

Inspection of G.E.M Hereford

Trinity House, 31 Barricombe Drive, Hereford HR4 0NU

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 June 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

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

What is it like to attend this school?

G.E.M. Hereford is a calm, safe and caring school. Many of the pupils who attend this school, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have had negative experiences in other settings. That is not the case here. Pupils are happy and take advantage of the broad range of activities on offer. This is a school full of passion and ambition for getting pupils' education just right. A place where the words, 'growth, empowerment and motivation' are not only the school's name, they are also the school's accomplished aims.

When pupils start school, staff spend time getting to know them to understand fully their needs and preferences. Staff support pupils effectively to manage their behaviours and feelings. This helps pupils to feel less anxious or overwhelmed and so prepares them for learning. Consequently, pupils work hard and focus well. This shows both in the volume and quality of the work they produce. The school has high expectations of pupils, knowing that they can achieve well.

Positive relationships between staff and pupils underpin the school's work. These are the bedrock of the successes here. Adults are sensitive to the needs and views of pupils and work tirelessly to create a school where pupils feel welcome, secure and motivated to learn.

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

Having only opened in September 2023, this school has been on a rapid journey. The proprietor, governors and the highly dedicated staff have created a school with a unique identity and a culture of constant improvement.

This is a place where well-being and learning go hand in hand. The school understands that pupils cannot learn if they do not feel secure and ready to do so. Staff are skilled and consistent in their interactions with pupils. If things go wrong, staff provide help and guidance immediately. Pupils appreciate the calm environment and compassionate staff. The promotion of pupils' personal development is threaded through each day. Pupils learn to cope when things are difficult and to understand and manage their feelings. They learn about relationships and making healthy choices in life, such as cooking nutritious meals and taking regular physical exercise. The careers programme is suitable and helps pupils to plan for their futures. Pupils are well prepared for their future education and playing a positive role in society.

The school has put in place a broad curriculum. Though a very small school, there is the ambition here to provide a curriculum that matches the breadth of much larger schools. This is beginning to be achieved through engaging with external agencies and settings, including the local sports centre. The curriculum is under constant review and development. The English and mathematics curriculum are well embedded and pupils achieve well. Some elements of the curriculum, including physical education (PE), are at an earlier stage of implementation. Although pupils

engage well and enjoy their lessons, intended learning is sometimes not broken down into small enough steps to be as purposeful as it could be.

In most lessons, teachers present information clearly because they have strong subject knowledge and make effective use of the high-quality resources available. However, on occasion, teachers do not make the best use of opportunities to deepen pupils' thinking through their questioning.

Teachers provide lessons in ways that suit each individual pupil. Lessons are bespoke and typically matched well to pupils' needs. Pupils engage well and achieve well because staff are quick to address misconceptions or provide guidance.

Staff are experts at engaging with readers who are reluctant. Using carefully chosen high-quality texts, they shape a reading and English curriculum that motivates pupils to learn. Staff's subject knowledge, along with the enthusiasm for the literature they share, is clear. Pupils typically read well and confidently. However, the school has already established a phonics programme to use if any pupils at the early stages of reading need support.

Most pupils travel long distances to school. Despite this, the school has been successful in developing effective partnerships with parents and carers. The school communicates regularly about how well pupils are doing and shares important information about how pupils are feeling. The majority of parents are highly complimentary about the difference this school has made to their children's education and well-being.

School staff keep a close eye on any pupils who are absent and always check up on those who are not at school. Pupils' attendance is considerably better than at their previous settings because they want to be here.

The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards are consistently and securely met. Pupils benefit from a well-resourced, inviting school environment. The school accommodation is safe and well maintained. Staff make regular site checks to ensure this remains the case. The school has an accessibility strategy in place to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum.

The proprietor is passionate about seeking objective and external views of the school. This extends to commissioning an external advisor and appointing a skilled governing board, which includes staff and parents. Governors share the proprietor's vision and ambition. They have developed their roles since the school opened and have a clear strategy to ensure they are effective in holding the school to account. At all levels of oversight, there is a drive for continuous improvement. The school maintains strong working relationships with other bodies, including the local authority.

This school has been successful in appointing staff who are committed to pupils' welfare and education. Staff bring extensive experience and expertise. The school

values them and ensures their workload is managed effectively. The proprietor provides continuing professional development and a supportive and collegiate working environment in which staff flourish. Staff are extremely proud to be members of the G.E.M Hereford team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- On occasion, the questions adults ask do not offer pupils enough challenge. This means that staff miss opportunities to encourage pupils to reason and deepen their thinking. The school should support staff to use questioning more effectively to promote pupils' deeper thinking and reasoning skills.
- Some areas of the curriculum are at an early stage of implementation. This means that there are times when learning is less effective because the intended curriculum has not been broken down into small enough steps. The school should ensure that the curriculum in all subject areas is broken down into small, sequenced steps so that pupils learn more and remember more.

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	149469
DfE registration number	884/6019
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10342194
Type of school	Independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Mercia Learning CIC
Chair	Debra Thomas
Headteacher	Rachel Ballance
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,000 to £70,000
Telephone number	01432 801000
Website	www.gemhereford.org
Email address	admin@gemhereford.org

Information about this school

- The school opened on 8 September 2023. This was the school's first standard inspection.
- The school caters exclusively for pupils with SEND, including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and pathological demand avoidance.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Places at the school are commissioned by the local authority.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school is run by Mercia Learning CIC, which is a not-for-profit community interest company.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- To check compliance with the independent school standards, the lead inspector walked the school site and reviewed associated documentation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and PE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with leaders, spoke to the proprietor and a member of the local governing board.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and throughout the day. They spoke formally with groups of pupils, as well as talking to pupils in lessons and around school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses. Inspectors also took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of documents, including governors' minutes, school improvement plans and the school's website.
- An inspector spoke to a member of staff from the alternative provision used by the school.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The material change refers to the school's request to increase the maximum number of pupils from 12 to 17.
- The school premises can readily accommodate an additional five pupils.
- The school has planned to increase staff numbers. This will ensure adequate levels of supervision if the proposed material change is approved.
- The proposed changes are unlikely to have a detrimental impact on existing pupils' education.

Information about the material change inspection

- The lead inspector met with the headteacher to discuss the material change.

Inspection team

Gareth Morgan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Martin Spoor

Ofsted Inspector

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