

# Inspection of Huckleberry Therapeutic School

Manor Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 8NE

---

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 February 2024

---

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Inadequate

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

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Every morning at Huckleberry begins with a warm welcome that helps pupils get off to a positive start to the day. Well-established routines support pupils to know what is expected and to feel safe and settled. Pupils enjoy being here and feel 'at home' and cared for. For many, this is the first time they have attended school regularly or engaged meaningfully with education.

The school considers the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities very carefully. Staff are skilful at managing pupils' complex needs and related challenging behaviours. Pupils receive effective support to help them understand, process and express their emotions. Typically, the school is calm and orderly and there is minimal disruption to learning.

Over time, the school's nurturing, therapeutic approach helps pupils to reconnect with education. This rekindles their curiosity and enjoyment of learning. Pupils develop confidence and renewed self-esteem. For some, this is a long process that takes time and patience.

Pupils learn valuable life skills, such as how to purchase items in a shop and how to travel safely. They enjoy Friday assemblies, when their achievements are celebrated. Weekly visits to the Exceed Centre provide pupils with opportunities to engage in outdoor activities ranging from animal care to gardening.

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

Since the previous standard inspection, resilient, determined leadership has brought about rapid improvement to all aspects of the school's work. Leaders and staff work as a close-knit team, keeping pupils' interests central to any decision-making. Pupils now receive a good-quality education. As a result, from very low starting points, they are making important strides in their learning and personal development.

The school's curriculum is suitably broad and ambitious. Long-term outcomes from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are successfully integrated into the curriculum. This enables staff to set out pathways for individual pupils. English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are rightly prioritised.

Therapies and other subjects combine to provide an interesting curriculum that is shaped around pupils' needs. They learn about the world around them. For example, in science, pupils learn about the properties of different materials and animal habitats. Purposefully planned, celebratory themed days help pupils to learn about other cultural traditions. They are taught to respect and value everyone, no matter what their family background or beliefs are.

Reading is a priority. Leaders have ensured that all staff have been trained in the school's approach. Phonics and early reading strategies are taught precisely and

systematically. Daily story times foster pupils' interest and enjoyment of reading. Staff use many texts to provide pupils with an accessible 'window' into real and imaginary worlds.

Pupils receive intensive, individual support. This helps staff to form warm, trusting relationships with them. This also means that staff understand pupils' progress and flexibly adapt learning. However, most pupils rarely have the opportunity to work independently and apply what they have learned. Staff also step in very quickly when pupils find something tricky. This limits opportunities for pupils to develop their independence and resilience.

Pupils learn important life skills, including about keeping safe. They are taught how to recognise risk and harmful behaviour. Staff make sure that pupils can identify a trusted adult to speak to if they are ever worried. The school seeks to prepare pupils for the wider world, including how to behave in different social situations. However, there are currently limited opportunities for pupils to mix socially at school, including through attending any extra-curricular activities.

Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and are happy to be here. This is reflected in their positive attendance and keenness to be in school. However, pupils' needs mean that they typically require lot of encouragement to remain focused. Some continue to need a very high level of support and guidance to regulate their behaviour.

Partnership working with the families of pupils at the school is a real strength. They are fully involved in decision-making about the plans and provision for their children. Staff keep in regular communication with families, including about any behaviour or attendance issues. Parents and carers are full of praise for the school's work with their children and the whole family. One described this as 'transformational'.

The proprietor has put in place effective governance arrangements. The education committee provides strong oversight and accountability to the school. Statutory duties are carried out effectively. This includes compliance with the independent school standards and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The leadership team and education committee are mindful of the need to manage any increase in pupil numbers very carefully. They recognise the importance of ensuring that the hard-earned improvements are sustained.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- There are very few opportunities for pupils to work independently or to apply their learning from adult-led teaching activities. Sometimes, staff step in very

quickly to provide answers when pupils do not respond straight away or are finding something difficult. As a result, pupils are not embedding or deepening their learning as well as they could be, or developing resilience and independence when encountering new challenges. This also means that they are not prepared as well as they could be for the next stage of their education. The school needs to consider its teaching approaches in order to address this.

- The school currently provides few opportunities for pupils to mix socially with their peers, including through any extra-curricular activities. This limits pupils' social development and preparedness for the next stage of their education and further on into adulthood. The school should review and develop its current arrangements for this aspect of its personal development provision.

## **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>	148625
<b>DfE registration number</b>	931/6025
<b>Local authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10299263
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	6
<b>Proprietor</b>	Harvinder and Sukhbir Singh t/a Calcot Services for Children
<b>Chair</b>	Harvinder Singh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Louisa Skinner
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£56,306 to £79,367
<b>Telephone number</b>	01235 639511
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.huckleberrytherapeuticschool.co.uk">www.huckleberrytherapeuticschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:Huckleberry@CSFC.co.uk">Huckleberry@CSFC.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 to 9 June 2022

## Information about this school

- Huckleberry Therapeutic School was registered by the Department for Education (DfE) in June 2021 and accepted pupils from September 2021.
- The school is registered for up to 35 pupils between the ages of five and 11. Since the previous standard inspection, the number of pupils on roll has decreased significantly. At the time of this inspection, there were six pupils on roll and no pupils were below the age of seven.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority, which funds their places. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs and have an EHC plan. Some pupils have a medical diagnosis, for example of autism.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in June 2022, when the school was judged to be inadequate. Since that inspection, Ofsted has carried out two progress monitoring inspections. These took place in January 2023 and in October 2023 respectively.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school's recently formed education committee fulfils the strategic functions of a governing body. The proprietor chairs this committee. Other members include the headteacher, the director of education from Calcot Services for Children and an independent educational consultant.
- Huckleberry is one of three schools belonging to the proprietor.

## 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.
- The inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussion 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 inspector met with leaders to discuss and consider the school's wider curriculum. This included reviewing curriculum information and sampling pupils' work in different subjects.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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 inspector met with the director of education and the school's external consultant, who are both members of the education committee. The inspector held a separate meeting with the proprietor.
- The inspector spoke with pupils' families to gather their views about the school.
- The inspector gathered staff's views during meetings with them and through their responses to Ofsted's confidential survey.
- The inspector considered a wide range of documents, including minutes from education committee meetings and local authority reports following visits to the school.

### **Inspection team**

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024