

# Spruce House School

114 Milton Road, Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 6HD

**Inspection date**

23 October 2025

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

*Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h) to 2(2)(i), 2A(1) to 2A(1)(b) and 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2)*

- The proprietor has developed an appropriately ambitious curriculum, including for early reading and mathematics. The school's curriculum plans will take into account pupils' individual needs, such as those detailed on their education, health and care (EHC) plan. The curriculum has been organised to support pupils to re-engage with education. For example, the structure of the intended timetable allows pupils to have breaks between sessions to re-focus and transition from one subject to another, reintegrating them to learning without losing valuable education time.
- The intended curriculum is comparable to the national curriculum and includes all aspects of education required in the independent school standards (the standards). There is a strong focus on personal growth and preparing pupils for their next steps in education, employment or training. The proprietor has identified the important knowledge and skills it wants pupils to know and remember. This includes prioritising addressing gaps in foundational knowledge that pupils may have.
- The intended personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme reflects the school's values and encourages respect for others. The proprietor's aim is that all pupils leave the school with a range of experiences, skills and knowledge that provide them with a solid foundation for success in life. The school aims for pupils to embrace diversity, including protected characteristics, through gaining a good awareness of difference and tolerance for others. If implemented as intended, the PSHE programme is likely to equip pupils with the knowledge they need to become active citizens in modern Britain.
- The school's relationships and sex education curriculum is comprehensive and age-appropriate. All pupils, whether of primary or secondary age, will get relationships education from the PSHE programme. This will prepare pupils well to develop and maintain safe relationships in the future.
- The proprietor has developed a suitable plan to ensure that pupils receive impartial careers advice based on their aptitude, interests and ambitions for their next steps.

The proprietor and school leaders have high aspirations for their pupils' futures. They aim to prepare pupils for the world of work by teaching them about different careers, education opportunities and supporting them to gain employability skills.

- The school has developed a clear behaviour policy. This informs its approach to securing high standards of behaviour consistently and will support staff to manage behaviour effectively. The proprietor intends that this will enable pupils to develop positive attitudes and effective learning and study skills.

*Paragraphs 3 to 3(g), 3(i) and 4*

- The school intends that staff will be provided with the training they need to identify and understand the needs of pupils who may have experienced trauma or have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The proprietor and school leaders intend to check that the quality of teaching in school is consistently effective through a regular programme of monitoring. If needed, staff will be provided with additional training to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogical skills further.
- Staff will be expected to build warm relationships with pupils and to plan suitable activities that engage pupils in their learning. Teaching methods chosen by the school are informed by research and will enable staff to understand how to adapt activities to overcome barriers to learning.
- Teachers will use a bank of resources that support the planned curriculum. They will use a range of strategies to engage pupils in their learning, based on the needs and abilities of each pupil. For example, the school has purchased a range of engaging young-adult reading books for older pupils who are at an early stage of reading.
- The school's assessment policy is well considered. It supports staff by outlining clearly the school's expectations of how they will check on pupils' understanding. Teachers will use a range of evidence to guide their evaluations of pupils' progress. This will include evidence from pupils' books, assessments and quizzes as well as speaking with pupils about their work. The school intends to regularly check how well pupils are learning, identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and monitor the progress they make.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

## Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

*Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)*

- The proprietor intends that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils will be a thread that runs through all school activities. The school's PSHE programme incorporates a broad range of themes. It is flexible to help pupils gain the important knowledge and skills that they need, whatever their starting point. This includes opportunities for pupils to learn about equalities and their own identity, health and well-being.
- The proposed school has considered how it intends to promote and teach pupils about the fundamental British values. This includes learning about democracy and a range of world faiths. An exploration of weekly themes or current news events will be used to help pupils distinguish right and wrong and to learn about public services and

different cultures. Pupils will have the opportunity to debate issues and listen to balanced opposing views. Staff will seek to challenge any views pupils may express that suggest an intolerance of difference.

- Pupils will benefit from regular opportunities to develop interests through enrichment activities. The school intends to make educational trips a feature of the curriculum.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)*

- The proposed school's written safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance. It is available on request and will be published on the website once the school opens. The policy indicates that the school understands its safeguarding duties and has suitable plans in place to fulfil these.
- Safeguarding leaders are suitably qualified and demonstrate a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. The designated safeguarding lead is experienced in managing safeguarding concerns and understands the need to share information appropriately.
- Regular safeguarding training will be a priority for all staff. There are clear systems in place for staff to report concerns and for leaders to be held to account for the decisions they make to keep children safe from harm. All staff will receive relevant training. Leaders have made sure that safeguarding is a high priority.

#### *Paragraphs 9 to 10*

- The proprietor has developed a clear behaviour policy that outlines the intended approach to managing and recording incidents of poor behaviour. This will be a simple system that pupils can understand.
- Leaders will regularly analyse behaviour records to identify and address trends and patterns in behaviour. There is likely to be effective oversight of behaviour if these procedures are implemented.
- The school's anti-bullying policy identifies how it intends to educate pupils about bullying and why this is unacceptable. It explains how the victim and perpetrator will be supported should this occur.

#### *Paragraphs 11 to 16(b)*

- The health and safety policy explains in detail the processes for keeping pupils and staff safe and for promoting their welfare. Leaders plan to make regular checks on all aspects of health and safety and will seek external advice and guidance to ensure that they are taking the right action.
- The proprietor has undertaken all the necessary fire checks of the building so the proposed school is compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The fire evacuation procedures, signage and plan are suitable. Fire doors, extinguishers and fire detection equipment is in place. The school intends to conduct fire drills half termly as well as regular checks on fire equipment.

- The proposed school has a suitable first-aid policy in place. Staff will be trained to administer first aid and to keep suitable records.
- The school plans to apply adequate staffing ratios to always allow the appropriate supervision of pupils, including when pupils take part in off-site visits.
- The school has identified systems to maintain accurate admission and attendance registers. An electronic attendance register will be used to record attendance at each lesson during the school day. This level of detail will enable leaders to address any emerging patterns in absence if needed. The school will record all the required information on the admissions register.
- The school has an appropriate risk assessment policy in place. Risk assessments have already been completed to detail how the school intends to minimise risk for pupils and staff. Risk assessments will be reviewed periodically to address any changes or emerging concerns.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

#### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

*Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(5) to 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(c) and 21(6)*

- Proprietor body members understand their responsibilities in relation to recruitment. They have been trained to seek the necessary assurances when appointing staff to the school.
- The school's single central record is in place and meets the requirements for the information it must contain. Leaders understand that the required checks on the suitability of staff must be completed before staff take up their appointment. These include the enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks, identification checks, checks on staff's right to work in the UK, and those checks relating to suitability for leadership and management of a school.
- The proprietor does not intend to use any supply staff to cover staff absence. However, they understand the procedures to follow and checks to be made should they wish to use supply staff in the future.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

#### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

*Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 25 and 28(1) to 28(2)(b)*

- The proposed school building was previously a large garage. It has been renovated to a high standard. The school sits on a securely enclosed site alongside a house that will become the residential children's home for pupils at the school if approved. The proprietor is knowledgeable about the routine maintenance checks that need to be in place so the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- The building has suitable toilet and washing facilities that are provided for the sole use of pupils. Cubicles are lockable from the inside. There is a supply of hot and cold water that is maintained at a safe temperature.

- There are no showering facilities in the school building because the proprietor intends that physical education will take place at a nearby sports provider that has these facilities.
- Drinking water is readily accessible, separate from toilet facilities, and is clearly marked.

*Paragraphs 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 26 and 27 to 27(b)*

- There is a suitably equipped medical room. This is close to a toilet and has washing facilities.
- Classroom and learning spaces have suitable lighting and acoustics for learning. External lighting is fitted to the outside of the building. Emergency lighting and fire exit signs are in place.

*Paragraphs 29(1) to 29(1)(b)*

- Outside space is available for social times. There is a grassed area with shade provided from trees. It is a safe and secure area and is well maintained.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

## Part 6. Provision of information

*Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(c), and 32(1)(f) to 32(3)(f)*

- The proposed school does not currently have a website. The required information, including the school's safeguarding policy, will be published on the school's website should the school open. The information required by the standards, including schemes of work and safeguarding policy, is all available in electronic and printed format if required. The school's policies show how the provision at the school will be adapted for all pupils.
- There is a system in place to account for any income and expenditure for each pupil that is funded by a local authority as part of an EHC plan. The proposed school will provide information on pupils' progress to the local authority.
- The proprietor has developed a detailed format for reporting pupils' progress to parents and carers called a 'snapshot of success'. These regular written reports will include information about pupils' academic and personal development.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

*Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)*

- The proposed school has a written complaints policy that outlines what pupils, parents and carers should do if they have a concern about any aspect of the school's work. The policy details the process that parents should follow and includes expected timeframes for each stage of the process and how the school will respond. The policy will be published on the website if the school opens.

- The policy allows for complaints to be addressed informally and formally. There is information about the next steps parents may follow if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint, including arrangements for a panel hearing.
- The school will retain written records of complaints and actions taken in response to them.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraphs 34 (1)(a) to 34(1)(c)*

- The proprietor has articulated a clear and ambitious vision for the new school based on an aim to provide the highest quality of education and care for vulnerable children in order to fully prepare them for their future well-being. The consideration of the well-being of staff and pupils is at the heart of the school's ethos. It is central to enabling pupils at the school to flourish. The proprietor runs a number of other schools linked to residential homes. The plan is for this setting to follow the same model that has been successful in returning pupils in care back to mainstream schools.
- The proprietor has a comprehensive understanding of the standards. They intend to use expertise from other schools in the group of schools and proprietor body to ensure that these are checked through regular quality assurance processes. Leaders and the proprietor have the skills appropriate to their role. These are likely to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.
- The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

## Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has demonstrated a commitment to inclusion, diversity and equality through the proposed curriculum and school documentation. The proposed school has a suitable accessibility plan. This identifies how the site, curriculum and documentation are made accessible.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Proposed school details

Unique reference number	151847
DfE registration number	861/6047
Inspection number	10407279

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent day school
Proprietor	Halliwell Homes Ltd
Chair	Mathew Hargreaves
Headteacher	Nicola Baddeley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,200
Telephone number	01782 291484
Website	<a href="http://www.halliwellhomes.co.uk">www.halliwellhomes.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:contact@halliwellhomes.co.uk">contact@halliwellhomes.co.uk</a>

### Pupils

	<b>School's current position</b>	<b>School's proposal</b>	<b>Inspector's recommendation</b>
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	5 to 14	5 to 14
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	5	5

### Pupils

	<b>School's current position</b>	<b>School's proposal</b>
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	5
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	5
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	5
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	5

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	2
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0

## Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is located at 114 Milton Road, Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 6HD.
- The proposed school intends to provide full time education for up to five boys and girls from 5 to 14 years of age with a range of social, emotional and mental health needs. It is proposed that all pupils will be looked after in a Ofsted registered children's residential home that the proprietor intends to open adjacent to the school. It is anticipated that all pupils will have an EHC plan.
- The proposed school does not intend to use any form of alternative provision.
- The proposed school will not have a religious character.
- The proprietor body of the school is Halliwell Homes Ltd. The proprietor currently operates six other independent schools.

## Information about this inspection

- The DFE commissioned this pre-registration inspection to determine whether the proposed school would be likely to meet the independent school standards if granted permission to open.
- This is the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspector met with the chair of the proprietor body and the head of education who will have the responsibility of headteacher if the school opens. In addition, the proprietor plans to recruit a lead teacher and other staff.
- The inspector scrutinised and evaluated a wide range of documents provided by the school, including safeguarding information, statutory policies and the proposed school's curriculum.
- The inspector toured the site to check the suitability and safety of the premises.

## Inspection team

Corinne Biddell, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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