

Inspection of Smallbrook School

Units 1–4, Sleaf Industrial Estate, Sleaf, Nr.Wem, Shropshire SY4 3HE

Inspection dates: 21–23 September 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff care for, nurture, educate and ultimately transform the lives of pupils who attend. Staff quickly get to know everything about individual pupils, so that they can personalise their approaches. This starts before pupils start at the school. Staff know that in the past, pupils have had a disrupted and often negative experience of education and care. Everyone at the school is determined to make sure that this does not happen anymore. As a member of staff commented, 'These pupils don't deserve the best – they deserve more than the best.'

Pupils who previously had poor attendance are now happy to attend school full time. Staff keep pupils safe, and help them develop their interests, knowledge and skills. Staff take time to understand and work closely with parents and carers. Pupils' behaviour has improved as a result. Pupils are engaged in and succeeding in their learning and get good qualifications.

Pupils know that staff deal with any behaviour issues, such as bullying, quickly. 'It's nipped in the bud,' said one pupil. At the same time, pupils are learning to take responsibility for their behaviour. There is a real sense of family, a view echoed by staff and pupils.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils access a broad curriculum, which staff carefully map out. It includes opportunities to pursue vocational interests and qualifications, including GCSEs. Teachers have high expectations for pupils. They know that pupils are likely to have gaps in their learning, so they make sure that these gaps are addressed. At the same time, they know what they want pupils to achieve in the longer term.

The curriculum and accompanying schemes in most subjects are suitably sequenced. Staff revisit concepts, building on what has been taught before. Teachers make regular checks on how well pupils are getting on. They use this information to inform future planning. In a few subjects, work is ongoing to develop and refine schemes of work. The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has hampered this work. There are long-term plans and schemes in place, but teachers have not yet made enough connections from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

Leaders make sure that staff carefully plan and deliver sensitive curriculum content. Teachers work with health and care professionals to achieve this. Teachers ensure that pupils are learning how to keep themselves safe, now and in the future. Staff do not shy away from exploring difficult topics. They do this in a thoughtful way, using appropriate vocabulary.

Teachers are creative in their delivery of the curriculum. Subject leaders are knowledgeable. Their passion for their subject often rubs off onto the pupils. Staff tailor activities to get pupils hooked on their learning. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) ensures that staff have the right advice and training to support

and manage pupils' special educational needs. The school environment celebrates pupils' learning through displays of work. Pupils are rightly proud of their achievements.

A very small number of pupils are at an early stage of reading. They follow a suitable phonics scheme. It helps them learn to decode words and become more fluent readers. Teachers have planned the range of texts for older, reluctant readers that will pique their interest. While staff have information on pupils' reading abilities, not all staff have been trained in phonics.

Pupils are being well prepared for their next steps into education, employment and training. An independent careers adviser builds relationships with pupils in key stage 2. Older pupils receive appropriate advice and guidance. Some pupils go on to study at higher levels, such as A level, and others follow vocational routes.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Exclusions are rare. In lessons, pupils are motivated to learn and complete the work set for them. Pupils value the support they get. They understand the school's reward and consequence systems. On the few occasions that pupils may struggle to regulate their behaviour, staff support them well by using a calm and reflective approach. Staff rarely use physical interventions, and the number has declined over time. All these improvements are because of the nurturing relationships that exist between staff and pupils, and the holistic approach to understanding and regulating behaviour.

Expectations of respect and understanding of different faiths, cultures, tolerance, and protected characteristics permeate the school's approach to education. Pupils show respect to each other and to staff and approach sensitive topics in a mature way. Pupils are clear that any inappropriate behaviour, such as harassment or homophobic comments, will not be tolerated. Pupils explore all aspects of fundamental British values through the planned personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils also participate in wider opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, through visits and charity work. Pupils are learning about the needs of others, as well as communication and employability skills as they run their free pop-up shop in Telford.

Pupils access a wide range of curriculum opportunities beyond the academic curriculum. Pupils talked positively about the different pursuits in which they take part, such as rock climbing, canoeing and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

The proprietor and leaders understand their statutory responsibilities. Effective systems are in place to check and hold leaders to account for their actions. The health and safety policy is implemented effectively, and regular checks and consideration of risks are made.

Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards continue to be met. An up-to-date safeguarding policy is available on the school's website. The school's accessibility plan complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Leaders are reflective and want the very best for the pupils. Staff echo this. The pupils' past experiences are understood but are not used as an excuse. Staff say that leaders have created a supportive working environment. They feel respected and integral to the school. Parents also speak highly of the school and the positive difference it has made to their children's lives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is given the utmost priority in the school through suitable pre-employment checks, up-to-date training and a rigorous quality assurance process. The school's single central record is fully compliant. Staff are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities and the actions they should take if they have any concerns about pupils' or adults' behaviour.

Leaders reflect on any safeguarding incidents and adapt practice where appropriate. Everyone is aware that peer-on-peer abuse can happen in their school, so keep a close eye on pupils and raise concerns with the safeguarding leads. Pupils are given the opportunity to share concerns in single-sex groups.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have not yet ensured that the curriculum content in a small number of foundation subjects has been clearly mapped from key stages 2 and 3. As a result, teachers are not clear about how pupils' knowledge and understanding are developed in a sequenced way. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum content is suitably mapped to enable a smooth transition between key stages, particularly key stage 2 to key stage 3, enabling pupils to build on their prior knowledge. Leaders should assure themselves that the curriculum identifies the pre-requisite skills and knowledge that pupils need before moving on to new content. It is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken that they are in the process of bringing this about.
- Newly appointed staff and some upper school staff have not been trained in phonics. As a result, they are not able to support weaker readers in the secondary phase as well as they might. Leaders should ensure that all staff gain an understanding of how pupils learn to read, so that older, weaker readers can be effectively supported in the secondary phase.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	134000
DfE registration number	893/6026
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10204069
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Education and Care
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Craig Seretny
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,020 to £74,740
Telephone number	01939 233 042
Website	www.smallbrookschoo.org.uk
Email address	education.smallbrook@brynmelyncare.com
Dates of previous inspection	20–22 June 2017

Information about this school

- Smallbrook School is an independent day special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils are placed at the school by many local authorities, most of whom are not in the West Midlands region. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates two small satellite assessment provisions: one in Shropshire and one in Snowdonia. Local authorities commission 12-week education, health and care assessment places at these provisions.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.
- The school's proprietor has recently changed. It is not listed on the DfE's 'Get information about Schools' site, but the DfE has been informed.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The lead inspector met with two representatives of the proprietor group – the regional director and operations director. Inspectors also met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, subject leaders, key stage leaders and the school's SENCo.
- Inspectors did deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, English, science, mathematics and PSHE. They visited lessons in these subjects, looked at pupils' work, talked to pupils, and talked to teachers and subject leaders. They listened to a very small number of pupils read. They also looked at vocational studies, humanities and food technology.
- The school caters for pupils up to the age of 19 years. At the time of the inspection, there were a very small number of key stage 5 pupils, so findings about the provision for these pupils is incorporated into the main body of the report.
- Inspectors considered the way in which the school keeps pupils safe. The school's single central register was scrutinised, along with pupils' safeguarding records, attendance and incident reports, and records of physical interventions. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and one of his deputies to discuss the actions the school takes to safeguard pupils. Inspectors spoke to staff about their training and understanding of safeguarding procedures, and views on their workload and well-being.

- The lead inspector conducted a tour of the premises, accompanied by the headteacher, to check compliance with the independent school standards. Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents on the telephone to gather their views of the school's work. The lead inspector spoke to a virtual school headteacher on the telephone from one of the placing authorities.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils at breaktime and lunchtime.
- The lead inspector visited one of the school's satellite assessment centres, accompanied by the headteacher.
- The lead inspector considered the small number of free-text responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. Due to unforeseen and significant technical difficulties, there were no responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey or survey for staff.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Amanda Clugston

Ofsted Inspector

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 2021