

White Trees Independent School

London Road, Bishop's Stortford, 13a London Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3SP

Inspection dates

25–27 April 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Not all independent school standards are met.
- Governors rely too much on what leaders say about the school's work, without checking that this is accurate.
- The school's effectiveness has declined since its last inspection. Leaders and governors' evaluation of the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils is over generous.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too varied. Leaders have not identified the weaknesses in teaching. Teachers do not accurately assess or track pupils' progress in all subjects.
- Leaders and governors have not taken sufficient account of the requirements for pupils' learning. The current curriculum offer does not cover all of the aspects required by the independent school standards.
- Leaders have not ensured that the management of behaviour is consistent across the school. It varies too much, depending on where pupils are taught and the teacher's interpretation of expectations.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' social and emotional needs are very well catered for by staff, who show consideration for their needs. This helps pupils to overcome barriers to their learning.
- Pupils' welfare is very well managed. Work to teach pupils to keep themselves safe is very effective in helping them to understand the risks they may face.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well managed, fit for purpose and rigorous. Risk assessments are thorough.
- Pupils receive good support to find places at college or in appropriate post-16 settings. Guidance effectively supports their journey towards adulthood.

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 the approach to the curriculum is understood by all and plans are shared
 - ensuring that governors rigorously monitor the work of the school to assure themselves that it meets independent school standards
 - looking at best practice beyond the school to support the implementation of a holistic assessment approach.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - assessment is accurate, covers all subject areas and includes all other aspects of what young people can do
 - teachers use these improvements in assessment to modify their teaching to challenge pupils, taking account of current pupils' progress
 - resources for pupils taught off site are of high quality and match their needs.

The school must meet the following independent school standards

- The proprietor must ensure that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work that take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, is drawn up and implemented effectively (paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2)(a)).
- The proprietors must ensure that teaching at the school:
 - enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress, according to their ability, so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range; (paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(c), 3(d), 3(f), 3(g)).
- The standard in this paragraph is met where the proprietor ensures that a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place (paragraph 4).
- The proprietors must ensure that persons with leadership and management

responsibilities at the school:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role;
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Not all independent school standards are met.
- The proprietor, school manager and senior leader do not have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Their lack of self-evaluation or checks against standards means that their knowledge of how well the school is doing is too limited. However, they have developed a clear set of priorities that have a positive effect on the social and emotional progress of pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe and well regarded at school.
- Leaders and governors' routine monitoring of the quality of some important areas of the school's work does not give them an accurate or detailed enough knowledge of the school's effectiveness. For example, when they evaluate the quality of teaching, not enough account is taken of provision for pupils who are taught at off-site locations. As a result, they are not assured that pupils are effectively supported to fulfil their potential.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the current curriculum offer covers the requirements of the independent school standards. Although it is well matched to pupils' social and emotional needs and does not undermine British Values, the lack of curriculum development that draws on good practice across the remit limits pupils' potential to succeed across a wide enough range of subjects.
- The school manager's positive and developing leadership has ensured that staff are a cohesive team. Individuals value the challenge that they are offered and benefit from some of the training they receive. Not all aspects of this training are sufficiently well developed, so although teaching addresses the emotional and social needs of young people, teachers do not yet have high enough expectations of all aspects of their learning. As a result, young people do not achieve as well as they can.
- Pupils know that staff care about them, consider their well-being and plan to meet their emotional needs throughout the school day. They enjoy the good provision made for the development of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding. Pupils attend school regularly because their emotional, individual, social and learning needs are met well and they are well supported to develop self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Staff give thoughtful consideration to helping pupils prepare for their lives when they leave school. Pupils who are currently in Year 11 have received good support to find places at college or in appropriate post-16 settings. The guidance they receive provides young people with a well-supported journey towards adulthood.

Governance

- Governors do not have an accurate view of the performance of the school. They have been over reliant on what they are told and have not checked for themselves or monitored against the independent school standards over time. They have not made regular monitoring visits to ensure that they are kept up to date with developments and improvements.
- Quality assurance procedures are not ensuring that governors remain well informed and,

as a result, they are not able to challenge leaders robustly to ensure that information shared with them is accurate and up to date. Governors do not have a thorough enough understanding of the quality of teaching and do not ensure that the requirements for managing the performance of staff are met.

- Governors are aware of the successes of every pupil and celebrate their achievements, but they do not challenge leaders to ensure that every pupil is effectively supported to reach their potential.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well managed, fit for purpose and rigorous. This is especially important in ensuring that the young people who are taught off site or out in the community are safe. Risk assessments are thorough and include all aspects of any visit, trip or off-site learning opportunity.
- Records are detailed and of good quality. All safeguarding-related policies and procedures are in place and published on the school's website. In reality, staff management of safeguarding practice is better than the underpinning policy suggests. Pupils describe how staff show them how to keep themselves safe and 'don't just talk about it'.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and are kept safe by staff that 'like us'. This is especially important to some who say that they feel that they have not been liked by previous settings or have had poor experiences of other adults. Pupils say that there is little bullying in the school but that if they had any concerns they would report them and are confident that staff would act quickly to ensure that difficulties were managed.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the relevant suitability checks are made when new staff are employed. Staff undertake appropriate safeguarding training and leaders have ensured that 'designated lead' training is up to date. There have not been any complaints about the provision. Nevertheless, appropriate procedures are in place should any arise.
- The culture and ethos of enabling pupils to feel safe and to thrive is strong. All pupils contribute to the very apparent positive atmosphere which permeates the school. Staff plan thoughtfully to manage different combinations of pupils when new pupils arrive as they may have been out of education for some time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable. Teaching is not as good when it takes place in some of the different environments pupils are taught in, such as local libraries. This is because the quality of resources available to them is very limited. In some subjects, therefore, pupils do not fulfil their potential.
- The quality of the way teachers carefully track pupils' progress in English and mathematics is not matched in other subjects. It is emerging in analysing pupils' emotional and social development, but the lack of assessment in other subjects means teachers do not match learning to the abilities and understanding of pupils well enough.
- Teachers do not adapt learning activities to ensure that all pupils are well challenged. The weak overarching curriculum means that the range of pupils' learning is too limited.

- Entry to the school usually happens at other-than-normal transition points. Leaders and staff manage this well to make the changes pupils experience positive. They take into account the needs and likes of the young person as well as the negative impact of previous education failures on their self-esteem. For example, they visit the pupils at home to instil confidence. As a result, the vast majority of pupils' transitions into the school are successful.
- Where learning is stronger, pupils have exciting opportunities to use well-designed resources to develop their skills. They are encouraged to take part in learning which challenges their thinking while also taking account of their emotional needs and developing resilience. Where this happens, pupils are also more willing to take risks in their learning and are well supported when they make mistakes.
- Through their flexible approach to learning, staff have created a supportive environment. Pupils who have previously refused education, or have suffered significant disruption to learning, are now attending regularly and settling into a routine which is re-engaging them in learning.
- Staff use appropriate community-based or practical experiences to help pupils learn new skills or to develop their existing skills in new situations. One example is work experience placements, which develop communications skills and self-confidence. Young people engage appropriately with members of the public and with other members of staff. This strong work enables them to develop important life skills that they can use as they move on to the next phase of their education or training.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Wider learning opportunities are often used to best advantage. Sport is strongly promoted, with some pupils attending off-site activities such as Ninja classes and gym-based learning. Although this is at an early stage, it is enhancing many pupils' enjoyment of physical and outdoor learning, as well as developing their understanding of health and safety.
- Teachers and support staff work well with pupils to support all aspects of their social and emotional development. Many pupils had not attended school for some time prior to arriving at White Trees. Some pupils say that they have moved on from not attending their previous school at all to attending White Trees as much as they can. Pupils say that they are liked at this school and that is why they come. Pupils also say that the positive atmosphere means that they are not worried about getting things wrong. As a result, they become more confident and motivated learners.
- The school manager and all staff take an active interest in the opinions of young people. The school council minutes show that pupils are happy to share their concerns with those that they trust, confident in the knowledge that they will be dealt with well.
- All pupils have positive relationships with staff and through these they are able to communicate their needs and concerns effectively. Pupils are well educated on how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Pupils say that they can talk to any adult if

they are worried. As a result, pupils feel safe and are safe.

- Well-informed staff have engaged positively with outside agencies to ensure that careers guidance is independent and of sufficiently high quality to ensure that young people make good choices about the next steps in their pathway to adulthood.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Some pupils are developing the skills to enable them to self-regulate their behaviour. However, the management of behaviour is not consistent across the school or across subjects. It varies too much depending on where pupils are taught and the teacher's interpretation of expectations.
- The frequency of physical intervention is low and instances of poor behaviour decline as pupils spend more time at White Trees. New pupils often exhibit challenging behaviour during their early days. However, staff support them to overcome the difficulties that they face effectively.
- Staff record incidents of poor behaviour in detail through their 'Blue to Blue' records and are beginning to use these to check how well a pupil's behaviour is improving as well as identifying any particular points of difficulty. Support is effective because it is carefully matched to the analysis of the reasons for any poor behaviour.
- Risk assessments are in place to support all pupils. A personal log helps staff understand how to manage difficult situations. These plans identify triggers for any deterioration in behaviour and describe what help is needed and when. Thoughtfully, staff use this information to plan and assess the risks of difficult situations. As a result, pupils are given the best opportunity to develop self-control and are supported well in times of crisis.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The quality of assessment information and records of pupils' progress over time lack sufficient detail to ensure that pupils achieve all they can.
- Where assessment is weak, pupils are not effectively challenged. This is often in work environments outside of the main school and in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Staff are experienced in managing the needs of these very vulnerable young people. As a result of the support they receive, pupils make the best progress in social and emotional aspects of their learning. Consequently, they are better prepared for the next stage in their educational journey.
- Pupils follow a small range of externally accredited awards. These are appropriate courses for most pupils. However, there are currently not sufficient opportunities to broaden their areas of study to include subjects that engage them fully in their learning and equip them to pursue all the career options that they otherwise might.
- During the short period of time pupils are at the school, they make good progress in English and mathematics and develop confidence in themselves as learners.
- Leaders have established effective systems to support pupils' transition from school to college. Pupils are prepared for the world of work because of the quality of these systems

and the use of work placements to help them develop the skills that they will need for work.

School details

Unique reference number	140655
DfE registration number	919/6053
Inspection number	10043521

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	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Sure Care Residential
Chair	Emma Barr
Headteacher	Becky Verallo-Graves
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,000
Telephone number	01279 658 518
Website	www.whitetrees-school.com
Email address	becky.verallo-graves@whitetrees-school.com
Date of previous inspection	24 February 2015

Information about this school

- White Trees Independent School is a day special school providing for boys and girls who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school opened in February 2014 and moved to its current location in 2017.
- The school is registered to take up to 12 pupils in the age range of 11 to 16 years. Pupils often do not remain at the school for very long. This is as a result of placement during Year 11 or a change in their care placement.
- There are currently 12 students on the roll of the school, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- The school makes use of additional off-site locations regularly for daily teaching and physical education. The school has a transport plan.
- The school's vision is 'to provide a systemic approach by ensuring its pupils' physical, emotional and educational well-being is developed through a nurture-based curriculum'. It provides individualised weekly teaching programmes for each of its pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons carried out in different locations.
- Inspectors spoke informally with a number of pupils during lessons and at lunchtimes throughout the three days.
- They met with the school manager, deputy school manager and spoke to some staff and met with two of the school's governors. A third member of the governing body was spoken to by telephone.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of meetings, information on pupils' attainment and progress, and safeguarding documentation.
- The inspectors took account of responses to Ofsted's staff inspection questionnaire.
- The inspectors checked whether the school met all the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements.

Inspection team

Mary Rayner, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector

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