

Inspection of The Wenlock School

Fossil View, Wrens Hill Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SS

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 January 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at this school. They enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve as well as they can. Highly skilled staff provide the right support for pupils who have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils thrive at this school because their individual needs are exceptionally well met.

Pupils feel very safe. They know that staff will help them with any worries or problems. Relationships between pupils and staff are extremely positive. Pupils say if bullying occurs, staff deal with it 'quickly and professionally'.

Most pupils behave very well. Staff provide effective support for pupils who struggle with their behaviour so they can get back to learning as soon as possible.

Pupils are prepared very well for the next stage of their education and future lives. For example, they complete work experience, take part in activities in the local community and learn how to manage their own money. Pupils also enjoy the wide range of experiences that are well matched to their interests. These include ice skating, forest school and educational visits, including one to Cadbury's World.

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

Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum well matched to the pupils' needs. Pupils who join the school have often experienced disruption to their education. They may have fallen behind academically. Leaders prioritise reading, writing and mathematics. They also ensure that pupils spend plenty of time learning a broad range of subjects. Teachers check how well pupils are learning the planned curriculum through a range of assessments. They use this information very effectively to review the targets on pupils' individual education plans and their education, health and care plans.

The curriculum is carefully sequenced so that pupils build and deepen their knowledge. Teachers ensure that pupils revisit learning and complete tasks to apply what they know. Leaders have designed the curriculum so that pupils can transfer knowledge between topics to help make sense of new learning. For example, in mathematics, a study of Alan Turing was reinforced by work undertaken in history.

In other subjects, such as art and design and construction, teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan learning so that pupils can apply knowledge to practical projects. Pupils make strong progress in all subjects because the curriculum is tailored to their individual needs. Pupils have frequent opportunities to apply their English and mathematical skills. This includes enterprise sessions where pupils make items in the school's workshop to sell at community events. Recently, pupils have been measuring, marking out and making planters to a high standard. A planned marketing campaign by pupils is aimed at encouraging people to buy them.

Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read benefit from daily phonics sessions. Staff are experts in teaching reading and help pupils become more fluent readers who understand what they have read. An attractive and well-stocked library helps pupils develop a love of reading. This is used effectively, and pupils are able to talk about their favourite books and authors.

Pupils enjoy physical education. The curriculum is well sequenced so that pupils can develop and practise specific sports and motor skills. The wide range of activities on offer includes swimming, gymnastics and Thai boxing.

Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 experience a curriculum that is bespoke to their individual needs. Pupils can choose to study a mixture of examinations, including GCSEs and A levels, as well as vocational studies linked to what they aim to study at college. Pupils are very well supported to make appropriate choices about the courses they select. This is based on their prior learning, interests and desired career path. Pupils receive excellent independent careers guidance. They visit local colleges and receive support to apply for courses and attend interviews.

Leaders have carefully organised the content of the personal, social and health education curriculum so that pupils develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need for the future. Pupils are respectful of differences. Pupils have an in-depth understanding of the issues that surround gender. Pupils know how to keep mentally and physically well, prepare healthy foods and are taught how to form positive relationships. The relationships, sex and health education curriculum adheres to current Department for Education guidance. It has been fully implemented. Teachers ensure work is age-appropriate.

Pupils have highly positive attitudes towards school and learning. They come to school regularly, which has not always been the case for some pupils prior to joining this school. They respond well to teachers' high expectations. Pupils work hard to produce the best work they are capable of and are proud of the work in their books.

The school is exceptionally well led and managed. Members of the proprietor body are knowledgeable and experienced. The independent standards are met in full. Leaders are determined to ensure that pupils who come to this school know that they can 'dream big', grow in confidence and achieve as well as they can. The school building is maintained well. The learning environment supports pupils' sensory and physical needs. Leaders comply with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Many parents and carers are full of praise for the school. They are pleased with the social, emotional and academic progress their children have made since joining the school. Where parents have concerns, leaders work to address these. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel valued. Leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being.

The school has recently applied to increase the number of pupils it can take from 90 to 100 pupils. There are separate individual toilets and suitable washing facilities for pupils. The number of toilets is likely to meet the needs of additional pupils. Existing

shower and changing facilities are provided and are likely to be able to accommodate the school's proposed number on roll.

There is a well-equipped and spacious medical room, with easy access to a toilet and washing facilities. The medical room contains a bed and first-aid kits and appropriate storage for medicines.

The proprietor has ensured provision for current pupils is well decorated, furnished and maintained. All the classrooms benefit from natural light through the windows. There is adequate classroom space, within the existing provision, to cater for additional pupils.

In addition, there are vocational workshop areas. The proprietor has ensured that heating, lighting and acoustics are suitable for all the activities that take place in these rooms and in all the spaces throughout the school.

The outdoor areas, including a large multi-sports, all-weather pitch, are well maintained. This area accommodates physical education and allows pupils to play together during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Additional outdoor space is provided in a smaller quadrangle area in the centre of the school. It is evident that pupils' welfare, health and safety will be maintained if the material change is implemented.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff receive training in keeping pupils safe. Staff know how to identify and report concerns about a pupil's welfare and do so promptly. Records show that leaders take effective action to ensure that pupils get the help and support they need. The safeguarding policy includes the most recent statutory guidance and is available to parents on the school website. The proprietor body makes all the necessary pre-employment checks to ensure all staff are suitable to work with pupils.

Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe. For example, the curriculum teaches about anti-bullying, gender equalities and how to stay safe when around water.

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	145563
DfE registration number	332/6009
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10197493
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	78
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
Chair	Lynette Edwards
Headteacher	Gemma Mann
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,020 to £80,140
Telephone number	01384 884883
Website	www.wenlockschoo.co.uk
Email address	info@wenlockschoo.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 to 8 November 2018

Information about this school

- Wenlock School is 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.
- Pupils may have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and/or a primary need of social, emotional and mental health. Currently, pupils attend the school from Dudley, Sandwell, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Walsall and South Gloucestershire.
- Since the last inspection, the premises have continued to be developed and refurbished. New learning areas include a hair salon and mechanics garage.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- At the time of the inspection, four teachers and two support staff were absent after testing positive for COVID-19.
- Inspectors met with the chair and one other member of the proprietor body. This body provides ongoing support and challenge to each of the schools in the group. Inspectors met with the principal, the head of school and the business manager to evaluate all aspects of the school's work.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, art and design and physical education. They spoke to subjects leaders, teachers and pupils. They visited lessons and looked at the curriculum and at examples of pupils' work. They also considered English and science as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of information provided by the school. This included leaders' self-evaluations, the school improvement plan and their behaviour, safeguarding and attendance records. They spoke to pupils, staff and the designated safeguarding leads about procedures to keep pupils safe.

- Inspectors checked the school's website. They also considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and the views of staff in Ofsted's online survey.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**

Inspection team

Heather Phillips, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Amanda Clugston

Ofsted Inspector

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