

# Millcourt School

2 Shelf Mills, Wade House, Shelf, Halifax HX3 7PA

## Inspection dates

11 and 12 December 2024

## Overall outcome

**The school meets 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 to 10, 14, 15, and 16 to 16(b), 32(1)(c)*

- These standards were found to be met at the school's previous standard inspection in October 2023.
- The school ensures that all staff receive appropriate training about safeguarding and child protection when they start their roles. Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and readily report concerns. Leaders take appropriate action where necessary in response to any concerns that are raised.
- The school ensures that all necessary checks are carried out on new staff starting at the school. This includes members of staff who have joined the school via an agency, or previously worked at the school on a temporary basis in a supply role. In all instances, a full and proper recruitment process is carried out. The school maintains a full record of the checks carried out on new staff.
- The school has produced a suitable safeguarding policy and published this on their website. This reflects the most recent statutory guidance. The policy is based on a model produced by the proprietor and has been adapted to reflect local context.
- Staff are supported effectively by the designated safeguarding lead to identify and record any concerns about pupils' welfare. Staff feel rightly confident that leaders in school will take appropriate action to ensure that pupils receive help and support when needed. The school's actions are detailed in comprehensive electronic records.
- There is a suitable written policy for managing behaviour. This policy is appropriate to the nature of the school and the needs of the pupils.
- The school is generally calm and orderly, which reflects the effective implementation of the policy. Records of sanctions are kept and analysed by leaders at a school and group level. Action is taken based on this analysis, for example, to adjust plans for supporting individual pupils. This has resulted in the reduction of behaviour incidents

and restrictive physical interventions over time, both across the school and for individual pupils.

- The school maintains an admissions register in line with the relevant regulations. There are suitable policies and procedures in place for managing pupils' attendance. Pupils generally attend school regularly. When this is not the case, the school acts quickly to put in place support for pupils and families. In a very small number of cases, this involves making use of part-time timetables, which are reviewed regularly, to build back up to full attendance. The school recognises where attendance concerns can overlap with safeguarding and gets assurance about pupils' safety and well-being if they are absent without a clear reason. Where pupils are finding it challenging to attend school, or there is a concern about the suitability of their placement, leaders communicate promptly with the relevant local authority.
- The school creates appropriate risk assessments and support plans for pupils who need help to manage their behaviour. These are reviewed and amended appropriately, with input from different professionals. The views of pupils, parents and carers are sought as part of this process.
- More general risk assessments, such as those relating to work experience, trips and visits, are also managed well in line with the school's risk assessment policy. This policy is contained within the health and safety policy.
- The independent school standards (the standards) in these parts continue to be met.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

### *Paragraph 33 to 33(k)*

- All of the requirements in this part of the standards were met at the school's previous standard inspection in October 2023.
- The school has adopted the Witherslack Group complaints policy. This policy is in writing and 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 that have been made to the school.
- However, at the time of this emergency inspection, the proprietor had failed to put in place a sufficient level of independence when complaints reach 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 to 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

### *Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)*

- All of the requirements in this part of the standards were met at the school's last standard inspection in October 2023.
- School leaders promote the physical and mental well-being of pupils. This is a central consideration in their decision-making and procedures. Leaders check on this aspect of the school's work and gather information that is reported to the proprietor. This includes information to demonstrate the school's work to reduce the need for restrictive physical interventions.
- As a result of this emergency inspection, the proprietor made adjustments to the school's complaints policy as it was non-compliant with the standards. The complaints policy is now compliant with the standards.
- These standards in this part are 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	147983
DfE registration number	381/6024
Inspection number	10377163

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	9 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Tracey Fletcher-Ray
Headteacher	Neil Bourke
Annual fees (day pupils)	£74,867 to £116,611
Telephone number	01274 924661
Website	<a href="http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school">www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/millcourt-school</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk">millcourt@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Dates of previous standard inspection	3 to 5 October 2023

## Information about this school

- Millcourt School is an independent special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. A substantial proportion of pupils at the school also have a diagnosis of autism and related social, communication and interaction needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and their places are funded by a local authority.

- The school is owned and managed by Witherslack Group Ltd. The group runs a number of other schools and children's homes.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in October 2023. Since then, the school has received a material change inspection in July 2024 to increase the number of pupils on roll to 62.
- The school currently uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school operates from a single address in Shelf, Halifax.

## 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 held a range of meetings with school leaders including the headteacher, deputy headteacher and designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the proprietor body. Inspectors spoke with representatives of some local authorities who commission places at the school.
- Inspectors spoke with and considered survey responses from pupils, parents and staff, including a number of free-text comments.
- Inspectors visited a range of lessons and observed other parts of the school day, including pupils' breaktimes.
- 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.

## Inspection team

Chris Ellison, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gaynor Roberts

His Majesty's Inspector

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