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism. All pupils will have an EHC plan funded by several local authorities.
- The proprietor, Witherslack Group Ltd, runs 31 registered independent special schools and integrated learning centres across England. The group has four directors, including the chief operating officer. An executive team of regional leaders provide further oversight.
- The proposed school is located in Rudgeway, a village in South Gloucestershire. The school is based in a former office building and independent school. The building has been newly refurbished. The school is adjacent to a small cluster of residential properties and a woodland area.
- An experienced headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed to lead the school. Two teachers and support staff are also in post.
- The proprietor intends to grow pupil numbers gradually. It is anticipated that a maximum of 15 pupils will be on roll during the first year of opening. The proprietor intends that the school will reach capacity over the first four years.

- The proposed school does not plan to use alternative provision.
- The proposed school will not open to pupils before the week commencing 18 March 2024.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the Secretary of State for Education. It was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to determine whether the proposed school will likely meet the standards if approved to open.
- This was the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspector discussed parts of the standards with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other representatives, including the regional director and the health and safety lead for the group. The inspector held a telephone conversation with the chair of the proprietor body to consider plans for the proposed school.
- The inspector toured the school site, both internally and externally, to check the suitability and safety of the premises. He reviewed the health and safety and fire risk assessments made by internal and external specialists.
- The inspector scrutinised and evaluated a wide range of documents provided by the school, including safeguarding information, statutory policies and the proposed school curriculum.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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