

# Howard House

Netherton Colliery, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 6BB

## Inspection dates

26–28 March 2019

| Overall effectiveness                        | Requires improvement |
|--|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Good                 |
| 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

- The proprietors and school leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. A policy and procedure for handling complaints have not been established.
- The proprietors and management board have not held school leaders to account rigorously for maintaining a good quality of education. As a result, teaching is not consistently good and learning has slowed. Pupils do not achieve well across a range of subjects.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not high enough. In mathematics, pupils' work lacks challenge.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Some subjects are not taught in enough depth.
- Staff do not receive the training they need to improve their teaching skills.
- Pupils do not use a range of punctuation, vocabulary and English grammar in their writing consistently enough.
- Middle leaders are new to their roles and have yet to develop the skills needed to lead their areas of responsibility fully effectively.

### The school has the following strengths

- Staff have a total commitment to do their best for their pupils. They build positive relationships which develop pupils' self-esteem.
- Leaders have created an environment where pupils feel supported and safe. Pupils are kept safe.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are given a high priority. Behaviour is managed consistently well.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They say that their children are well cared for and given excellent support.

### 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 the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good across all subjects by:
  - making sure expectations of what pupils can achieve are high
  - planning challenging learning activities in mathematics that closely match pupils' needs
  - developing pupils' use of vocabulary, English grammar and punctuation in their written work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that the management board challenges leaders and holds them to account for the progress pupils make and that all the independent school standards are met
  - developing the role of middle leaders
  - providing teachers with sufficient training opportunities to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - developing a broad and balanced curriculum that is taught in depth across all subjects.
- The school must meet the independent school standards as set out in the annex to this report.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, the school has been through a period of turbulence and considerable change in leadership and staffing. This has slowed improvement. As a result, teaching is not good and pupils are not making good enough progress. Proprietors and school leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The very small number of teachers in the school means they each have several areas of responsibility to lead. They are enthusiastic and keen to do well. However, they are new to their roles and have yet to develop the skills necessary to bring about good improvement.
- Staff receive regular support to understand pupils' emotional needs and matters regarding safeguarding. However, leaders have not ensured that they have been provided with the training they need to improve their teaching skills.
- Beyond the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the curriculum is underdeveloped. While pupils access a range of learning activities in core subjects, there is little coherence in other subjects to give pupils enough depth in their understanding.
- Pupils participate in a range of off-site physical education activities. This includes opportunities to undertake adventurous activities, such as walking, swimming and boxing. These activities develop pupils' social skills, while also promoting their physical development.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There is a strong ethos of tolerance and understanding of others' views and opinions. Pupils receive effective personal, social and health education, where topics such as lifestyle choices and life in modern Britain are discussed.
- Fundamental British values are promoted well. Pupils have regular opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures. Talks given by the local police help to ensure that pupils understand their responsibilities to society and have a good grasp of the law.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. However, leaders regularly survey parents to assess their views of the school. Parents are complimentary about the school and the care their children receive. One parent commented that her child 'has come on in leaps and bounds', while another felt that staff at the school 'do an amazing job'.
- Leaders ensure that all fire safety checks and risk assessments are carried out, including fire-extinguisher tests. Staff have received up-to-date training in emergency procedures, fire alerts and fire drills.

### Governance

- Over time, the proprietorial body has not established clear expectations about the quality of teaching, pupils' academic performance and for the effective running of the school. As a result, the progress that pupils are making is not good enough and the independent school standards concerning the manner in which complaints are handled are not met.

The proprietor has not ensured that a complaints procedure has been drawn up and is effectively implemented.

- Proprietors are realistic in their judgement about the school's effectiveness and are developing a management board in order to provide more effective support and challenge to school leaders. They have been proactive in seeking external support to help them with this and are close to establishing more effective systems to check on the efficiency of plans to improve the school's performance. However, systems to provide effective challenge and support to school leaders have not been implemented.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of providing a safe and secure environment in this school. Appropriate checks are made on staff before their appointment to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Safeguarding training is in place and staff understand their responsibilities in identifying safeguarding concerns.
- The school's safeguarding policy is current, comprehensive and available on the school's website. Staff sign a declaration to indicate they have read the safeguarding policy and the latest government guidelines on keeping children safe in education.
- Staff are vigilant and highly skilled in spotting signs of neglect and/or abuse and know exactly what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare or safety. Leaders carefully monitor and risk assess all pupils. Additional risk assessments are in place to ensure that pupils are always safe when on school premises and when participating on educational trips, visits and outdoor pursuits.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Teaching is improving, but it is not consistently good enough. Although pupils make progress, not all pupils make the progress they are capable of. This is because teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not high enough to build quickly on what pupils already know and can do.
- Pupils' workbooks show that they are not encouraged to make their writing more engaging to the reader by using interesting vocabulary, a range of English grammar techniques and appropriate punctuation.
- In mathematics, pupils are not being challenged sufficiently because they are completing work of little value and not moving on to more demanding work when they are ready.
- The teaching of subjects other than English, mathematics and science is inconsistent and, as a result, pupils' knowledge and skills are not developed well enough.
- Teachers generally use verbal questioning well. Typically, questions prompt pupils to think deeply and explain their understanding.
- The support for those who have the most complex social needs is a strength of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers exhibit endless patience and good skills to encourage these pupils to engage in their learning.

- Teaching assistants work alongside pupils well. They accurately judge when they need to give pupils an opportunity to work by themselves, and when there is a need to provide them with support.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Trust underpins the strong relationships that exist between staff and pupils. The good social skills modelled by staff permeate throughout the school. This helps pupils build their self-esteem and interact positively with others.
- Pupils value what the school provides for them and the positive relationships they have with teachers and other staff. When asked what he likes about the school, by the inspector, a pupil replied, 'What is there not to like?'
- Pupils become more confident learners over time because the staff offer them regular reassurance and support. Very low pupil numbers along with staff knowledge of each individual pupil ensure that pupils settle quickly to their learning.
- Pupils have an opportunity to go on a residential trip each year at an outdoor activity centre. During this week-long visit, pupils develop good individual and teamwork skills through activities such as kayaking, raft building and grass sledging.
- Charitable events demonstrate how pupils develop their thinking about social and moral issues. Recently, pupils raised money for a cancer charity.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff are trained thoroughly in how to manage pupils who have behavioural difficulties. Instances of challenging behaviour are managed well. Improvements in behaviour since the previous inspection have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of occasions where staff have needed to restrain pupils physically. Such occasions are now rare.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school. They know how to keep themselves safe through well-thought-out activities and workshops that raise awareness of knife crime, gangs and drug misuse.
- The very low numbers of pupils that the school has make it difficult to make meaningful conclusions about overall attendance figures. However, typically, attendance is improving. It often improves considerably when pupils join Howard House.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Requires improvement**

- Pupils often join the school with standards of attainment that are well below age-related expectations. Most pupils have large gaps in their prior learning because they have missed school due to their poor behaviour and attendance. Pupils make strong progress in their behavioural and emotional development, but progress is inconsistent in their academic subjects.

- Leaders assess pupils when they arrive at the school to see what they already know and can do. However, in mathematics, teachers do not always set work that is difficult enough to enable pupils to make good enough progress from their starting points. Similarly, pupils' written work shows that they do not use a wide enough range of vocabulary, English grammar and punctuation.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to develop their health and physical skills. The school uses a local sports venue for physical education.
- Staff prioritise supporting pupils to settle into school promptly and prepare them for learning. Pupils quickly gain in confidence. They develop their social skills through their interaction with others, which enables them to mix well and engage in learning.
- The dedication of staff enables pupils to regain a sense of direction, particularly with regard to their future plans. At the end of last year, most pupils successfully moved into employment, education or training. Some current pupils have been successful in gaining work placements in different areas, such as working with animals.

## School details

|                         |          |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 132855   |
| DfE registration number | 929/6046 |
| Inspection number       | 10083835 |

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                 | 10 to 18   |
| Gender of pupils                    | Mixed  |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 9  |
| Number of part-time pupils          | 0  |
| Proprietor                          | Angela O'Neil  |
| Chair                               | Angela O'Neil  |
| Headteacher                         | Lesley Brind (Operations Manager)  |
| Annual fees (day pupils)            | £29,300  |
| Telephone number                    | 01670 820320   |
| Website                             | <a href="http://www.howardhousecare.com">www.howardhousecare.com</a>           |
| Email address                       | <a href="mailto:school@howardhousecare.co.uk">school@howardhousecare.co.uk</a> |
| Date of previous inspection         | 1–3 November 2016  |

## Information about this school

- Howard House is a small independent school which is registered for up to 14 boys and girls from the age of 10 years to 18 years. There are currently nine pupils on roll. There are no pupils above Year 11. Consequently, there is no sixth-form provision. The school does not operate any alternative education provision.
- This independent special school provides education for pupils who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan for their special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- All pupils are of White British heritage.

- Pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education prior to joining Howard House.
- There is no headteacher currently in post. The school is overseen by the operations manager.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place over two and a half days.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by visiting lessons and reviewing pupils' work.
- The inspector held discussions with the operations manager, staff, the proprietors and a headteacher from a local school. A telephone interview was held with the external school improvement professional.
- Throughout the inspection, the inspector listened to the views of pupils about their work and about the school in general.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, at breaktimes and at lunchtimes and as they moved around the school. Records of incidents of misbehaviour were also checked.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils, information required as part of the independent school standards, and the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans.
- No parents completed the Ofsted online questionnaire or used the free-text service on Parent View. However, the inspector took account of the school's own survey of parents' views of the school and its provision.

## Inspection team

Alan Chaffey, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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

### **The school must meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled**

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which:
  - 33(e) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (d), establishes a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing;
  - 33(f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
  - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is:
    - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
    - 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
  - 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and:
    - 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
    - 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
  - 33(k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

#### **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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