

Hall Cliffe School

Dovecote Lane, Horbury, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF4 6BB

Inspection dates

11 and 12 December 2024

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 9(b) to 9(c), 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 to 16(b)

- The proprietor knows that the school requires some necessary improvements. The school has been subject to ongoing additional support by the Witherslack Group. Much work has taken place to increase the leadership capacity. For example, the proprietor has appointed additional staff with designated responsibility for safeguarding. The regional director maintains close oversight of the school.
- The proprietor has completed the necessary checks to ensure that adults at the school are suitable to work with children. The school has a single central record. It records all of the required pre-employment checks accurately.
- There have been significant staff changes across both sites over the last year. All staff receive induction training and regular on-site safeguarding training. When staff are concerned that a pupil may be at risk of harm, they make appropriate referrals and record any concerns accurately. The school takes timely action and works with a range of external agencies as necessary. The proprietor has oversight of safeguarding arrangements in the school.
- There are weaknesses in the implementation of a number of school policies and practices relating to the management of pupils' behaviour, health and safety, and attendance. These shortcomings mean that the school is not actively promoting pupils' well-being, and this potentially puts pupils at risk of harm. This is particularly the case on the Hall Cliffe site.
- The school does not implement its policies relating to pupils' behaviour or the use of restrictive physical interventions effectively. Policies state that restrictive physical intervention will be used as a last resort. In practice, this is not the case. Pupils accept witnessing or receiving restrictive physical intervention as a routine part of school life.
- The school does not deal with pupils' misbehaviour consistently well. Some staff's less effective management of pupils' behaviour leads to pupils' further misbehaviour. The proprietor has secured additional staff training which is due to take place in January

2025. There has been some reduction in pupils' misbehaviour and the use of restrictive physical intervention over time. However, to date, the proprietor has not done enough to improve the culture in the school and address the poor behaviour of pupils effectively.

- When incidents happen or when pupils misbehave, staff record what happened and when. The school typically updates pupils' individual behaviour plans and risk assessments in line with its policy. However, some aspects of pupils' behaviour records and incident logs do not capture the views of pupils with the rigour, accuracy or detail that the proprietor expects.
- Staff accept too readily that getting hurt is part of the job. For example, staff often downplay serious injuries. When staff are injured because of the behaviour of some pupils, the school completes accident and first-aid records. However, post-incident briefings for staff and pupils after restrictive physical intervention, accidents or significant behaviour incidents are not completed in line with Witherslack Group's policy. Some post-incident debriefs for staff and pupils remain incomplete for far too long. Some staff refuse the post-incident briefings. These weaknesses in the implementation of the school's policies limit how well the school can learn from incidents and reduce the likelihood of such incidents occurring again.
- Maintenance checks are carried out in line with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. For example, the school makes regular checks on fire extinguishers. However, the proprietor has not ensured that the school follows other aspects of its fire risk assessments and fire safety procedures adequately.
- Supervision and support for pupils during fire evacuations is not effective. For example, during a fire evacuation on the first day of the inspection, pupils were seen running around and climbing on the bonnet and roof of a minibus. On the second day of the inspection, during another fire alarm, pupils re-entered the building before the fire doors had been reset or the attendance register was complete. The school's fire evacuation arrangements do not support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) sufficiently well. Pupils do not receive adequate support or guidance to ensure that fire evacuation events are successful in keeping them safe. These weaknesses in fire evacuation potentially put pupils at risk of harm.
- There are weaknesses in the supervision of pupils. The intended supervision of pupils was disrupted across both days of the inspection on the Hall Cliffe site. Many pupils spend time out of classes. Too often, staff who are supposed to be teaching are taken away to deal with pupils' misbehaviour. This limits pupils' supervision and leaves pupils waiting unnecessarily for lessons to start.
- The school maintains an admissions register in line with current legislation. The school works closely with local authorities and families to ensure that, over time, pupils' attendance increases. This is proving successful. Despite this positive work, the school does not follow basic signing-in and out procedures when pupils go on school visits or off site. This means that the school does not have accurate information about who is on or off site. This could potentially put pupils at risk of harm. The school knows to use the up-to-date attendance coding as set out in current statutory guidance. By the end of the inspection, inspectors were satisfied that staff who manage pupils' attendance record pupils on part-time timetables accurately on the register. However, leaders in the school did not provide inspectors with accurate information during the

inspection, nor did they show a sufficient understanding of what constituted a part-time timetable. The school does not have sufficient oversight or understanding of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

- There is a risk assessment policy in place. Pupils' risk assessments are routinely updated when there is a significant change. However, some site risk assessments are not updated or adhered to closely in line with policy. The school does not have sufficient oversight of this.
- The independent school standards (the standards) in this part are not met.

Paragraphs 9(a), 10

- The school has an appropriate behaviour policy in place. It sets out the sanctions to be received in the event of any misbehaviour.
- There is a clear anti-bullying strategy in place. When bullying happens, staff follow this up. The school takes timely action. This prevents reoccurrence.
- These standards are met.

Paragraph 32(1)(c)

- The school's safeguarding policy reflects current statutory requirements and is available on the school's website.
- This standard is met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)

- The school has adopted the Witherslack Group complaints policy. This policy is in writing. Parents and carers can access it via the school's website. The policy details how complaints can be made on a formal and informal basis, including the timescales for the management of these complaints. The school keeps a log of all complaints made to the school.
- At the time of this emergency inspection, the proprietor had failed to put in place a sufficient level of independence when complaints reached the final stage of investigation. The independent school standards require formal complaints at stage 3 to be considered by a panel, one member of which should be independent of the leadership and management of the school. Inspectors found that the Witherslack Group's complaints policy did not include this requirement. This meant that if a complaints panel was ever convened at stage 3, the complaint may not have been considered by anyone impartial to the leadership of the school.
- Prior to the publication of this report, the Witherslack Group updated their complaints policy. The school has adopted it. It now ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school.
- The standards in this part are met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor has made some considerable operational changes to the school since the previous standard inspection in October 2023. For example, since September 2024, teaching on the Grange Moore site is for pupils aged 14 and above. These pupils receive their vocational and academic learning on this site.
- The proprietor has made inroads to increase leadership stability. For example, the current headteacher has been in post since September 2023. Prior to this, there have been nine other headteachers since the school opened in 2015.
- In the last 12 months, there has been significant staff change to teachers and support staff. The Witherslack Group recognises that this school needs support to overcome weaknesses in its operation. Much work has started to bring this about. However, the proprietor has not ensured that all school leaders have a secure knowledge and understanding of the requirements of the independent school standards. Leaders do not fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met securely and consistently.
- The school's arrangements to actively promote the welfare of pupils have shortcomings. The proprietor has not ensured that there is enough oversight of the impact of operational systems at school level. Failure of leaders and staff to adhere to school policies potentially puts pupils at risk of harm.
- The standards in this part are not met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet 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	141860
DfE registration number	384/6003
Inspection number	10377165

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 category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	8 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	102
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Tracey Fletcher-Ray
Headteacher	Vicky Prosser
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,373 to £87,621
Telephone number	01924 663 420
Website	witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	Hall-Cliffe@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	10 and 12 October 2023

Information about this school

- The school operates on two sites. The main school site is located at Dovecote Lane Horbury, Wakefield, WF4 6BB. The second site is located at Jubilee Way, Grange Moore, WF4 4TD.
- There have been 10 headteachers at the school since it opened in 2015. The regional director attends the school regularly as part of a package of support in place for the school.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. This includes pupils with social,

emotional and mental health needs and pupils who have a diagnosis of autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Some pupils have moderate learning difficulties or speech, language and communication needs. Almost every pupil who attends the school has an education, health and care plan.

- The school is registered to take post-16 students up to the age of 17 years. At the time of this inspection, there were no post-16 students on roll.
- The school is part of the Witherslack Group which runs special schools and residential care across the UK.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) as a result of a number of concerns raised about the school and the Witherslack Group in general. This was one of a number of inspections carried out at the same time.
- The DfE commissioned the inspectors to check the school’s provision for the welfare and safety of pupils, the school’s complaints procedure and leadership and management.
- The inspection was conducted without notice.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other school leaders and staff.
- An inspector spoke with representatives of some local authorities who commission places at the school and held telephone conversations with parents.
- Inspectors spoke to staff both formally and informally.
- Inspectors took account of the views shared by pupils during informal discussions.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the Witherslack Group, including the chief operating officer, the regional director and the operations manager.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted via Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also reviewed the responses to Ofsted’s surveys for school staff.

Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Nathan Lowe	His Majesty’s Inspector
Lucy English	His Majesty’s Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted.

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.

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, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024