

Smallbrook School

Sleep, Harmer Hill, Shropshire SY4 3HE

Inspection dates

20–22 June 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school has been through a period of instability, which led to a dip in pupils' behaviour and in the quality of teaching. However, the school has turned a corner. Effective teamwork between new and existing staff has secured changes, which have impacted positively on all aspects of the school's provision.
- Pupils enjoy learning and engage well in lessons. Many attest to the improvements they have seen over recent months. Pupils feel safe, secure and benefit from a stable environment, often after experiencing disrupted personal circumstances.
- Staff value the improvements that have been made and this has led to better morale.
- Teaching is good and engages pupils well in lessons. The strengths of teaching are the flexible learning programmes, designed for each pupil, and the warm relationships, to encourage and motivate pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and improving. Clearer boundaries, higher expectations and consistent staffing have contributed strongly to the rapid improvement, so that the school is calm and orderly.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through subjects and the opportunities provided to enrich their experiences.
- The vocational opportunities offered to pupils are excellent, providing them with meaningful skills for their next stage of life.
- Careful timetabling has enabled pupils' needs to be met more effectively and provided a better balance of vocational and academic subjects.
- The analysis and use of assessment information is not yet good enough for senior leaders or placing authorities to identify easily strengths and areas for improvement in pupils' progress.
- There are not enough opportunities for the most able pupils to obtain more demanding qualifications of which they are capable.
- Questioning in lessons does not always extend pupils' thinking. Targets for learning in lessons are not personalised enough to ensure that all pupils are challenged as much as possible. Feedback to pupils does not consistently help them to improve their work. Access to information technology to support teaching is patchy.

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 teaching and learning so that more is outstanding by:
 - using questioning more effectively to test and extend pupils' thinking
 - personalising learning objectives in lessons to provide greater challenge for all pupils
 - providing and using more information technology resources to further enhance teaching
 - ensuring that pupils know clearly how to improve their work consistently.
- Improve the outcomes, particularly for the most able pupils, by preparing and entering them for higher-level qualifications which they are capable of achieving.
- Further develop the analysis and use of assessment information to enable stakeholders to identify more easily the strengths and areas for improvement of pupils' academic progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and directors have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- The school has been through a turbulent time with key staff having left and the school amalgamating on to one site. This disruption led to the poor behaviour of some pupils. However, the new headteacher has brought about rapid improvements, despite being in post for a short time. Along with other senior leaders the headteacher has established a more ambitious culture for pupils' behaviour and better quality teaching. The school is improving well and has good capacity to improve further.
- New staffing and procedures to support more consistent and effective behaviour management are highly effective. Diligent attention is paid to the requirements of individual needs. The increased cooperation with placing authorities has improved liaison and communication. Comments from two local authorities indicated that the needs of pupils who they place at the school are met effectively. One local authority representative noted significant improvements in the school's provision over the last six months, with a sharper focus on pupils' progress and attainment.
- A more integrated approach is developing between the care homes and the school which is helping to improve pupils' behaviour and readiness for learning. The school is careful to ensure that no pupil is overlooked and that all have equality of opportunity with respect to gender or background. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain through the curriculum, the range of outdoor opportunities and the increasingly respectful ethos of the school.
- Although the assessment centres were not inspected, discussions with senior leaders focused on the procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and that teaching and learning are checked, so that provision is appropriate for all pupils.
- The leaders' self-evaluation is an accurate picture of the current state of development of the school. The school development plan sets out important priorities, with the key aim of improving teaching and learning.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils very well. The vocational opportunities available to pupils are outstanding. Pupils follow a wide range of purposeful courses both on and off the school site. The changes in timetabling have improved the balance of subjects and experiences for pupils. The curriculum is beginning to increase the academic demands for pupils.
- The headteacher enjoys the overwhelming confidence of staff, who recognise the school is improving very rapidly. Staff welcome the positive changes that have been implemented.
- There are effective arrangements in place for all staff to ensure that they receive training and appraisal to improve their performance and these are linked to salary progression. The quality of teaching has been improved through lesson observations, feedback, coaching and demonstration of good practice by senior leaders.
- Pupils are provided with independent careers education guidance and benefit from work-related opportunities, with suitable safeguards in place. Safeguarding of pupils when off-

site or attending alternative provision such as local colleges is promoted through close supervision by staff.

- The analysis and use of assessment information for pupils' academic progress are not clear enough for senior leaders or placing authorities to identify easily strengths and areas for improvement in pupils' progress.
- The school is aware that the website does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website in respect of listing pupils' achievements at the end of key stage 4.

Governance

- The governance of the school is provided by an operational director, who has specific responsibility for safeguarding, and the chief executive officer, who provides strategic and operational support to the headteacher.
- Regular visits take place between the chief executive officer, who has a good understanding of education, and key school staff. An appropriate level of challenge and support to the headteacher is provided.
- There is a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the school. There has been useful input and dialogue with regard to self-evaluation and development planning. The directors have successfully improved the quality and quantity of staffing and ensured all the independent school standards are met.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective. The school has a suitable safeguarding policy on its website for parents to read and it is reviewed regularly. Senior leaders create a safe culture in the school and effective engagement with carers and other stakeholders help to ensure that all pupils are supported and safe.
- Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding. They receive regular training to keep themselves up to date. The three designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained at a higher level and retrain every two years. Staff are vigilant to ensure that changes in pupils' behaviour can be checked and quickly addressed. They fully understand the procedures for referral of concerns.
- Risk assessments are in place so that they are managed and reduced, for example when pupils are off-site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers encourage positive attitudes for learning of pupils. The strong and supportive relationships between pupils and staff do much to engage pupils and encourage them to persevere.
- Nearly all pupils engage well in lessons. Staff have a close working knowledge of pupils and use this to get the best out of them.

- Teachers gear subject matter around the interest of pupils. For example, in a computing lesson one pupil relished building a computer game, learning how to carry out simple programming tasks and solving problems.
- Pupils are highly motivated by the array of vocational opportunities on offer. This includes construction, cooking, horticulture and motor vehicle maintenance. These experiences equip pupils with valuable skills and confidence for the future. In a motor vehicle maintenance session, two pupils took great pride in learning how to replace a suspension arm on a car.
- Increasingly, pupils' positive attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to the good quality of teaching and learning. This means that lessons proceed with minimal disruption and pupils sustain their concentration well.
- The teaching of mathematics is good and increasingly provides more challenge to pupils. This current year, the most able pupils are being encouraged to take GCSE courses and all pupils are starting to benefit from more challenging teaching than previously.
- The teaching of literacy across the curriculum has been identified as a key priority in the school improvement plan, so that all subjects have a stronger focus on improving reading, writing and spelling.
- Teaching does not always use questioning well enough to extend pupils' thinking, so that they can think more for themselves and work out problems. Individual learning objectives in lessons are not personalised enough, so that greater challenge for all pupils can be provided. Not all teachers have enough access to information technology equipment to enhance teaching and learning. There are some good examples of effective feedback to pupils in their books, in line with the school assessment policy, but this is not yet consistent across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Although pupils' attendance is below average, for most pupils there is a vast improvement on their previous history. If a pupil refuses to attend the school from a care home, outreach teachers provide support and work to transition pupils back into school.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They have confidence in the staff to act quickly upon any concerns they may have. The trusting and supportive relationships are crucial in developing pupils' confidence in staff.
- Most pupils spoken to said they enjoyed school and the range of activities on offer. Pupils start to value the increased positive social times at the start of the day, where they can interact positively.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe because of the good curriculum planning. For example, learning about online safety when working on computers and following health and safety rules in vocational studies such as construction or cookery.
- Through visit and events pupils develop an understanding of British values and enjoy trips to local places of interest to enrich their experiences. Pupils benefit from outdoor

education trips to participate in team-building activities, fundraising and learning to appreciate nature.

- Pupils are increasingly becoming more responsible citizens through participation in the school council and are starting to take more ownership in the school, for example by being involved in interviewing new members of staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a range of visits and events, and British values are actively promoted. An annual event with the British Army has become the highlight of the year, providing opportunities for team building, development of self-esteem as well as enjoyment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. More effective systems to manage and encourage pupils' behaviour have been implemented and this has resulted in significant improvements in pupils' behaviour. At the start of the academic year, pupils' behaviour was more volatile and there was damage to the premises. However, over the last six months this has improved, allowing teaching to take place with minimal disruption and the fabric of the building is now excellent. Records also indicate falling trends of incidents of poor behaviour.
- The new pastoral manager has established clear boundaries and expectations. This has resulted in pupils showing increased respect and politeness to staff. Work in their books and lesson observations also indicate improving attitudes to learning.
- Pupils gather together at the start of the day in a relaxed and informal way and this is used as a time to build relationships and reinforce positive messages, for example the current theme is 'manners matter'. Similarly lunchtimes have developed into pleasant sociable occasions.
- Pupils benefit from a strong and consistent pastoral support system and increasingly learn to self-manage their behaviour more appropriately. On occasions some pupils act immaturely at the end of the school day.
- Pupils' behaviour and welfare is assured in alternative provision, through careful risk assessments and close supervision by school staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school at various ages and stages in their schooling, with all pupils having experienced disruptions to their learning. Additionally, many pupils have complex needs which have not always been met well in previous settings so that pupils often have gaps in their learning.
- The school undertakes initial assessments to find out what pupils know and can do and, from their usually low starting points, pupils make good progress. This is because assessment highlights the gaps in their learning so that these can be addressed.
- Work in pupils' books is in line with their capabilities and it is presented to a good standard, with pupils taking pride in their written work. Most-able readers read confidently and fluently. However, owing to periods of missed education many have low

literacy levels. The school has identified the teaching of literacy more systematically across all subjects as a high priority.

- Pupils enjoy vocational subjects such as food technology, art and motor vehicle maintenance and achieve accredited awards or certificates of competency. These courses give pupils a sense of achievement as they receive accreditation for these, building their self esteem.
- Pupils' destinations can be affected by external factors. For example, pupils' placements being terminated by placing authorities before the end of Year 11. Last year two pupils went on to further education but this year the number is set to be higher.
- In the past the most able pupils have not achieved as well as they could have done, sometimes due to external factors and sometimes because they were not entered for more challenging qualifications. The majority of achievements by pupils have been entry level, or level 1 qualifications. This has been identified by the school as an area for improvement so that the most able pupils can be supported to gain GCSE qualifications which match their abilities.

16-19 Study programmes

Good

- As with the rest of the school, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and improving. Leadership of this provision by the headteacher is good, with careful consideration given to the curriculum to ensure that the needs of individual students are met well.
- Students continue to follow courses to enable them to achieve a qualification which is appropriate to their ability. Students receive good advice and guidance on how to plan for their future lives, education, training or work.
- The strength of the sixth-form provision is the ability to offer bespoke programmes to meet students' particular needs. They are provided with a mixture of academic and vocational studies provided either at the school or at local colleges, with support provided by school staff as needed. Students are prepared for the next stage of life and have suitable opportunities to undertake work-related placements and participate in community projects.
- Students start to develop a more mature approach, realising the importance of achieving particular qualifications to help them fulfil their ambitions.

School details

Unique reference number	1340000
DfE registration number	893/6026
Inspection number	10012915

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	Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Bryn Melyn Care
Chair	Robert Yetzes
Headteacher	Craig Seretny
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,444
Telephone number	01948 661 110
Website	www.brynmelyncare.com
Email address	craig.seretny@brynmelyncare.com
Date of previous inspection	5-7 November 2013

Information about this school

- Smallbrook School is registered to admit up to 50 boys and girls, aged 11 to 19 years, with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The vast majority of students have severely disrupted educational and family backgrounds.
- The school has been amalgamated on to one site since the last inspection, but operates three assessment centres for pupils based in the company's care homes. Pupils undergo a 12-week assessment period, following which they are placed in a variety of schools. Some pupils then attend Smallbrook School. These assessment centres were not inspected at the time of this inspection. These are inspected separately by the social care inspectorate.

- All students have special educational needs, 22 of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school's last full inspection was in November 2013.
- The current headteacher took over in February 2017. Prior to this there was an acting headteacher.
- The school uses North Shropshire College for vocational courses and the Shropshire Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service (TMBSS) to supplement specific academic subjects.
- The school has recently received a small amount of pupil premium money, but it is too early to measure any impact of this funding. All pupils at the school are deemed to be disadvantaged as they are in care.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 13 parts of lessons, all of which were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Pupils' work, staff surveys, annual reports and other records were scrutinised.
- The school's documentation was examined, including planning for subjects, records of pupils' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of pupils. The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The views of pupils were sought through individual discussions.
- There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, to take these into consideration.

Inspection team

Frank Price, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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