

High Close School

Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1TT

Inspection dates

27–28 February 2018

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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have taken rapid and decisive action to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. As a result, safeguarding policies and procedures are now effective.
- The principal and other senior leaders work together very well. They are driven by the desire to do everything possible to keep pupils safe and give them a good-quality education.
- Leaders have planned the curriculum very well. It allows pupils to gain academic and other qualifications, and to have a range of experiences that help develop the skills and confidence needed to be successful in life.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The vast majority of pupils gain placements in further education when they leave High Close.
- Pupils are cared for in a friendly and sensitive manner because staff know them as individuals. Highly positive relationships contribute towards pupils' good personal development.
- Behaviour around the school is typically good. When it does occur, any challenging behaviour is managed calmly and sensitively.
- Strong systems in school, and effective links with families and other professionals, ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm.
- Teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers use their knowledge of individual pupils to plan activities that help them make good progress from their starting points.
- Some teaching is of the highest quality and deepens pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding extremely well.
- The governing body has been restructured following an external review. Recently, governors have rightly and successfully focused on improving safeguarding arrangements. However, they do not yet monitor all aspects of the school's work effectively.
- Fixed-term exclusions are used too frequently to manage the behaviour of pupils with the most complex needs at times of personal crisis.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the effectiveness of the governing body so that it challenges leaders to improve all areas of the school's work continually.
- Work with the proprietor to improve the range of provision for pupils with the most complex needs so that the use of exclusion can be avoided.
- Share the very best practice in teaching across the school so that all pupils make rapid progress from their starting points.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders' actions to make improvements since the last inspection have been rapid and successful. Under the principal's strong leadership, staff work tirelessly to keep pupils safe and give them a good education.
- There is a strong culture of trust and support across the school. Staff enjoy working at High Close and feel well supported by leaders. In turn, pupils feel well supported by staff.
- Leaders at all levels know their responsibilities and how they fit into the smooth operation and current priorities of the school. Subject leaders welcome the autonomy they have, but know that they will be challenged if their actions do not achieve positive outcomes for pupils.
- The leadership of teaching is very strong. As a result, the good teaching observed by inspectors at the previous inspection has been maintained and built on. Staff benefit from whole-school and tailored professional development opportunities that enable them to develop their practice and achieve better outcomes for pupils.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils exceptionally well. There is a careful balance between academic learning that can lead to meaningful qualifications and other experiences that help prepare pupils for life in the wider world. For example, a pupil's day could include lessons in English and mathematics followed by a trip to a local café to develop their social skills in public.
- The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum has been strengthened to give pupils more appropriate relationship and sex education.
- Pupils' learning is further enriched by opportunities to make visits to other places, or to work with visitors or other professionals. For example, primary pupils recently visited London to sketch bridges over the River Thames, while some older pupils have performed in a schools Shakespeare festival.
- Pupils learn to be tolerant of each other and gain a growing understanding of, and ability to respect, each other's differences. These fundamental British values are embedded within the school.
- Additional funding, for children looked after by local authorities, is used well to provide additional therapies and opportunities for disadvantaged pupils.
- The primary sport premium is used to improve facilities, train staff to teach physical education more effectively and ensure that every pupil can swim 25 metres by the end of Year 6.
- Leaders are highly knowledgeable about, and strong advocates for, the pupils in their care. As a result, pupils' personal development and welfare are good. Staff told inspectors that the new head of therapy has given them a greater evidence-based understanding about how to support their pupils well. However, leaders are aware that more work could be done to improve the therapeutic provision for the most complex pupils so that they do not need to exclude them when their behaviour puts them or others at risk of harm.

- The principal has valued external challenge from a new school improvement partner and from safeguarding audits and other local authority visits. These have confirmed she has taken the correct actions to make the necessary improvements.

Governance of the school

- Governors were quick to organise an external review of governance following the previous inspection in July 2017. The review found some weaknesses in the structure and organisation of the governing body and the way that governors challenged leaders.
- The chair of governors quietly and deliberately worked behind the scenes to orchestrate changes to the membership of the governing body. He also refined the committee and meeting structures. They are now fit for purpose.
- The governor responsible for safeguarding has been instrumental in helping the school to make the rapid improvements necessary. He visits the school very regularly to check that actions are completed to keep pupils safe. He has helped leaders to strengthen strategic processes around safeguarding successfully. Governors also rightly helped to influence the proprietor to change recruitment procedures so they follow government guidance.
- New governors have relevant skills, experience and expertise to challenge leaders, and they are already doing this. However, the impact of governors in driving improvements in all areas of the school's work is not yet evident.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Following the inspection in July 2017, leaders responsible for safeguarding took rapid action to improve processes around recruitment and recording concerns about pupils. The leadership of safeguarding by designated leaders is meticulous.
- Following discussions with the proprietor, Barnardo's, leaders have changed the school's recruitment procedures so that references are now sought prior to interviews.
- A new electronic system for recording and tracking concerns about pupils is being used successfully by staff and leaders alike. Cases and concerns are correctly recognised, recorded, responded to and, where appropriate, referred. Links with other professionals and with families to help keep pupils safe are very strong.
- Training for all staff is comprehensive and up to date. All training is logged centrally by leaders, and any missed training is followed up efficiently. Staff are relentlessly vigilant about dangers that pupils may fall victim to.
- Staff are constantly developing their own expertise about online safety. This means that they understand the dangers that pupils may encounter online, including from grooming and sexting. The open, honest culture of the school means that pupils trust adults and talk to them about any concerns they have. For example, pupils discuss any problems with adults when they are using their mobile devices during social times.
- The PSHE curriculum and trips out in to the community encourage pupils to take positive steps to keep themselves safe. This provision is enhanced by visitors whenever

possible, for example during the inspection a theatre company performed to key stage 4 pupils to raise their awareness of child sexual exploitation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching at High Close is good because teachers have appropriate subject knowledge and know how to challenge pupils just enough. The positive relationships in classrooms mean that teachers are able to manage pupils' behaviour well so that any incidents of poor behaviour do not disrupt learning for other pupils.
- Teachers are highly skilled and use a range of approaches to develop pupils' learning. They know their pupils well and know what will work. Lessons across the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 are interesting and interactive. Practical demonstrations and activities in science and design technology help pupils to make good progress. The use of visual models of different texts in English helped pupils to organise their writing. One pupil told an inspector: 'I never thought I would learn this and surprisingly enjoy my lessons.'
- In key stage 2 there is a strong focus on developing reading, writing and mathematical skills. Teachers use small-group work and individual tuition very well to develop the skills pupils really need to succeed in the future. Equally, teachers know when not to pursue the teaching of these key skills and instead to use activities that allow pupils to explore the term's theme. For example, during the inspection, pupils observed carefully as chicks hatched from the eggs they had been incubating. Pupils applied their forest-school skills really well to design a nest for the chicks to live in.
- The teaching of reading is a high priority. In key stage 2 pupils were observed and heard reading for pleasure and to develop their skills. Year 6 pupils have made rapid progress in reading and are able to demonstrate more complex comprehension skills. For example, one pupil discussed with his teacher how Roald Dahl, David Walliams and CS Lewis all use the technique of talking directly to the reader in their books.
- In addition to developing knowledge, understanding and skills, teaching helps pupils to become more confident. For example, inspectors observed older pupils confidently and convincingly leading a physical education lesson improving football skills to a group of teaching assistants as part of a BTEC National Diploma course.
- Assessment information is used very well by teachers to plan precise next steps in learning for pupils. English teachers have recently reviewed their assessment systems to follow more closely the curriculum they teach. This aims to further enhance pupils' progress.
- Leaders clearly know where the strongest teaching can be found in the school and, conversely, where learning and progress are slower. Leaders are providing opportunities for teachers to share strong practice so that all pupils can make rapid progress in all subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Pupils say that High Close is a safe school. Staff and parents agree. Staff have a very clear understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm. Staff help pupils to develop their character and personality because they know them so well as individuals.
- Pupils have a confidence and assuredness about themselves when they are feeling positive. They say learning about having a 'growth mindset' has helped this.
- Pupils' physical and emotional well-being is cared for well. Residential pupils each belong to a house and have a key worker and team who care for them. Day pupils have the equivalent support through the 'Redwood' team, whose members provide similar support during the day.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' well-being, for example through physical education that promotes healthy lifestyles and PSHE where pupils learn about healthy relationships, including online.
- Pupils are proud of the school. One pupil told an inspector that the best thing about the school was 'everything'. Many pupils take pride in their work, by presenting it very neatly. Some pupils take on additional responsibilities as prefects or members of the school council while others prepare for the world of work, for example by shadowing the work of the caretaker.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have helped develop a shared understanding of bullying across the school. Staff and pupils have been part of a working group to produce a new counter-bullying policy. As a result of raised awareness throughout the school, pupils now understand what bullying is or is not. However, it is too early to see if this will have an impact on changing the behaviour of the few pupils who sometimes demonstrate bullying traits.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour is managed very well. Positive relationships between staff and pupils contribute well to this. There are clear systems to track and reward positive behaviour that pupils understand and value. Incidents of poor behaviour are carefully tracked and analysed. Staff know many of the triggers for such behaviour and try to avoid these situations.
- Increasingly, pupils learn how to remove themselves from situations sensibly when they are struggling to manage their own behaviour. This means that they do not have a negative effect on the learning of their peers. Staff are never far away to support pupils when they need extra help or guidance.
- Behaviour around the school at less structured times is good. Pupils arrive calmly at school and are welcomed enthusiastically. At breaktimes, a range of activities engage pupils well, resulting in positive behaviour. Pupils eat their lunch sociably and sensibly, often chatting to staff about interests, pastimes or the weather!
- Pupils attend school regularly. Poor attendance is never a reason for underachievement of any kind. There are clear structures to follow up poor attendance, which are having a positive impact. Staff do all they can to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- Over time the number of exclusions and incidences of physical intervention have

reduced because staff manage behaviour well and prevent situations from escalating. A recent peak in physical interventions has been appropriate to keep pupils with complex needs safe.

- Where pupils with the most serious and complex needs demonstrate behaviour that endangers themselves, other pupils or staff, leaders reluctantly resort to excluding them from school. This is because the school is unable to offer the secure or therapeutic provision that they need.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of learning when they leave High Close. As a result, the vast majority of former pupils obtain appropriate placements in further education settings. School leaders continue to track pupils after they leave, and visit them in their new settings to check on their progress. They check to see if there is any more they can do to help pupils succeed in the future.
- In key stage 4 pupils have the opportunity to work towards meaningful qualifications in a range of subjects. Pupils have the opportunity to achieve progressive qualifications leading to GCSEs. Most pupils achieve a pass in at least one GCSE. School leaders have reviewed the qualifications available to pupils to ensure that they can be accessed and achieved without causing undue stress or anxiety to the most vulnerable pupils.
- Detailed assessment information is used to plan individual pupils' learning. This helps to close gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, the vast majority of pupils were found to have improved their reading age when reassessed.
- Across the school pupils are making at least good progress in a range of subjects. This is because lessons are interactive, rooted in real-life experiences and develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding well.
- Some of the strongest progress was seen in developing pupils' reading skills in key stage 2 and in English and science at key stages 3 and 4. School assessment information confirms that this is the case. Leaders now want to ensure that pupils make equally rapid progress in all areas of the curriculum, for example current pupils' learning and progress in computing is not as strong as it should be.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils ensures that they make at least the same progress as their peers academically. It also funds additional therapeutic support to improve a wide range of outcomes for pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	110181
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10044364

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	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Rayman
Principal	Zoe Lattimer
Telephone number	0118 978 5767
Website	www.barnardos.org.uk/highcloseschool
Email address	HighCloseSchool@barnardos.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 July 2017

Information about this school

- High Close is a non-maintained special school with residential provision and is owned by Barnardo's. The school caters for pupils aged from seven to 18 years 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 over 20 different local authorities and many have experienced considerable changes in their education and home lives.
- The proportions of pupils looked after by local authorities and those supported by the pupil premium are much higher than average. The school does receive some pupil

premium funding, but not for all the pupils who are categorised as disadvantaged.

Information about this inspection

- When High Close School was inspected in July 2017 it was judged to have serious weaknesses. This inspection began as the first monitoring visit and was deemed a Section 5 inspection.
- Her Majesty’s Inspector looked in great detail at the school’s safeguarding procedures and records. He met with leaders and a wide range of staff to discuss how the school ensures that pupils are kept safe.
- Inspectors met with the principal and other senior leaders throughout the inspection. They visited lessons to observe learning in key stages 2, 3 and 4 with the principal or deputy principal. During these visits they looked at examples of pupils’ work over time.
- Her Majesty’s Inspector met with the chair of governors and two other members of the governing body. He held a telephone conversation with a representative of the proprietor, Barnardo’s.
- To gain their views of the school, inspectors spoke to pupils around the school at social times and in lessons. An inspector had lunch with some pupils and met a small group of pupils more formally.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation associated with safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching and learning, the views of stakeholders, and pupils’ progress.

Inspection team

Lee Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Ross Macdonald

Ofsted Inspector

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