

Inspection of Mill School - Bury

Wellington Street, Bury, Greater Manchester BL8 2BD

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 May 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

When pupils join Mill School, often following difficult experiences in other educational settings, they begin to regain their enthusiasm for learning.

Pupils feel welcome here. They said that they are comfortable being themselves, regardless of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are proud of the ways that their school celebrates difference.

The school is ambitious for pupils, all of whom have education, health and care plans (EHC plan). However, for a time, the education that pupils received was hindered by frequent changes in staff. That said, most pupils leave school well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment.

Until recently, the behaviour of a minority of pupils made some of their peers feel unsafe. The school has adapted its approach to supporting pupils' emotional needs. Staff respond sensitively and appropriately when pupils experience distress. As a result, pupils feel happier and safer at school than in the past.

Pupils value the wide range of opportunities available to promote their personal development. For instance, they are delighted to be elected to positions of responsibility and to help to arrange school events. Pupils also look forward to joining in with yoga sessions, raising money for charities and spending time with the school's therapy dogs.

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

The school is emerging from a recent period of turbulence. Since 2022, instability in the staffing and leadership of the school had a detrimental effect on pupils' behaviour and welfare. During this time, some parents and carers raised concerns over the education that their children received. The proprietor has addressed these concerns and made suitable changes. Some of these changes are helping the school to move forward apace. For instance, it is once again a calm learning environment.

Some other changes are taking longer to have the intended positive impact. Several key staff appointments have happened very recently. These have brought renewed optimism to the school. However, some new strategies are only beginning to be embedded.

The school has introduced a broad, ambitious curriculum. Pupils in key stage 4 work towards a range of formal qualifications, including GCSEs. The curriculum, alongside a comprehensive careers programme, ensures that pupils are ready to move on to suitable post-16 destinations.

The school ensures that any additional needs that pupils may have are identified quickly. It uses pupils' EHC plans effectively to set individual targets. Staff support

pupils' academic and social achievement well. Most pupils successfully build their independence over time.

In most subjects, the curriculum has been carefully organised. The school has considered the key content that pupils should learn and in what order it should be taught. Typically, this curriculum is taught by staff with strong subject knowledge. They choose learning activities that help pupils to revisit and remember important learning. As a result, many pupils learn well despite the legacy of the weaker previous curriculum. However, some pupils have large gaps in their prior knowledge. In some subjects, the school's assessment strategies do not identify these gaps well enough. On occasions, some pupils' missed learning goes unnoticed by staff.

A small number of pupils in key stage 2 experience a different curriculum. This prioritises their communication and language development. This curriculum is appropriate to these pupils' current needs; however, it is underdeveloped. The school has not considered what these pupils should learn in the longer term. This hinders how well these pupils achieve.

The school recognises the importance of reading. Work has recently begun to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Most pupils read confidently and fluently. Staff know how to help pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read, including those who use symbols to communicate. Pupils in all key stages develop their communication and reading skills appropriately from their individual starting points.

Most pupils conduct themselves well around the school and engage positively in lessons. Staff support pupils to build their confidence and develop resilience. On the whole, this is successful. Recent changes to the school's behaviour policy have reduced the number of incidents of negative behaviour. In addition, the school uses a range of suitable interventions to help pupils to regulate their emotions. Most parents are happy with the support that their child receives to help improve their behaviour and conduct. The school is working with a minority of parents to address any remaining negative views.

Most pupils attend school regularly. However, a significant minority are persistently absent. Staff draw on their detailed knowledge of each pupil to provide appropriate support. This is informed by pupils' individual needs and circumstances. Some pupils' rates of attendance are increasing as a result of the school's actions.

The school ensures that pupils are well prepared to lead independent lives in modern Britain. For instance, pupils learn how to manage money and what it means to have a healthy relationship. The school also encourages pupils' appreciation of the wider world. For example, pupils enjoyed recent trips to the zoo and to local museums. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about the forthcoming hiking expedition that they are planning.

The proprietor has recently appointed leaders with the required expertise to ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) can be met consistently.

These leaders provide capacity for further improvement. However, some of the school's systems for monitoring the standards are not employed as well as they should be. For instance, inspectors identified some minor routine maintenance issues that had not been dealt with. Furthermore, some issues with the administrative aspects of the single central record, such as the pre-employment checks on staff who work at the school, needed to be rectified during the inspection. While these matters were resolved fully during the inspection, the proprietor had not maintained a clear enough oversight of the school.

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Staff recognise that a lot has changed at the school in a short time. This has increased their workload. That said, many staff spoke highly of the school's efforts to ensure that their workload is purposeful and manageable. For instance, staff appreciate the additional training and development opportunities that are now available. They are eager to play their part in the school's continued improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Rapid changes to the school's leadership have hampered the proprietor's oversight of the school. Over time, the proprietor has not ensured that the standards are met consistently and securely. Added to this, some new and temporary staff are not as familiar with the proprietor's systems as they need to be. This hinders the pace of further improvements. The proprietor should enhance its efforts to stabilise the leadership of the school and provide suitable support for new staff to fulfil their roles effectively so that the standards are consistently met.
- The curriculum in key stage 2 is in a state of transition. The school has not finalised the knowledge that pupils in key stage 2 should learn or how it connects with their future learning. This makes it difficult for pupils to build up their knowledge gradually as they grow older. The school should ensure that there is clarity about how the curriculum prepares younger pupils for their transition to key stage 3.
- In some subjects, assessment strategies do not give staff an accurate understanding of how well pupils have learned the curriculum. At times, this means that staff are unaware of the gaps in some pupils' knowledge. The school should ensure that assessment strategies are well matched to the knowledge in the curriculum so that teachers accurately identify and revisit pupils' missed or forgotten 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	147349
DfE registration number	351/6017
Local authority	Bury
Inspection number	10286138
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Kedleston (Olsen House Holdings) Limited
Chair	Paul Brosnan
Headteacher	Helen Birkinhead
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,274
Telephone number	0161 359 7788
Website	www.kedlestongroup.com/our-schools-homes/day-schools/mill-school-bury/home
Email address	sally.goodwill@kedlestongroup.com
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 July 2021

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend this school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with autism. In addition, some pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 13 to 15 July 2021. Subsequently, two emergency inspections were also carried out due to concerns raised with the Department for Education (DfE) about the school. The first of these took place on 8 February 2023 and the second on 25 May 2023.
- The school operates from premises at Wellington House, Wellington Street, Bury, Greater Manchester, BL8 2BD.
- The proprietor is Kedleston (Olsen House Holdings) Limited, more commonly known as the Kedleston Group. This group operates a large number of schools and care homes across the North West and West Midlands.
- The current headteacher was appointed in June 2023. Since then, many other new staff have also been appointed.
- The headteacher was not present in school during this inspection. At the time of the inspection, the school was led by an acting headteacher with support from the proprietor's regional staff.
- The school makes use of two unregistered alternative provisions for a small number of pupils.
- The school is registered with the DfE to admit pupils up to the age of 17. At the time of the inspection, the oldest pupil on roll was 16 years old. The school had no sixth-form students.
- The school is registered to admit up to 70 pupils.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of 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 spoke with the acting headteacher, senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector also met with the regional director and chief operating officer of the

proprietor body. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone.

- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including that relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the checks that had been carried out on staff to ensure their suitability; 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school and their views of behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science and art and design. They met leaders and teachers and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning in these subjects. They also considered the curriculum across some other subject areas and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school premises.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Maria McGarry

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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.

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