

Wenlock School

Fossil View, Wrens Hill Road, Dudley DY1 3SS

Inspection dates

6–8 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Informed, ambitious and articulate leadership means that all staff understand the vision and ethos of the school. There is a strong sense of team spirit. Acorn Care and Education Group provides effective support and is ambitious for all pupils. The independent school standards are met in full.
- This newly opened school has got off to a great start. In a short period of time, leaders have created a safe, nurturing and specialised environment where pupils get the support, help and care they need.
- The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a key strength of the school. Staff know their pupils well. Through personalised plans, pupils make strong social and emotional progress from their starting points.
- Good teaching helps to reignite pupils' interest in education. Pupils say that learning is fun. Current pupils are making good progress towards realistic targets.
- Pupils who previously missed a lot of school now attend regularly. In a short space of time, the school has had a remarkable impact on pupils' attitudes and their behaviour.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective. Staff are 'tuned in' to their pupils. They take swift action to report any concerns. Pupils say they feel safe at school.
- The curriculum is bespoke to pupils' needs. Even so, teaching could do more to promote literacy skills in different subjects and make the most of known assessment information.

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?

- Make sure that school leaders build securely on the school's positive start, so that the personalised and nurturing approach to the curriculum and pupils' welfare is maintained as the school grows.
- Further improve teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - make the best possible use of available information about pupils' academic achievement when planning next steps in learning
 - make the most of opportunities in different subjects to develop pupils' literacy skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school is led by a driven, inspirational headteacher who, in a short space of time, has established a clear vision for the school, which she articulates clearly. The headteacher is supported by skilled senior leaders and a dedicated staff team. As a result, this vision is shared and there are high expectations. All staff are ambitious for all pupils. They place their pupils at the heart of everything they do. Leaders have ensured that provision at the school meets the requirements of the independent school standards.
- There is a strong, supportive culture. All staff reflect on their practice. They are not afraid to say when things have not gone as planned. They actively seek support from colleagues and leaders and consider alternative ways of working to meet the needs of their pupils. As a result, staff say leaders have created a climate where teachers are empowered and trusted to innovate in ways that are right for their pupils. Staff are proud to work at the school. They say the school is well led and managed.
- The curriculum is fit for purpose. It is carefully planned to re-engage learners through a balance of core and vocational subjects, including art, music, cookery and construction. All subjects are accredited through BTEC and GCSE routes. Staff provide interesting opportunities for learning out of doors, such as gardening and woodcraft activities. The environment is carefully adapted and well resourced to underpin positive learning experiences. As a result, pupils regain an interest in learning and engage well in their own personalised curriculum.
- Trips to a nearby nature reserve further enrich the curriculum, as do lunchtime clubs where pupils can play games and do sports together. Pupils learn about, and learn to appreciate, different cultures through art and cookery. In history, they learn about the local area and speak proudly about their heritage. They engage well in carefully planned social activities. Consequently, pupils develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the next stages of their learning.
- The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is specifically designed to meet the needs of pupils across all year groups. It helps pupils to build relationships and develop their social skills. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They also learn about respecting differences. As a result, pupils develop fundamental life skills.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress towards their personal targets. If pupils are at risk of falling behind, teachers intervene quickly with appropriate additional support. As a result, pupils are able to catch up and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning through effective monitoring systems. Where teaching is not as strong as it could be, leaders are quick to identify areas for improvement and ensure consistency. Teachers benefit from precise feedback and support. Consequently, across most of the curriculum, pupils make good progress.

- The school is new, with firm plans to grow and become more established. Leaders have identified appropriate actions to make sure that the school remains a calm, nurturing environment as the number of pupils increase.

Governance

- The arrangements for governance are effective. The headteacher is fully supported by Acorn Care and Education and a wider group of professionals, including a peer mentor.
- Those responsible for governance have a clear, accurate measure of teaching and learning. Every aspect of the school's work is scrutinised. Governors have a good oversight and know the current strengths of the school and areas of development. As a result, they are able to provide appropriate support and challenge that drive improvement. Governors are ambitious for all pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safety of pupils is a key strength of the school.
- The school has a suitable safeguarding policy that takes into account current guidance from the Secretary of State. The policy is published on the school's website.
- There are four designated safeguarding leads who are appropriately trained to fulfil the responsibilities of their role. Through established links with police and the Local Safeguarding Children Board they are well informed on risks within their community, including gangs and child sexual exploitation.
- All staff are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. Staff have also completed training in the 'Prevent' duty. They are aware of their reporting responsibilities with regard to female genital mutilation. There is a culture of vigilance. Staff leave nothing to chance when it comes to the safety of their pupils.
- Reporting systems are clear. Concerns are reported quickly and accurately. Record-keeping is detailed and maintained securely.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online. They know about risks within the local community, including gangs and crime. Pupils told the inspector that they would tell a teacher immediately if they felt unsafe outside of school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There is a personalised approach to teaching. Careful, gradual routes into learning are well planned and take into consideration previous history to re-engage pupils. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and underpin enriching learning experiences. Pupils learn in safe spaces. They are free to express opinions and do so with consideration and respect for others. Pupils are given curriculum choices. They can choose how and where they want to learn, making the best use of the facilities available to them. This is a new experience for them and they have adapted positively to this way of learning.
- Teachers use questioning well. They gently encourage and support pupils. Most teachers quickly reshape tasks and activities, when needs be, to ensure that pupils understand.

Pupils know what is expected of them and do their best to meet their personal targets. They are confident to ask for help when they need it and say that teachers do things to help them learn. As a result, pupils make good progress from their individual starting points across the curriculum.

- When pupils join the school, information about their previous achievement is often lacking or minimal. Induction to the school is therefore well planned and thorough. Pupils complete standardised tests to give an accurate academic starting point. The vast majority of teachers use information available to them to plan lessons based on what pupils already know and what they can already do. On occasions, when teachers do not use this information well, work does not provide enough challenge for pupils.
- The majority of pupils arrive as reluctant readers and writers. The school has carefully introduced a standardised scheme and learners have started to engage well in appropriately chosen texts. Their progress is tracked through reading diaries, and individual support is provided. As a result, pupils are becoming regular readers and are enjoying a wide range of texts.
- English and mathematics are taught well. In English, pupils express themselves with confidence. They explore new vocabulary and read aloud with a degree of fluency. Their work in books shows that, in a short space of time, they have improved their writing skills. Pupils are learning to write extended pieces of work with maturity. In mathematics, pupils solve problems and perform complex calculations. They know how to check their work and show resilience when attempting new learning. Their work increases in difficulty gradually and teachers make sure that they are secure in their skills before new learning is introduced.
- Literacy is not yet planned for as well as it could be in other subjects. There are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length or extend their writing in lessons other than English.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. In a short space of time, leaders have created a culture that promotes all aspects of pupils' welfare.
- All of the pupils arrive at the school having experienced significant disruption to their education. Prior to joining the school, many had been permanently excluded from previous schools or taught in isolation. The majority of pupils had become disillusioned with education and disengaged from school. Consequently, pupils often arrive at the school lacking in confidence and social skills and experiencing high anxieties. All staff take time to get to know their pupils well. They have an excellent understanding of pupils' emotional starting points.
- Pupils are gradually reintegrated into learning through a carefully planned induction programme. The induction is fully supported by the wider clinical team. All aspects of the school's work are underpinned by individualised therapeutic input. Therefore, plans are appropriate and take into account pupils' holistic needs. This thorough induction enables pupils to meet key staff and become familiar with the learning environment. Parents and

carers are fully involved and informed throughout the transition period. As a result, pupils settle extremely well into a nurturing, safe environment.

- Parents say the school is 'life-changing'. They say the support provided by the school has not only helped their child, but also improved family life as their child is much happier.
- Pupils are provided with high-quality, impartial careers advice. Secondary pupils have chosen career aspirations and say that school helps to prepare them for the world of work. There are opportunities for work experience and visits to local colleges. As a result, pupils are equipped with the skills they need to prepare them for their next phases.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Since starting at the school, pupils' behaviour and attendance at school have improved considerably. This is due to the exceptionally effective work of the staff team.
- Prior to joining the school, most pupils have not been in formal education for a considerable period of time. For all pupils, attendance in the past has been poor.
- The school is warm and welcoming. Staff are pleased to see pupils every morning and they make sure the day starts well. Pupils want to come to school, and they told the inspector that learning was fun because the 'school was different' and that 'teachers understand' them. As a result, current pupils arrive on time and rarely miss a day at school. Parents say that pupils 'cannot wait to get to school in a morning'. This is a big improvement on their previous settings and is a remarkable achievement given their previous records of attendance and their social and emotional starting points.
- A high proportion of pupils arrive with histories of negative behaviours. Staff take time to get to know and understand their pupils. They work collectively to create personalised behavioural plans to identify trigger behaviours, trends and patterns. This information is underpinned by highly positive relationships and used effectively to support pupils. Appropriate changes are made to the learning environment and the core day where necessary. As a result, there is a marked improvement in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The school's information shows a clear reduction in behavioural incidents.
- There is a comprehensive behaviour policy. This is applied consistently by all staff and understood by all pupils. Staff manage behaviours appropriately and swiftly to make sure that the flow of learning is not disrupted. Pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Their conduct and attitudes during lessons and unstructured times of the day are highly positive. As a result, the school is a calm, orderly environment where pupils thrive.
- There are no reported cases of bullying. Pupils know about different types of bullying, including online and verbal bullying. They told the inspector that staff are there to support them and they are confident staff would solve any problems.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Prior to joining the school, most of the pupils have not attended formal education for a considerable amount of time. The vast majority have gaps in their knowledge and their academic achievements are significantly lower than most other pupils of a similar age.

- Everyone at the school understands that pupils need to feel safe, supported and happy before they can re-engage with learning. To this end, staff take account of pupils' interests and hobbies and build on these through rich, purposeful tasks. Quickly, pupils are able to experience a sense of success and gradually build up to attending structured lessons. During this inspection, pupils displayed positive attitudes to their learning and made good progress in lessons. There are too few pupils in the school to comment on the progress of different groups of pupils.
- Targets for pupils are realistic. All pupils have a literacy and numeracy aim, as well as a behaviour and health and well-being target. Work in pupils' books shows that they are developing resilience. They are learning from their mistakes and use teachers' feedback well to improve. As a result, the majority of pupils make good progress from their academic and social and emotional starting points.
- On occasions, there are missed opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy skills in other areas of the curriculum.

Sixth form provision

Insufficient evidence – amnesty granted

- The school is registered to educate pupils up to the age of 18. The school has not yet admitted any pupils over the age of 16. For this reason, there is no operational post-16 provision at this point.
- The school has taken appropriate action and there are clear plans in place to meet the needs of post-16 students, should any arrive.

School details

Unique reference number	145563
DfE registration number	332/6009
Inspection number	10056212

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Group
Chair	Julie Taylor
Headteacher	Gemma Mann
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,500 to £49,500
Telephone number	01384 884883
Website	www.wenlockschool.co.uk
Email address	info@wenlockschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Wenlock School is registered as an independent day school for up to 90 pupils aged from seven to 18 years old. The school is part of the Acorn Care and Education Group. The school is situated in Dudley in former vocational college premises, accessible through security gates. It neighbours a nature reserve.

- The school provides individual education programmes for pupils who have complex social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum conditions. Currently pupils attend the school from Dudley, Sandwell and Birmingham local authorities. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Since the pre-registration inspection in May 2018, the premises have undergone significant refurbishment. Learning areas are purpose built and include a science lab, music studio, sports hall and a vocational skills area.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- Since applying for registration, there has been a change to the proprietor listed on the Department for Education's 'Get information about schools' website. The inspector saw evidence that a change of proprietor request had been submitted in August 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Meetings were held with a number of key staff, including the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, governors and a representative of the proprietor.
- The inspector toured the premises, accompanied by members of the senior management team and those responsible for health and safety.
- The inspector met with pupils from all year groups. The views of a small number of parents who spoke to the inspector were also considered. Five responses to the parent questionnaire were reviewed. The inspector also took account of the 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector, accompanied by the headteacher and a governor, observed teaching in all year groups. Lessons were observed in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE), information and communication technology (ICT) and food technology.
- The inspector also observed the behaviour of pupils upon arrival at school and during unstructured times of the school day, including at lunchtimes and breaktimes.
- The inspector reviewed the work in pupils' books across a range of subjects and year groups and scrutinised the school's baseline assessment information.
- A number of key policies were examined, including safeguarding, behaviour, admissions, attendance, anti-bullying and the curriculum. The school's records of employment checks on staff's suitability to work with pupils were evaluated.

Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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