

Ashbrooke School

Ashbrooke Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7JA

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), 32(1)(c)

- The proprietor ensures the school's safeguarding arrangements are secure. The school has maintained a strong culture of effective safeguarding. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and understand their responsibilities. They act swiftly and appropriately when they recognise concerns about pupils' welfare. Pupils feel safe and know how to share any concerns they may have for their own or others' safety.
- The school maintains thorough safeguarding records. The school works with a range of external agencies to provide additional help when needed.
- The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance. The policy is readily available on the school's website.
- The school has a rigorous approach to safer recruitment. Thorough checks are undertaken before adults start working with pupils. These checks are recorded on the single central record.
- These independent school standards (the standards) are met.

Paragraphs 9 to 9(c), 10

- The school has a suitable behaviour management policy that sets out what leaders expect of pupils and how staff will promote and manage positive behaviour. The policy reflects pupils' specific needs. The policy is implemented effectively. The school is calm and orderly.
- Leaders have effective ways to record incidents of pupils' poor behaviour and resulting sanctions. The school's analysis of behaviour information shows that pupils' behaviour improves when they start attending the school. Pupils' behaviour continues to improve over time.
- The school has a suitable anti-bullying policy. This policy is effectively implemented. Bullying is rare. If it happens, pupils are confident that staff would address it promptly.

- These standards are met.

Paragraphs 14, 15

- The school ensures that staffing levels provide appropriate supervision of pupils across the structured school day, including breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- The school manages admissions and attendance information well. All required information is recorded in the admissions register. The school's attendance registers are maintained in line with statutory guidance. The school's analysis of attendance information shows pupils' attendance improves from when they start attending the school. Pupils' attendance improves over time.

- These standards are met.

Paragraphs 16 to 16(b)

- The school's risk assessment policy stresses the importance of assessing and managing potential risks. The school ensures every pupil has an individual risk assessment that identifies specific steps to keep the individual safe. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly. The policy is implemented effectively.

- These standards are 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 that have been 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 reach the final stage of investigation. The 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 its 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.
- These standards are met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34 to 34(c)

- The proprietor has ensured that the school securely and consistently meets all of the

standards.

- Leaders fulfil their responsibilities relating to promoting pupils' well-being.
- These standards 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	143532
DfE registration number	394/6000
Inspection number	10377160

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	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Richard Wilkins
Headteacher	Clare Read
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,540 to £92,000
Telephone number	01539 566081
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/our-locations/our-schools/ashbrooke-school
Email address	ashbrooke@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	5 to 7 July 2022

Information about this school

- Ashbrooke School is an independent special school for pupils aged five to 19 years. It is part of the Witherslack Group. The school is located at Ashbrooke Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7JA.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in July 2022 when it was judged to be outstanding. The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an additional emergency inspection in June 2023.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by 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 carried out without notice.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders. They met with representatives of the proprietor, including the chair.
- To review the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 spoke with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including the school's admissions and attendance registers and the school's behaviour, anti-bullying, risk assessment and complaints policies and related records.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who they spoke with as well as those who completed Ofsted Parent View and the free-text responses. They reviewed the responses to Ofsted's survey for school staff.

Inspection team

Chris Davies, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Pippa Jackson-Maitland	His Majesty's Inspector
Peter Stonier	His Majesty's Inspector

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