

Wolfdale School

Cropston Road, Anstey, Leicestershire LE7 7BP

Inspection dates

12–13 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have established a harmonious school community. Staff understand the school’s aims and support each other well to achieve them.
- The directors and the newly appointed head of school share a common vision, to ensure that pupils develop the skills and confidence they need to make a positive contribution to society.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school’s strengths and weaknesses. They have identified the right priorities for improvement.
- Teachers ensure that learning is well planned to meet pupils’ needs. Teaching staff are skilled in adapting learning so that pupils stay on track.
- Staff are skilled in managing pupils’ behaviour and ensuring that pupils remain calm.
- The curriculum is adapted well to pupils’ needs. Alongside their academic subjects, pupils take part in outdoor and ‘community-based’ learning.
- Pupils make good progress across all areas of the curriculum, including in their social skills and emotional well-being.
- Pupils value their education. Having previously been disengaged from education, they now enjoy excellent attendance.
- Behaviour is good. Through their time at this school, pupils learn to manage their behaviour effectively and cooperate well.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training, because leaders have put in place detailed plans to aid their transition.
- Improvement plans are at an early stage of development. It is not clear how leaders will implement them, or how the directors will hold leaders accountable.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in music and drama, and to read for pleasure and interest.
- Younger pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about the world of work.
- The arrangements to manage teachers’ performance are too informal.
- The new assessment system does not measure and record the progress that pupils make across all areas of their learning.

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.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - formalising the school’s improvement plans, ensuring that they contain measurable milestones for each of the identified priorities and a clear indication of how the directors will monitor their implementation
 - strengthening the arrangements to manage teachers’ performance, so that all teaching staff have clear targets for their improvement and are held accountable for the progress that pupils make.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that there are systems in place to measure the progress that pupils make in all areas of their learning, so that teachers can set targets for pupils across all areas of the curriculum and provide fuller reports to parents
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - increasing the opportunities for younger pupils to learn about the world of work
 - ensuring that pupils are able to develop their skills in music and drama.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have created a positive culture in the school. They have been successful in their aims to improve pupils' social skills so that they are better prepared to make a meaningful contribution to society.
- The independent school standards are met in full. Leaders have developed links with other independent schools locally. These informal partnerships are a useful source of advice and guidance, and have helped leaders to improve their knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards.
- The recently appointed head of school has already brought about improvements. Staff say that they understand their roles and responsibilities more clearly and know what is expected of them. This appointment has increased the school's capacity to make further improvements.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Through observations of learning, talking with pupils and checking their learning, leaders know what is working well and what needs to improve.
- Staff are well motivated. Despite the challenges they face in their work, they remain resilient and determined to improve the life chances of the pupils they teach. In so doing, they exemplify the school's values and are positive role models for the pupils.
- Curriculum leaders provide good support to staff. They work closely with them to ensure that learning is well planned and to collect information about pupils' progress. Regular meetings enable staff to share information and best practice, and this is helping staff to improve their teaching.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest legislation and is published on the school's website.
- The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and is effective in re-engaging pupils in their education. Pupils receive intensive one-to-one support and are gradually introduced to pair and group tasks. They particularly enjoy their outdoor learning, where they work together successfully on a range of outdoor tasks.
- At the heart of the curriculum is an emphasis on 'community learning'. In these sessions, learning takes place in the local community, for example in the library or in a local museum. These opportunities are effective in giving pupils the confidence to use local services and preparing them to play a full part in society.
- Leaders have ensured that the right staff and strategies are in place to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance. However, leaders do not currently track the improvements to pupils' behaviour and well-being. This means that they cannot report on all of these improvements to parents. They do not have sufficient oversight of which strategies are working well, and which are less successful.
- The arrangements to manage staff's performance are too informal. Not all staff have development targets, and the leadership has not finalised systems to hold staff to account.

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disability. Leaders keep a careful track of the funding for these pupils, to ensure that it is being well used to support their needs.
- Through the programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, pupils have opportunities to learn about fundamental British values. For example, they learn about the importance of democracy and of living by the rules. They understand why laws are important, and are taught to relate this learning to their own lives.
- The school caters well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning. For example, pupils are encouraged to reflect when things have not gone well and to understand the consequences of their actions. They understand the importance of respecting others. Over time, they develop positive and supportive relationships with each other.
- Leaders have applied to the Department for Education to increase the number of pupils that the school is registered to admit. Should this material change be approved, the school is likely to continue to meet the independent school standards.

Governance

- Since the appointment of the head of school, the directors have been able to step back from the running of the school and have developed a more strategic oversight of its work.
- With the changes in leadership has come greater accountability. Through the formal meeting structure, the directors check that the independent school standards are met, and that they are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work.
- The directors have worked with the head of school to set the school's strategic direction and agree priorities for improvement. However, they have not yet developed a formal plan that shows how they will hold leaders to account for improvement.
- The directors and school leaders share the same vision and values. They are equally committed to ensuring that they make a positive difference to the life chances of the pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a culture of vigilance. Staff take careful account of pupils' needs when planning learning, including the learning that takes place off site. They carry out a risk assessment for each pupil, showing how any specific risks will be managed and controlled.
- Staff have a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. They keep accurate written records of any concerns they have, and know the steps to take should they need to raise concerns about other members of staff.
- The curriculum provides well for pupils to learn how to stay safe in a range of situations, including online. Pupils feel safe in school, and trust their teachers to deal with any concerns they have.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers make detailed assessments of pupils' knowledge and skills in English and mathematics when the pupils first start at the school. They use this information to set individual targets for pupils' learning. This careful planning is helping pupils to make up the gaps in their learning caused by prolonged absence from school.
- Teachers plan learning to ensure that it takes account of pupils' different needs. They are skilled in finding creative ways to engage pupils in their learning and adapting the learning to ensure that pupils stay focused.
- Much of the teaching takes place on a one-to-one basis. As a result, teachers and support staff know the pupils well. They use a range of strategies to motivate and reward pupils. They know the situations that may trigger emotional upset and manage these situations effectively.
- Teachers build opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy across other areas of the curriculum. For example, in their science work, pupils are taught to use correct scientific vocabulary and practise interpreting and presenting data using graphs.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Pupils whose reading ability is well below the expectations for their age receive very intensive support. The teaching of phonics is blended effectively with story-telling, so that the pupils can practise the sounds they have been learning about.
- The school has a good supply of a range of books and reading material. However, there are too few opportunities in the curriculum where pupils can read for pleasure and their own interest.
- Teachers use a variety of methods to assess the progress that pupils make across different areas of the curriculum, such as their emotional well-being. However, at present, there is no system in place to collect and analyse this information across the school. This means that it is not always clear which strategies are having an effect, and which are not.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school is very successful in promoting pupils' social development. Well-planned activities gradually introduce them to pair and group tasks, and to access services in the community.
- A range of therapeutic activities contribute effectively to pupils' well-being. These include art therapy, counselling sessions and outdoor learning.
- The curriculum provides well for pupils' physical well-being. Pupils have access to a range of sports, including swimming lessons and fitness sessions off site. The school's large grounds give pupils space to calm down and let off steam.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They appreciate the efforts their teachers make to ensure that learning is interesting and relevant, and respond enthusiastically.

- Pupils feel safe in the school. They know what to do if they have any concerns, and trust their teachers and support workers to help them. They have no concerns about bullying in the school. The school's records indicate that where there have been incidents of racist language, for example, these have been dealt with appropriately.
- Parents who responded to the free-text survey speak highly of the care and support that their children receive. One wrote, 'My son has completely changed since coming to Woldale. The staff understand his needs and struggles.'
- The programme of PSHE education is planned to meet pupils' individual needs and interests. Pupils develop a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and are well prepared to play a full part in society.
- Older pupils have received impartial careers education and guidance. There are well-thought-out plans in place to prepare them for the next stage of their education, and they have taken part in work experience. The younger pupils are less well informed about the world of work and the opportunities that are open to them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning. In tutorial sessions, they consider which aspects of school are going well, and what they need to improve on. In this way, they are helped to make small but consistent improvements to their behaviour.
- Sessions are typically calm and well managed. Where there are disruptions, staff work together to ensure that these are quickly diffused and that other pupils are not affected.
- Almost all pupils have achieved full attendance since starting the school. For many, this represents significant progress. The majority of pupils were previously not engaging with education.
- Pupils can talk confidently and articulately about how the school is helping them to improve their behaviour. For example, one pupil explained how learning mindfulness techniques is helping him to stay calm in class.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Scrutiny of pupils' work and assessment information show that in a short space of time, pupils make good progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Careful assessment of pupils' skills and abilities in English and mathematics allows teachers to pinpoint the gaps in pupils' learning quickly and precisely and target the teaching at these areas. Pupils make rapid progress in these subjects.
- Pupils who have been at the school for some time have made good progress in science, history and geography. Their skills in music and drama are less well developed, as there are fewer opportunities to learn these subjects.
- The curriculum provides extremely well for pupils' emotional well-being and helps them to develop their confidence and social skills. They make the most progress in this area. As one parent said: 'Our son has come on very well in his education, but also in his social and emotional skills. Each child is catered for individually but also encouraged to work in

small groups. The work is individualised, so each child feels they are achieving their own goals, and this can only be a positive thing.'

- Pupils' skills in reading develop well as a result of effective teaching of phonics and engaging teaching strategies. Pupils make fast progress in their ability to decode words, sustain their interest in a text and tackle comprehension tasks.
- No pupils have yet been entered for formal examinations. However, there are plans in place for the older pupils to have these opportunities. Scrutiny of their work shows that they are making good progress towards these objectives.
- Pupils are increasingly well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Careful transition plans, as well as opportunities to visit colleges, ensure that the older pupils have a good understanding of the courses open to them. Just as importantly, they develop the confidence and social skills they need to make the next step.

School details

Unique reference number	142659
DfE registration number	855/6036
Inspection number	10039199

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 school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Gemma Thompson and Anthony Blanchard
Chair	Not applicable
Head of school	Sachin Dogra
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,500
Telephone number	0116 235 5600
Website	wolfdaleschool.co.uk/
Email address	office@wolfdaleschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Woldale School is a small independent school located in the village of Anstey.
- The school offers education to pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, and additional forms of learning disabilities and difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school was registered by the Department for Education as an independent school on 3 November 2016. It admitted four pupils in March 2017 and in August 2017, the number on roll increased to nine.
- This was the school's first standard inspection.

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- Since the appointment of a head of school, the previous headteacher has become one of the school's two proprietors.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed lessons in English, mathematics, PSHE and 'community learning'. She looked at the work in pupils' books and folders, talked with pupils about their learning and listened to a few pupils reading in class.
- Meetings were held with the head of school, the directors and senior leaders. The inspector spoke with leaders about their plans for improvement and looked at the minutes of the directors' meetings with leaders.
- The inspector visited the proposed additional site, to assess whether the school is likely to continue to meet the independent school standards should the material change be approved.
- A range of documentation was considered, including: records of behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and minutes of meetings. The inspector looked at curriculum plans and examples of pupils' assessments.
- The inspector took into account the 12 responses to the staff survey and the seven responses to the free-text service.

Inspection team

Deirdre Duignan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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