

Howard House

Netherton Colliery, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 6BB

Inspection dates

1–3 November 2016

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's nurturing yet ambitious vision has been embraced fully by staff, pupils, the proprietor and governors. The shared culture of high expectations and good-quality teaching contributes to pupils' good progress in their learning and in their good social and emotional development.
- The proprietor, headteacher and governors have ensured that all independent school standards are met and that pupils are safe.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers' regular assessments of pupils' prior skills are used to set activities that are usually matched well to pupils' current abilities. Consequently, pupils make generally good progress in their learning from often low starting points, particularly in English, health and social care, and sports studies.
- The assessment of pupils' learning in a few subjects such as art and humanities is not as regular. This means that work is not consistently matched to what pupils can already do or already know.
- Occasionally teachers do not stretch the most able sufficiently, and when this happens their progress is steady rather than good. Teachers do not use the school's marking and feedback policy consistently across all subjects.
- The development of high-quality relationships between pupils and staff lie at the heart of the school's effectiveness, tackling previous barriers to learning well. Pupils' behaviour and attendance rates improve markedly because of this and the personalised support and care provided. An atmosphere of mutual respect and trust pervades the school.
- Pupils say that they feel valued. They speak highly of the difference the school is making to their achievements, behaviour and attitudes. Pupils' workbooks showcase the good-quality work they now produce.
- The broad curriculum and vast range of out-of-class activities extends pupils' aspirations and helps them to achieve well. Such work enables pupils to contribute to the local and wider community and to understand the values that lie at the heart of modern Britain.
- Governors are actively involved in the life of the school. They have a good understanding of the strengths and of the areas that need to be better. Governors provide a good balance of challenge and support to the headteacher. Together, they ensure that all pupils move successfully into the post-16 world of education, training or work.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent Schools 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 teaching so that pupils can make outstanding progress in their learning by:
 - ensuring that the most able students are given tasks that challenge them sufficiently in lessons so that they can achieve their full potential
 - ensuring that the marking and feedback policy is embedded across all subjects so that pupils know what they need to do to achieve the next steps in their learning
 - embedding the effective assessment procedures already in place in subjects such as English, across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following some turbulence in staffing since the previous inspection, the headteacher 'hit the deck running' upon his appointment. He quickly secured the confidence and trust of pupils and staff to improve the impact of the school's work. Staff speak enthusiastically about the rapid improvement in the quality of teaching, in pupils' behaviour, their attitudes and the progress pupils make in lessons since his arrival. Staff share the headteacher's vision to provide a calm, happy and safe atmosphere where pupils' past difficulties are put behind them so that they can achieve well and are prepared successfully for life after school.
- Governors and staff welcome the strong team ethos the headteacher has created, where individuals work together to drive improvement. This is reflected in the good-quality teaching across the school, pupils' good progress in lessons and the increasingly broad range of subjects and qualifications that pupils study, including at least five GCSE subjects.
- The headteacher knows the school well and his evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate. He has a very clear view of the quality of teaching and its impact through regular reviews of teaching and learning, pupils' workbooks, teachers' planning and assessment information. This information is used successfully to identify strengths and areas for development for teachers and to provide support and training where needed. Robust action is taken if things do not improve.
- Staff report how the increased rigour in the monitoring of teaching and learning and in the arrangements to manage their performance have raised the bar and improved their effectiveness as professionals. They welcome the changes and the added accountability these changes have brought, and particularly the positive impact on pupils' achievements.
- Improvements to the curriculum and teaching have contributed to the good progress pupils make in their learning. The focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills alongside tackling significant gaps in their learning is ensuring that pupils are catching up to where they should be for their ages and abilities.
- The school takes a personalised approach to meeting each pupil's individual needs, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, the curriculum and teaching are usually tailored well to pupil's current abilities and needs. Leaders know that there is still more to do to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently across the wider curriculum. This is a priority in the school improvement plan.
- High-quality work experiences alongside careers courses and the independent guidance from the local Connexions service mean that pupils are well informed about future career options. All are supported to move on successfully to education, training or apprenticeships when they leave Howard House.
- Pupils are successfully prepared to be active citizens in modern Britain. Recent work in the curriculum, assemblies and visits out of school have provided many opportunities to explore issues such as law and order, culture and beliefs, local and global citizenship. Pupils report how they learn to respect others' views and feelings. They say this helps

them all to get along together. Pupils also say that on the rare occasions derogatory language is used, staff tackle it robustly as there is zero tolerance of such behaviour.

Governance

- Governance is strong. Governors, including the proprietor, have a good understanding of the work of the school and its impact. Governors have supported the headteacher well in implementing the shared vision for improvement and in recruiting or retaining a strong team.
- Governors hold the headteacher to account effectively through performance management arrangements, regular meetings and reports. They have secured a school improvement professional (SIP) to evaluate and report on the school's work independently. These reports identify the wide range of information governors receive about pupils' progress, achievements, behaviour, the quality of learning, safety of pupils and the outcomes of the challenge brought to bear. SIP reports are clear and accurately identify the areas that are strong and those needing further improvement.
- Governors have made sure that all independent school standards are met. All required information for parents is up to date and available on the website or on request. This includes a safeguarding policy that takes into account current government requirements. Governors have ensured that arrangements to manage the performance of staff are rigorous.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Recruitment procedures are rigorous. Staff are suitably trained in how to identify and respond to concerns, including concerns about sexual exploitation, online grooming or extremism. They understand clearly the risks that each pupil faces due to their complex behaviours or personal circumstances and have detailed plans for each pupil to minimise risks. Leaders are working with staff to ensure that risk assessments for out-of-school visits link more closely to these plans.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Trusting and respectful relationships between staff and pupils are a consistent strength. Teachers are skilled in developing a calm and purposeful atmosphere. This sets the bar of expectations when pupils enter the class and they soon settle down to their work. Staff know pupils well and they are highly tuned to pupils' changing moods or attitudes. Staff pre-empt potential trigger points by quietly and calmly distracting and defusing situations and supporting pupils so that they can quickly refocus on their learning.
- Good-quality teaching and carefully planned activities mean that pupils make good progress in their learning, especially in their basic skills of English and mathematics. They also achieve well in the other qualifications they are taking, such as sports studies and health and social care.
- Teachers generally use the very regular assessments they have about pupils' achievements to plan work that moves them on quickly from their starting points. However, in some subjects such as art and the humanities, pupils' prior skills and knowledge are not checked as carefully. This means that for the most able, progress slows because tasks are not sufficiently challenging.
- Teachers deploy the well-trained teaching assistants effectively to challenge and support pupils in their learning. Staff work with pupils to develop resilience and perseverance in

tackling their tasks and to work independently. This represents improvement from the time of the previous inspection. High staff-to-pupil ratios mean that there is always someone available to check pupils' understanding of their tasks, tackle misconceptions and encourage pupils to focus on their learning activities and targets for improvement. Consequently, little time is wasted in lessons.

- The recent marking and feedback policy is being used well in some subjects, but not all. Pupils report that they know their targets, but are not as clear in subjects like art about what they are doing well and what they need to do to achieve the next steps.
- Daily reading sessions have increased pupils' skills successfully. All read fluently, and with expression, including the least and most-able. Leaders are currently increasing the range of books available so that they can continue to capitalise on pupils' improved interest and confidence in reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders' strong focus on building trusting relationships with pupils and an atmosphere of mutual respect lies at the heart of their approach. This is developing pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the personal qualities that they need to be successful members of the school community and beyond. Pupils gain confidence and self-belief as a result.
- Pupils speak convincingly about the difference the school has made to their views of education, their confidence and well-being. They value highly the good relationships they have with adults. They particularly value their key worker, who is someone they can talk to or advise them when they are a bit low or facing a difficulty, or just someone they can have a chat with. Throughout the inspection, pupils were seen interacting in a friendly and relaxed way with all adults in the school. Pupils all report that their views are heard and responded to and that you can 'speak your mind to the staff and they will try to help'.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and are taught well about how to be safe in the school and wider world. They have a good understanding of risks to their safety online, from their own complex behaviours, from issues facing teenagers locally and how to keep safe when facing such risks. They report that the life-skills work they all undertake helps them to prepare them for the time they will move on to life after Howard House.
- Leaders have developed a comprehensive programme to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. Assembly themes and visits out of school expand opportunities further. Photographs, pupils' portfolios and displays across the school showcase the range of opportunities they are afforded.
- Staff are steadfast in the way that they tackle stereotypes and ensure that pupils understand the principles of right and wrong, tolerance and respect that lie at the heart of British values. Pupils report that any incidents of discriminatory or derogatory language are stamped out immediately. Records show that such incidents are rare and are tackled robustly.
- Bullying records confirm pupils' views that bullying is just not an issue in the school. They say that this is because of the respectful relationships developed and the way that any untoward actions are quickly identified and tackled.

- The headteacher has instilled in pupils high aspirations for their futures and has increased significantly the range of purposeful work experiences pupils can undertake. These are matched to pupils' views of what they would like to do in the future. The accredited careers course, tutor time and independent advice and guidance from the Connexions service provide a wealth of guidance and advice. Pupils are prepared well for transitions to the world of work, training or apprenticeships.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful. They speak proudly of how their behaviour has improved since joining the school. 'Respect' and 'trust' are common words used by staff and pupils alike when describing school.
- Pupils respond positively to the behaviour management strategy that is based on rewards and is consistently applied by staff. Incidents of serious misbehaviour are rare, responded to robustly and recorded in detail in the school's incident log by staff. Incidents are reviewed carefully by governors and the headteacher to recognise and learn from trigger points. The numbers of pupils with complex behaviours needing to be restrained have reduced well over time and are now very rare.
- Staff report that behaviour and attitudes have improved significantly since the arrival of the headteacher and as a result of the style of leadership and high expectations he has brought. One commented, 'Behaviour has improved dramatically...this is because there are systems in place which build the confidence of staff and self-esteem of pupils.'
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils are engaged and concentrate for long periods of time. Those who are having a difficult time are calmly supported to get back on with their work without disruption to others or much delay to themselves. Their workbooks show that they take pride in their work and they are productive in lessons.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning can be seen in the rapid improvement in their attendance since coming to Howard House. Attendance rates remain below average at around 93%. However, for many this represents a massive improvement on their previous attendance rates in other schools. A significant proportion of pupils were not attending school at all before they came to Howard House.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Observations of learning, work in pupils' books and portfolios and teachers' assessments of pupils' work show that pupils are making generally good progress in their learning from their low starting points into school. This is particularly the case in English, mathematics, health and social care and sports studies.
- Information from assessments of pupils' abilities when they arrive are used effectively to set targets and plan individual learning programmes for each pupil. Targets set are challenging and take account of the significant gaps in pupils' learning due to the unsuccessful previous encounters with education.
- All pupils have social, emotional or mental health difficulties and are looked after by the local authority. The school does not receive identified additional government funding for looked after pupils as it is not treated as a separate item in local authority funding agreements. However, the personalised approach, good-quality teaching and high staff-to-pupil ratios mean that pupils' needs are quickly identified and usually met well.

Consequently, pupils make generally good progress from their starting points. Differences between their achievements and other pupils nationally are diminishing rapidly.

- Extra activities and one-to-one work are provided when any pupil is at risk of not achieving their targets or shows high levels of ability in a particular subject, such as extra English or sports studies. However, occasionally in lessons teachers do not build quickly on what the most able pupils already know. When this happens, their progress slows.

School details

Unique reference number	132855
DfE registration number	929/6046
Inspection number	10012944

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	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Angela O'Neill
Chair	Angela O'Neill
Headteacher	Christopher Roberts
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,000
Telephone number	01670 820320
Website	www.howardhousecare.com
Email address	school@howardhousecare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–11 July 2013

Information about this school

- Howard House is a small independent school which is registered for up to 10 boys and girls from the age of 10 years to 18 years. There are currently six pupils on roll. There are no pupils above Year 11. Consequently, there is no sixth-form provision. The school does not operate any alternative education provision.
- This independent special school provides education for pupils who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. A small number of pupils have either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- All pupils are of White British heritage and all are in the care of the local authority. Pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education prior to joining Howard House.
- The school opened in 2006. At the time of the last inspection in July 2013 the school met all of the independent school standards and was judged to be good in all aspects.
- The school aims to 'create a caring, challenging environment in which all pupils are encouraged to fulfil their potential and are given opportunities to flourish in a wide variety of curricular and extra-curricular interests'.
- The school does not receive additional government funding called Year 7 catch-up or pupil premium plus for pupils who are looked after by the local authority. It receives a set rate per pupil per week that does not identify these aspects specifically.
- A new headteacher was appointed in the summer of 2016.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice. It took place over two and a half days. The inspector observed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by visiting lessons, reviewing pupils' work and checking the information that teachers have about the progress pupils are making in subjects across the curriculum.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, staff and governors including the proprietor and the head of operations. On day three an interview was held with the external school improvement professional.
- Throughout the inspection the inspector listened to the views of pupils about their work and about the school in general.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and at break, at lunchtimes and as they moved around the school. Records of incidents of misbehaviour were also checked.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils and information required as part of the independent school standards.
- One parent completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and their written comments were taken into account. The views of five staff who completed the inspection questionnaire for staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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