

Bluebell School Ltd

Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove, Stoke on Trent ST7 1EH

Inspection date

19 March 2024

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b)(i) and 2(2)(h)

- The proprietor body has an appropriate curriculum policy that sets out a sufficiently broad range of subjects for pupils to study across the school. The policy is based upon the National Curriculum and explains clearly leaders' aims for the curriculum.
- The curriculum defines pathways of learning for pupils depending on their additional needs. The pathways carefully consider the different ages and stages of development that pupils are at. This includes pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- The organisation of the curriculum into cognition and learning and social, emotional and mental health needs pathways supports all pupils to learn in a way that is most appropriate to them. The academic curriculum is enhanced by many specialist sessions, including a range of therapy sessions and relaxation. These are effective in supporting pupils to be physically and mentally ready to learn and make progress.
- The school ensures that staff are trained and well-equipped to support pupils throughout the day and their learning. The skill, commitment and expertise that staff show is a key factor in the success of pupils in growing, learning and progressing to the next stage of their education.
- Pupils use the learning environment well and with increasing independence. Through caring, strong and positive relationships, staff know just the right moment to distract, support or have a change of scene. This ensures that pupils make the most of each lesson and achieve well.
- The school's systems for using information in the EHC plans to inform the small steps of learning are clear and effective. Staff assimilate this knowledge and readily transfer it to bring out the best in the pupils, both with their learning and as an individual.
- These independent school standards (the standards) continue to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 11 and 16

- The school's safeguarding and child protection policy is suitable, reflects the most recent statutory guidance and is available on request. It is published on the school's website.
- All staff have completed appropriate safeguarding training, including for de-escalation and physical intervention. Leaders are aware of their duties and the importance of establishing and maintaining a strong safeguarding culture.
- The school has a detailed and comprehensive health and safety policy. Leaders work with a range of professionals to ensure that all relevant checks are undertaken and that the current premises are maintained to a high standard. The health and safety policy is implemented effectively and adhered to by all staff.
- Leaders demonstrate a secure knowledge of their duties to keep pupils safe. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, including a comprehensive induction programme for new staff. This ensures that everyone knows how to identify and report any concerns.
- Leaders deal with safeguarding concerns appropriately. They keep meticulous and detailed records. These show that leaders remain vigilant and act promptly to address concerns about pupils' safety. Leaders work closely with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils get the extra help they need.
- The school's risk assessment policy is current, clear and fit for purpose. It recognises the specific needs of the pupils who attend the school. It is written with the building, activities and people who work and learn there in mind. Alongside this, leaders and staff are adept at on-the-spot situational awareness and take appropriate action to reduce identified risks.
- Positive, caring relationships between staff and pupils help pupils to learn right from wrong and to make the right choices in keeping themselves safe.
- These standards continue to be met.

Paragraph 9 to 9(c),

- The school has a behaviour policy in place. It starts from a place of positivity. It sets out the high expectations that are expected and rewarded. It outlines the consequences in a clear manner.
- Underpinning the written behaviour policy and all that happens within the school are warm, caring and supportive relationships. Pupils clearly value their learning and social time with staff. Equally, they know, seek out and chat to school leaders. Walking down the corridors is a privilege and one that takes time as pupils stop to give hugs, do high fives, share pictures or recount a story. The pride and deep respect in each person, whether adult or child, is clear to see.
- High expectations are set and modelled consistently by every member of staff. Pupils know what they should be doing and why. The very clear, straightforward responsibilities give them a structure that they know and understand. The rewards they 'earn' are clear motivators. Whether it is computer time, losing oneself in the sensory room or having some pampering in the beauty room, pupils talk of these with

enjoyment. They work hard to develop the knowledge and strategies to regulate their own behaviour.

- There are times when pupils' behaviour does not meet expectations or becomes dysregulated. On these occasions, the environment and the skill and expertise of the staff come to the fore. Safe spaces and retreat rooms are strategically placed around the building. Pupils are taught to know when they need these and how to use them. Staff know when their attention and company is wanted or needed. Just as importantly, they recognise when to step aside and give space and time. The combination of staff expertise alongside careful design and provision within the environment means pupils learn to know themselves, their triggers and their calming strategies. The success of this is shown through the meticulous records that the school keeps and analyses.
- There are occasions when, despite all that is in place, a pupil's behaviour escalates. For these times, everyone's safety is upheld through specific guidance on the use of physical intervention within the behaviour policy. The policy and documentation is clear, takes account of relevant government guidance and ensures that each incident is reported and recorded appropriately.
- All staff are trained in physical intervention, including annual refresher training. All incidents of restraint are recorded in detail, including a description of the incident, the type of hold, start and end time, the trigger, and next steps. Parents and carers are contacted by the end of the day if restraint has been used and reparative conversations are held with pupils. For each incident, there are several layers of accountability and scrutiny in place at both school level and proprietor body level.
- Leaders are deeply reflective and take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They use their systems and analysis to continually consider what they can learn and improve upon. This includes listening to the pupil's voice during reflection and reparation. Physical intervention is used appropriately, safely and as a last resort. Scrutiny of the school's records show that if physical intervention has been used, incidents reduce over time.
- The school works extensively and effectively with parents and carers alongside a varying range of external agencies. They keep the pupil and their individual learning and behavioural needs at the centre of all they do. Detailed planning and very small steps of development are carefully set out within clear guidance and policies. Staff weave these many moving parts together in a way promotes and ensures good behaviour amongst pupils.
- Fundamental to the success of the behaviour policy is the school's belief that, 'together, we make a difference.' The one factor that unites everything is the respectful relationships that are evident across the school. Lunchtime is an especially heartwarming and social occasion. Staff and pupils sit and eat together in calm and collegiate way that is testament to the school's vision. Pupils are independent, happy and positive; and can contribute to society.
- These standards continue to be met.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3) to 21(3)(b), 21(6)

- The single central record contains the full range of pre-employment checks. It is stored centrally in an electronic format. The school has appropriate recruitment procedures in place. This includes obtaining two references and carrying out a medical check prior to appointment.
- The school does not use supply staff to cover staff absence.
- The school is aware of the checks required for members of the proprietor body and has carried these out appropriately following changes to the structure of the business.
- A sufficient number of leaders are safer recruitment trained. At least one of these leaders sits on every recruitment panel.
- These standards continue to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor body, executive staff and senior leaders maintain strong oversight of the school's work. They have established clear lines of accountability. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the independent school standards and ensure that the standards are consistently met.
- The school is united through its vision of 'together, we make a difference.' Every thought and every action stems from the belief that the pupils in the school deserve, and will have, the very best. And they do.
- The school ensures that the extensive resources are of high-quality and finely tuned to individual needs. Each space is supplied with a range of equipment that actively promotes the well-being of pupils, as well as their education. With their individual needs known, understood and carefully addressed, the school ensures that pupils are safe, independent, happy and have positive attitudes to their learning.
- The school does not sit in isolation. Leaders actively promote the well-being of pupils through close partnership working with families, numerous external agencies and several local authorities. They seek advice if required. They share best practice in many ways. This helps them to remain reflective, open to challenge and quality assured by the local authorities who place pupils at the school.
- The school invests extensively in its human resources. The recruitment process is structured to bring staff with the right qualities and experience into the school. Leaders then build upon this through a range of training and support across all aspects of school life. Staff value this. They are well-equipped and show skill and expertise in their work of supporting the learning and management of the behaviour of pupils. The daily briefing is an intrinsic and important part of staff development. It is structured in a way that looks after staff, helps them grow and develop; and through this, be best placed to promote the safety, well-being and education for each pupil.

- These standards continue to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	143932
DfE registration number	860/6045
Inspection number	10334293

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Hopedale Children and Family Services Ltd
Chair	Sarah Deaville
Headteacher	Mrs Kay Banks
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,025-£79,490
Telephone number	01782987012
Website	www.bluebellschool.co.uk
Email address	office@bluebellschool.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	29 November to 1 December 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with special educational needs linked to autism spectrum disorder, learning difficulties or social, emotional mental health (SEMH). All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school's curriculum is designed through three 'pathways'. These are: a cognition and learning pathway, a SEMH pathway and a 'pod' pathway where pupils with the most complex needs receive targeted one-to-one support.
- Since the previous inspection, the proprietor body has changed. The chair of the proprietor body remains the same.

- A group of 'critical friends' provide governance and support for school leaders.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- A range of local authorities place pupils at the school.
- The overall effectiveness at the school's previous independent standard inspection was judged as outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- The emergency inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education due to safeguarding concerns linked to complaints they had received. The inspection was carried out without notice.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; examined relevant documentation; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector held discussions with school leaders, including two directors of education, members of the executive leadership team, the head of school and deputy headteacher. The inspector also met with the chair of the proprietor body.
- The inspector met with a group of staff to discuss their experiences of working in the school.
- The inspector carried out learning walks. This enabled them to visit a range of lessons, look at examples of pupils' work, and observe pupils in lessons and at breaktimes. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors held meetings linked to behaviour, curriculum and health and safety.

Inspection team

Kirsty Foulkes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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