

# Physis Heathgates Academy

PO Box 179, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 9DE

## Inspection dates

6–8 February 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Adequate

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that the independent school standards are fully met. However, the shortcomings relating to the development of some policies, provision and the attendance register are relatively minor and easily rectified.
- Leaders' development plans do not adequately address the school's key weaknesses. As a result, the proprietor and head of service are not able to hold leaders to account for all aspects of the school's performance fully.
- The proprietor and head of service do not have sufficient oversight of the school's overall effectiveness. They have commissioned professionals to review the school's performance but this work is at an early stage.
- Teachers are not routinely given opportunities to share the aspects of their practice that they know work best. As a result, there is some variation in the extent to which pupils are challenged and in the quality of their writing.

### The school has the following strengths

- Relationships between adults and pupils are very strong at Heathgates. The caring and nurturing approach of staff supports pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are key strengths of the school. Staff support pupils to manage significant challenges in their lives effectively.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved considerably. Teachers' lesson plans are detailed, respond to the individual needs of pupils and result in good outcomes. These strengths are replicated for students in the sixth form.
- Leaders tailor the curriculum to offer a balance between education, care and therapy. As a result of strong support, pupils are ready for the next stage in their lives.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - policies relating to safeguarding, exclusion and particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language are fully established and shared with staff
  - leaders use the correct codes for recording pupils' absence from school
  - work continues to encourage the best possible attendance at all times
  - development plans sharply identify the key priorities for securing further improvement, particularly those relating to teaching, learning and assessment
  - these plans contain clear milestones and success criteria so that senior leaders can be more effectively held to account for all aspects of their work
  - the monitoring and evaluation cycle provides teachers with greater opportunities to share their effective practice.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby pupils' outcomes, by making sure that:
  - teachers' planning provides pupils with even more opportunities to write at length and practise their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills
  - activities are adapted quickly if pupils find learning too easy.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that the independent school standards are fully met. Some of the school's policies are either unclear or not fully established. In addition, leaders have not taken sufficient account of guidance issued by the Department for Education in relation to safeguarding and attendance.
- Though the guidance issued by the Secretary of State is covered within the school's curriculum, it is not fully referenced in the safeguarding policy. The interval within which training for the designated lead should be updated is incorrect in the school's policy. However, the designated lead was aware of the correct interval and training was up to date. Staff do not always use the correct codes to classify pupils' absence from school. Leaders have not established arrangements for the education and welfare provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. None of these shortcomings has a serious impact on pupils' welfare, health and safety or academic or personal development. These matters are easily rectifiable.
- Since the last full standard inspection, the proprietor has recruited several new staff with key skills and expertise. This includes a headteacher and deputy headteacher. These leaders have brought about a greater sense of purpose and organisation to Heathgates. Monitoring and evaluation systems are starting to develop.
- Leaders have a clear picture of the quality of teaching and the impact that it is having on learning. Although leaders are able to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of teaching, the key weaknesses are not reflected in an effective action plan designed to secure further developments.
- Actions that are contained within current plans lack any milestones or success criteria. It is therefore not possible for leaders, or the proprietor and head of service, to check on the effectiveness of leaders' actions and offer an adequate level of support and challenge.
- The head of service has begun a process of conducting internal audits. These audits are helpful and are the foundations of a more rigorous approach to accountability. However, the audits do not yet have a sufficient focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Though the overall effectiveness of teaching is good, the pace of improvement could be even stronger if systems had more rigour.
- The proprietor has recently commissioned professionals with specific expertise in special education to develop all aspects of the school's work. This commissioning process demonstrates leaders' commitment to securing further improvement. It is too early to see any impact of this work at this stage.
- Leaders and managers are honest and frank about their journey of improvement. They are deeply committed people who place pupils at the heart of the decisions that they make. Education, care and therapy underpin the curriculum offer. All staff want the very best for pupils. As a result of this steadfast commitment, pupils are effectively supported and most make rapid progress during their time in the school.
- The curriculum gives pupils experiences in a wide range of subjects and ensures that pupils participate in practical activities. Schemes of work and teachers' lesson plans are comprehensive and much improved. The outdoor space has been developed to extend

pupils' learning further. Staff and pupils have established an area to grow fruit and vegetables. Pupils' portfolios demonstrate how effectively this area is utilised in different seasons.

- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is well established. Teachers make links to each of these areas through their planning across the curriculum. Effective assemblies and additional experiences also enhance pupils' development. This area of the school is well led. In recent months, pupils have explored a range of topical issues and significant events, including the international Holocaust Remembrance Day, Independence Day and the importance of democracy. Staff weave fundamental British values into this learning successfully.

## **Governance**

- The proprietor acknowledges that greater oversight of the school's work is required. The head of service and proprietor are committed to securing further improvements. They are proud of the strong relationships between staff and pupils. The head of service and proprietor have worked with leaders to develop the curriculum offer and enhance the therapeutic care offered to pupils. They are acting upon any shortcomings relating to the independent school standards with urgency.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school website. Although there are some minor omissions within the safeguarding policy – mainly relating to the inclusion of specific issues and the regularity of training for the designated lead – robust day-to-day practice means that these omissions do not have an impact on pupils' welfare.
- Pupils' records and files are very well organised. Staff understand pupils' needs exceptionally well and are very clear about what they must do if they have a concern, however minor.
- Leaders and managers have designed the curriculum to offer specific and frequent opportunities for pupils to learn how to stay safe. This includes delivering important messages about e-safety, building resilience, making safe choices and developing life skills. Work to enhance pupils' life skills is well coordinated and is key to ensuring that pupils are prepared for adulthood. Pupils learn how to paper walls, carry out basic plumbing and electrical repairs, hang curtain poles and maintain a car. The school even has its own small family car, which staff use to teach pupils how to check oil levels and tyre pressure.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved considerably since the last inspection. Teachers' lesson plans are thorough and reflect the needs and abilities of pupils.
- Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils. Teachers encourage most pupils to settle quickly to learning. This is a significant achievement, given pupils' past experiences.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They quickly assess what pupils can and cannot do when they first arrive at the school. Teachers use these initial assessments to plan what they call a 'learning journey'. Lessons are carefully adapted as pupils progress through different schemes of work. Staff deliver most lessons to very small groups or on a one-to-one basis. This allows pupils to have detailed discussions about their knowledge and understanding with staff. As a result, pupils' books show strong progress over time.
- Assessment systems are well established. Most pupils work hard towards achieving their agreed targets. Leaders check on progress through their monitoring cycle. They have also established 'key worker meetings' where professionals from other agencies and teachers from across the school meet to share and celebrate pupils' achievements. These events allow pupils to receive important feedback. Staff praise pupils for their resilience and progress and give them clear and effective feedback about how they can develop further.
- Leaders bring together feedback about pupils' achievement and personal development from teachers in detailed progress reports for pupils' families, placing authorities and other agencies. Staff use this feedback to establish any necessary additional support.
- Though teachers do establish challenge within their teaching, this is not consistently high across the school. On occasion, staff do not adjust or extend activities when it is clear that a pupil finds learning too easy.
- In English lessons, there are sometimes insufficient opportunities for pupils to write at length. This hampers pupils' ability to fully practise and apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills. As a result, the quality of some pupils' spelling can vary a little and requires further development.
- Teachers have limited opportunities to share their practice. Consequently, there is variation in the impact that teaching has on learning. Staff do not share the best teaching widely enough.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- As a result of very strong relationships with staff, pupils are confident and ready to learn. This is a noteworthy accomplishment for both pupils and staff. Staff sensitively support pupils to manage a range of very significant challenges in some aspects of their lives. Staff do this with the utmost care, sensitivity and empathy.
- Pupils say that they are confident that staff respond to any concerns they have about bullying. During the inspection, pupils were very happy to talk to the inspector about how they feel about school life. Pupils' answers were positive. They feel as if they have a stake in what they learn.
- Leaders and managers have designed a range of effective strategies in consultation with the leader of their 'Quantum Leap Programme' and the school's clinical lead. These programmes provide pupils with important dedicated time to explore their feelings and emotions. Pupils say that they enjoy these sessions.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour was good throughout the inspection. The school environment is well organised and tidy. Pupils take pride in their work and the presentation of their work is usually good.
- Pupils are encouraged to share their views through the school council and, where necessary, the complaints procedure. Staff pay close attention to pupils' views.
- Attendance is normally strong at Heathgates. However, recent levels of attendance have fluctuated. Leaders and managers acknowledge that they must continue to encourage good levels of attendance and do all that they can to ensure that the current picture improves.
- Leaders have not fully established a policy that sets out the arrangements for exclusion.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Pupils' books demonstrate that progress is consistently strong across the curriculum.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards their work and are keen to gain accreditation in a range of skills and qualifications.
- Some pupils begin their journey at Heathgates with levels of attainment that are typically lower than those of their peers nationally. This is often because of gaps in their learning from times when they have not been in full-time education. The school assesses pupils carefully when they first arrive and quickly establishes targets and expectations for improvement.
- In the last academic year, pupils gained qualifications in English and mathematics functional skills, GCSE English, mathematics, psychology, science, history, physical education, religious studies and food technology.
- There are no marked differences between the progress made by any groups or key stages. Pupils make strong progress from their different starting points.
- In English, pupils are making strong progress but sometimes have limited opportunities to write at length. As a result, there is some variation in the quality of pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills because they are not practising these basic skills with sufficient frequency.

## Sixth form provision

**Good**

- Work experience and work-related learning are strengths of the school. Students receive impartial careers advice. They are invited to think carefully about how their future careers will support their well-being and match their interests. Students attend careers events in local towns and careers experts visit them.
- During the inspection, students were observed exploring potential career pathways. As a result of effective teaching, students were able to consider the importance of researching different careers successfully.

- Students also attend work experience placements. These placements provide them with opportunities to develop workplace skills. Students that the inspector spoke with said that they look forward to and enjoy their placements.
- The development of skills in English and mathematics is central to the curriculum. Students' books show evidence of strong progress over time. However, like the rest of the school, on occasion, there is scope for even more challenge.
- The number of students in the sixth form is too small to report fully on comparisons with national performance measures. However, the school can provide evidence of how it has successfully supported students to access courses at local colleges. Students who move onto further education continue to enjoy their learning and attend well.
- The behaviour and personal development of students are as strong as those found across other key stages. Leaders effectively monitor the impact that teaching has on learning. As a result, students' outcomes are strong, given their different starting points.
- Though leaders are improving teaching and learning effectively, self-evaluation and development plans lack rigour. As with the rest of the school, the proprietor and head of service are not fully holding leaders to account for standards in the sixth form. This therefore limits the capacity for further improvement.

## School details

Unique reference number	138580
DfE registration number	893/6029
Inspection number	10012917

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 special school
Age range of pupils	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Physis Group
Headteacher	Andy Plant
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,800
Telephone number	01948 841 260
Website	<a href="http://www.physisgroup.co.uk">www.physisgroup.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:aplant@physisgroup.co.uk">aplant@physisgroup.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	23–24 July 2013

## Information about this school

- The school opened in 2012 and had its first standard inspection in July 2013. The school received progress monitoring inspections in April 2015 and November 2015. It extended its provision in 2014 to include a separate off-site teaching facility called The Retreat. The school closed The Retreat in August 2016.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.

- Heathgates is a school for pupils aged 10 to 18 years who have social and emotional difficulties.
- Since the last standard inspection, the school has recruited a full-time headteacher and deputy headteacher.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in four lessons and completed book scrutinies over two days of the inspection. These activities were conducted by the inspector on his own and jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector held a range of meetings with leaders to ascertain the quality of the curriculum, safeguarding, the sixth form, the monitoring of teaching and learning, the management of behaviour and the use of assessment information.
- The inspector toured the school with the headteacher and took account of the suitability of first aid arrangements, toilet and washing facilities, drinking water, outdoor space and lighting, and the acoustic conditions and sound insulation of each room.
- A range of documents were scrutinised to review the effectiveness of safeguarding. Documents included the single central record, child protection files, risk assessments, information relating to e-safety, first aid records, staff personnel files and training records.
- The inspector took account of responses to Ofsted questionnaires. There were seven responses to the staff questionnaire and insufficient responses on Parent View to generate a report. The inspector spoke to pupils throughout the inspection.
- The inspector met with the school's proprietor and head of service. The inspector held a telephone discussion with a social worker from a placing local authority.

## Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that:
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].

### **Part 6. Provision of information**

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that:
  - 32(3)(a) particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, misbehaviour and exclusions;
  - 32(3)(b) particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with education, health and care plans and pupils who speak English as an additional language are provided.

### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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