

High Close School

Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1TT

Inspection dates

5–6 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

The school is inadequate

- The school has serious weaknesses in some aspects of safeguarding, including governors' and leaders' oversight of safeguarding.
- Leaders, directors and governors have not ensured that pre-employment checks and recruitment procedures, outlined in government guidance, are fully implemented.
- Governors do not check on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements with enough rigour and do not follow up tenaciously on safeguarding concerns raised in committees.
- Directors have not worked closely enough with leaders and governors to ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are robustly monitored and concerns are followed up thoroughly.
- Records relating to some staff training are not collated effectively and leaders do not have a clear enough overview of what training staff have received and what training is required.
- There are inconsistencies in leaders' responses to safeguarding concerns. Although some are effective, others are not. There was an instance of 'sexting' that was not followed up and also one where the potential signs of radicalisation were not identified.
- Leaders have not analysed bullying logs in sufficient detail. They do not have a comprehensive picture of the extent of bullying and whether pupils apply the term correctly.
- The personal development programme does not include sufficient opportunities for secondary pupils to learn about sex and relationships.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has not been placed in special measures because there is evidence that strengths in leadership are having a positive impact on the curriculum, teaching, assessment, pupils' behaviour and outcomes.
- The principal, working well with senior leaders, has improved many areas of the school. She enjoys the support of the dedicated staff team. Together, they ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' academic and social needs.
- Pupils are very well supported by the team of support staff, as well as by the effective one-to-one help and therapies they access.
- Pupils behave well, respond positively in lessons, successfully collaborate with their classmates and have aspirations for the future.
- Transition arrangements help pupils feel confident about their next steps. In addition, the school's work with parents and carers has begun well and is helping them to support their youngsters more effectively.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, governors and directors should, as a matter of urgency, improve safeguarding arrangements, by:
 - making sure that directors work closely with governors to ensure that their combined oversight of safeguarding is thorough and effective
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders to account stringently for all aspects of safeguarding
 - making sure that recruitment procedures and pre-employment checks fully comply with government guidance and the school's own policies
 - ensuring that governors tenaciously pursue with school leaders any safeguarding concerns they raise
 - improving the quality of safeguarding record-keeping to ensure that leaders have a detailed and accurate oversight of what training staff have received and what is required
 - ensuring that referrals to the local authority's welfare services and follow-up communications are recorded properly, so recommendations can be implemented and monitored
 - scrutinising responses to safeguarding concerns to ensure that they tackle any underlying issues, including signs of potential radicalisation
 - making sure that pupils receive carefully considered, age-appropriate sex and relationships education, including about 'sexting'
 - ensuring that bullying logs are analysed thoroughly, so leaders have a fuller and sharper picture of the issues, including how well pupils understand the term.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Despite having strengths in several areas of leadership, particularly in managing pupils' behaviour and developing teaching so pupils' outcomes are good, overall the school has serious weaknesses. This is because some aspects of safeguarding and governance are significantly less effective than might reasonably be expected, in particular leaders' and governors' oversight of some safeguarding arrangements.
- From their careful monitoring, enhanced by helpful reviews conducted by consultants from Barnardo's, leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in teachers' practice. Following short visits to lessons to find out if new approaches are working, leaders provide helpful advice as to what teachers' next steps should be. Leaders also carefully scrutinise pupils' work to see if the curriculum and tasks teachers set are meeting pupils' needs well enough. Information from work scrutinies and visits to lessons is used well to design bespoke training, decide on future priorities and set targets for teachers' performance. It is recommended that newly qualified teachers may be appointed.
- The principal and senior leaders have developed the team of middle leaders effectively so they now make a more substantial contribution to moving the school forward. Middle leaders are held to account purposefully by senior leaders and challenged to explain the impact of their work on pupils' progress and emotional development.
- Responsible leaders have developed approaches to assessment very well. Pupils' learning is assessed against age-related expectations, helpfully drawn from the knowledge and skills that underpin the curriculum in each subject. Leaders carefully track the progress pupils, and groups of pupils, make towards appropriate end-of-year progress and attainment targets, based on age-related expectations.
- Leaders ensure that special educational needs funding enables pupils to access their learning and manage their behaviour well. Interventions support pupils' whole development, helping them therapeutically as well as academically. Support assistants linked to subjects provide pupils with high-quality individual help, using their subject expertise to do this. Leaders also ensure that off-site provision meets pupils' needs and supports the small number of targeted pupils in learning new and useful vocational skills.
- The curriculum has been carefully designed to enable pupils with complex needs to develop a wide range of academic, practical and creative skills, as well as competence in basic literacy and numeracy. The school has recently strengthened aspects of personal development, including introducing a new programme of learning about e-safety. However, the personal development curriculum in the secondary school does not focus enough on sex and relationships education.
- Pupil premium funds are used effectively to assist pupils, including pupils who are looked after, in developing their basic skills and in accessing the curriculum. Of note is the positive impact of the subject-based teaching assistants on targeted pupils' learning. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make the same strong progress as other pupils in the school.

- Sports premium funding supports pupils in accessing sporting activities that meet their individual needs, such as curling, dancing and swimming. Success in bespoke sports activities is enhancing pupils' sense of self-belief.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is very carefully tracked to ensure that it is threaded through all aspects of the curriculum. As a result, SMSC is embedded well within most curriculum areas, and especially so within physical education, English and educational visits. The school uses national and school events to good effect to demonstrate how fundamental British values can be put into practice. For example, leaders planned school council elections to coincide with the 2017 general election, making topical links between the two democratic processes.
- Efforts to assist parents so they play a greater role in supporting their children are relatively new but working well. A designated member of staff works purposefully with small groups of parents, focusing on how they can best support pupils in avoiding risky behaviours, including when online.

Governance of the school

- Governance is not effective in some key areas. Although more recently governors have rightly placed a greater focus on monitoring pupils' learning, they have not held the school to account with enough rigour for its safeguarding arrangements and procedures. When governors raise safeguarding concerns in committees they do not follow them up with enough diligence and persistence. As a result, aspects of the school's work in this area are not as thorough as they should be.
- Governors and directors have not ensured that pre-employment checks for staff comply fully with the latest government guidance.
- Minutes from full governing body meetings attended by directors indicate that they do not ensure that leaders and governors monitor and evaluate safeguarding procedures and practices with enough rigour. However, directors monitor robustly the way leaders and governors respond to complaints.
- Governors now sensibly use assessment information provided by the school to ensure that improvements in teaching and support for pupils are working well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. Weaknesses include recruitment, record-keeping and actions taken in response to safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders do not ensure that all referrals are properly followed up. In particular, records of referrals to the local authority and of the authority's responses are not always as detailed as they should be. Leaders' follow-up to some safeguarding concerns is too focused on the symptoms of the concern and does not always identify the underlying issue. For example, inspectors found two instances, one of 'sexting' and one of potential radicalisation, which were not properly followed up.
- Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of what safeguarding training has been undertaken. As a consequence, they cannot check whether training fully meets the safeguarding needs of the pupils and whether whole-staff training requirements have

been met in line with statutory guidance.

- Leaders have not ensured that the school's recruitment procedures are in line with government guidance in 'Keeping children safe in education'. However, they do adhere to the owner's overarching organisational recruitment policy. Leaders and governors have made directors aware of this disparity.
- Some elements of the school's work support pupils well in staying safe and maintaining a positive outlook. The school promotes and enhances pupils' well-being and sense of self-belief effectively, including through the provision of well-chosen therapies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Practice in teaching, learning and assessment is effective. Of note is how well staff use information about each pupil's aptitudes when planning learning. As a result, pupils' needs are well met and they make strong progress.
- Learning across the school has been enhanced by improvements to the way pupils' knowledge, skills and learning are assessed. Teachers now have a clear understanding of the skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils need to meet and exceed their targets, and use this well when planning learning. For example, the mathematics tasks given to pupils enable them to apply their mathematical skills in word problems which relate to familiar real-life contexts.
- Pupils learn well in key stage 2. They achieve a secure foundation in a range of basic literacy and numeracy skills, which support them in accessing the harder learning tasks teachers set in the secondary school setting.
- Of note is the work done to encourage pupils to develop a lifelong love of reading, which includes reading aloud to teaching staff. The detailed records in pupils' reading logbooks demonstrate how well pupils are developing the skills of effective readers, such as predicting and making links between different parts of the book.
- Science teaching is effective because pupils are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding at a deeper level, ask hypothetical questions and link different scientific disciplines to explain phenomena. In key stage 2, pupils build up their scientific vocabulary well and apply it when explaining processes.
- Teachers make good use of their expertise when teaching practical subjects in the secondary provision, imparting their specialist knowledge enthusiastically. Pupils learn well because teachers demonstrate key skills in an accessible manner and provide pupils with individualised guidance when they undertake practical activities, such as cooking a healthy meal.
- The most able pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable. In some classes, the tasks teachers set for them are not rich enough to fully challenge them. Leaders acknowledge there is more work to do in this area and have strong plans in place to improve this aspect of teachers' practice.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is graded inadequate because aspects of safeguarding are not effective.
- A number of pupils mentioned to inspectors that there was some bullying. In the pupil survey, responses about bullying and how safe pupils felt were less positive compared to other responses, which were positive. The school is aware of these concerns and has usefully surveyed parents about their perceptions of bullying. Leaders diligently log all the occurrences of bullying; however, they do not analyse their detailed log in enough depth. Leaders, therefore, do not have a comprehensive overview of bullying in the school, including whether pupils are applying the term correctly.
- Personal development programmes are sensibly increasingly focused on e-safety because this issue has recently become more prevalent for pupils. However, not enough focus is placed on learning about healthy relationships, including sexual relationships, and 'sexting' in personal development programmes for older pupils.
- Careers advice and guidance are well planned. Older pupils receive personalised help from impartial advisers and undertake a carefully considered programme of practical activities as part of their 'learning to work' programme.
- Some aspects of pupils' well-being, such as their ability to cope with stress and anxiety are effectively promoted by the school. Pupils benefit from a raft of additional support, including a wide range of sensory therapies. Therapies and additional support successfully help pupils to develop positive attitudes. For example, in tutor time the occupational therapist worked effectively with pupils to help them to develop greater resilience.
- School leaders are well attuned to the anxieties caused by transition and have implemented carefully planned support for pupils. For example, support staff accompany Year 11 pupils when they make visits to choose their post-16 provision. Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 is managed effectively so pupils moving to the secondary provision get to know the teachers and the site before they start in September.
- Leaders keep close tabs on how well alternative provision meets each pupil's needs. Teaching assistants ensure that pupils feel well-supported while at the off-site provision. As a result, pupils generally respond positively to learning provided off-site and behave well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The team of staff ('Redwood') dedicated to supporting pupils' behaviour do so very effectively. Team members work in close collaboration with teaching staff and ensure that their colleagues are fully aware of the most appropriate approaches for managing each individual pupil's behaviour.

- Support staff work to good effect with pupils who are finding it hard to concentrate in lessons, struggling to stay calm, or feeling anxious. They provide pupils with the assistance they need to stay focused on their learning.
- Pupils' behaviour is tracked very carefully on a day-by-day basis. Daily behaviour tracking links seamlessly to pupils' individual behaviour targets, wisely focusing on those aspects of behaviour that pupils most need to improve. Behaviour tracking is collated effectively so leaders have a very detailed overview of behaviour across the school, including any 'hotspots'. Behaviour tracking links closely with the rewards system which also motivates pupils well.
- The school has successfully focused on improving attendance, including through engaging better with parents and carers. As a result, since the start of this academic year, attendance rates have risen compared to last academic year, including for pupils eligible for additional funding.
- Following training, the school has successfully introduced a new approach to how staff can best avoid conflict and calm pupils down. This new approach is used consistently by all teaching and support staff, as well as by staff who work with pupils beyond the school day. As a consequence, the number of times physical restraint has been used over the past year has substantially reduced compared to last academic year.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions has risen this academic year, compared with last year. Following detailed analysis, the school believes that there is a link between the rise in exclusions and the decline in the use of restraints. The school has effective plans to ensure that the two methods of modifying pupils' behaviour work in greater synergy, including by updating exclusion procedures.
- Parents are positive about how well pupils behave and the impact of the school's work to support pupils. One parent commented on Parent View: 'The school's approach to all aspects of behaviour, learning, enrichment and care is exceptional.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils do well in the broad spectrum of qualifications and courses they undertake. They make strong progress from their starting points and achieve success, often having had a turbulent experience of education to date. Outcomes are not outstanding because some most-able pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable. The school is fully aware of this and has strong plans in place to rectify it.
- Broadly speaking, across the school, pupils achieve better in reading than in mathematics and writing. Pupils are taught effective reading skills, including using the sentence context to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words, predicting what might happen next and articulating why they have enjoyed or disliked their reading book. However, pupils' progress in mathematics and writing is now improving due to effective teaching and improved methods of assessment.
- Key stage 2 pupils are well supported so that they gain the skills needed to access the curriculum in secondary school. Work in pupils' books in key stage 2 indicates that most pupils make strong progress from their starting points, including in science and non-core subjects.
- In key stage 4, leaders have carefully chosen the courses they offer to pupils so that

they dovetail well with courses offered in mainstream schools but are, nevertheless, pitched at the right level. Last year, all pupils achieved at least one external qualification, the majority of which were level 2 qualifications. About one third of pupils achieved a C grade in at least one GCSE qualification.

- Qualifications for pupils in core subjects are carefully selected. They enable pupils to progress from the most accessible qualifications at entry level on to qualifications that test how well they can apply their knowledge. Pupils with the capacity to take academic qualifications do so. As a consequence, most pupils make strong progress and also build their sense of self-belief.
- The school is developing the way teachers use information from assessments so they better meet the needs of most-able pupils. However, this group do not always make the very rapid progress of which they are capable. Some most-able pupils did not achieve the top awards in a number of key stage 4 qualifications in 2016, even though they had the potential to do so.
- Across the school, programmes designed to help pupils catch up in their basic skills work really well. The vast majority of pupils increase their reading ages on intensive reading programmes, some by a substantial amount. As a result, reading does not create a barrier to pupils accessing the curriculum.
- Pupils eligible for additional funding make progress that is at least in line with other pupils' strong progress. Their progress is strongest in reading but is improving in mathematics and writing, due to effective additional help. Those pursuing vocational courses in alternative provision make strong progress because of close collaboration between the provider and the school.
- Outcomes are supported by the in-depth baseline tests conducted when pupils join, which enable teachers to have a clear view of pupils' aptitudes, including how good their memory recall is.
- Due to effective teaching and support, pupils leave school ready for their next steps and the vast majority go on to education, employment or training.

School details

Unique reference number	110181
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10003785

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Rayman
Principal	Zoe Lattimer
Telephone number	0118 978 5767
Website	www.barnardos.org.uk/highcloseschool
Email address	high.close@barnardos.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 January 2013

Information about this school

- High Close is a non-maintained special school, with residential provision. Both the education and residential provision are owned by Barnardo's. The school caters for pupils aged seven to 18 but does not have a sixth form.
- All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The vast majority of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs, and over half also have at least three other identified needs, including speech, language and communication needs, autistic spectrum conditions, obsessive compulsive conditions and/or other medical needs.
- Pupils have been placed by approximately 26 different local authorities and many have experienced considerable changes in their education and home lives.
- The proportion of pupils looked after by local authorities and those supported by the

pupil premium is much higher than average. The school does receive some pupil premium funding but not for all the pupils who are categorised as disadvantaged.

- Alternative provision known as 'Thrive' is used by the school for a very small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- During the school inspection, an aligned inspection of the residential provision was undertaken by social care inspectors.
- Inspectors made visits to observe learning in 15 lessons. They also visited a number of classes during tutor time. Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised by inspectors.
- Inspectors met with three separate groups of pupils, including one group from the primary provision, who also read to inspectors. Inspectors met with the principal on several occasions, and separately with a group of staff, including teaching assistants. Inspectors also attended an after-school information-sharing briefing for staff.
- Separate meetings were held with the vice-principal, assistant principal, the special educational needs coordinator, the leader responsible for careers guidance, newly qualified teachers, and initial teaching education students. Inspectors also met with designated safeguarding leaders on more than one occasion.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the governing body, accompanied by another governor, a group of parents, and made a telephone call to a regional director from Barnardo's.
- Inspectors reviewed the 20 responses made by parents to the online parent survey, Parent View, and also the 12 comments made by parents using the free-text facility. Inspectors also took into account 23 responses to the pupil survey, as well as 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation and development plans, were reviewed. Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding records, including safety checks made when teachers are appointed, pupils' records and a selection of teachers' files.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Emma Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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