

Inspection of Smallbrook School

Units 1–4, Sleaf Industrial Estate, Sleaf, Nr. Wem, Shropshire SY4 3HE

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 June 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Smallbrook School is a special place to learn. Leaders and the proprietor have set high aspirations for themselves, their staff and their pupils. All adults are committed to helping pupils to succeed. The vocational aspect of the curriculum is exceptionally successful in making these aims a reality.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and an education health and care (EHC) plan. Almost all have previously been out of education for a long time. Leaders make their school the best it can be for all pupils. All adults want pupils to achieve their very best and they consistently do. Pupils love their school, do well and now attend regularly.

Care, nurture and a sense of belonging permeate every aspect of the school. Leaders sharply focus on pupils' well-being. The curriculum to promote pupils' personal and character development is highly effective. As a result, pupils re-engage in their education and learn to trust again. Through the excellent extra-curricular offer, pupils learn valuable life skills and are exceptionally well prepared for life after school.

The school is a calm, positive and orderly environment. Lessons are free from disruption. The purposeful, supportive and positive relationships between staff and pupils are joyous.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school offers an exceptional curriculum which is designed in two parts. The first part is based fully on the National Curriculum. High ambitions and expectations of every pupil are commonplace. Pupils learn across the full range of subjects. They achieve very well and all gain qualifications appropriate to their levels and aptitudes.

The other part of the curriculum is the vocational and outdoor education, which all pupils have access to. This is where the magic happens. The school has developed a unique provision that pupils find engaging, exciting and inspiring. It includes a professional garage, exotic farm, a fully equipped gym and a bright and well-resourced beauty salon. Through the superb facilities on offer, every pupil has the chance to try something new, find their passion and to flourish. This curriculum ensures that pupils re-engage in education, want to attend school and ultimately find their purpose and passions in life. All pupils leave the school with accredited qualifications. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are thoroughly assessed and provided with excellent support. This includes assistance during regular classes as well as intervention sessions that are promptly arranged for those in need of extra help. Detailed information is shared with every adult so that they can support pupils effectively. Teachers skilfully adapt learning to meet these needs.

Therefore, pupils overcome their barriers to learning and achieve to the best of their ability.

The impact of the reading curriculum is excellent. Reading is a clear focus across the school. Almost all pupils join the school with significant gaps in reading knowledge and skills. Detailed assessments help to find pupils' starting points. Staff quickly put intervention in place, especially for pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Over time, pupils develop an enjoyment of reading for pleasure. There are daily story times in each class and pupils read interesting and engaging literature.

Pupils' behaviour is underpinned by excellent pastoral support and very positive relationships. The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct while at the same time having a very clear understanding of why pupils behave the way they do. Everyone understands the expectations and how to meet them. Staff spot immediately if a pupil shows signs of distress and act swiftly to mitigate this. As a result, incidents are often dealt with before they escalate.

The school's work to promote pupils' mental health and well-being is exceptional. This work includes a plethora of outdoor activities, which pupils keenly take part in. For example, pupils learn about empathy by taking care of animals, responsibility by tending to the school's garden and teamwork by safely going down water rapids together. Pupils learn about fundamental British values and healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. The school has ensured that the statutory guidance on relationships and sex education and health education is met.

The school prepares pupils very effectively for the world of work. All pupils receive bespoke and individualised careers advice and guidance. Staff go out of their way to ignite passions and interests and then support pupils on their pathways. In recent years, all pupils have left the school, moving on to appropriate destinations in education, training or employment.

All staff speak highly of the training and support they receive, including about their well-being and workload. They are proud to work at this school. Parents are unanimous in their praise for the school. All reported how the school has changed their child's life for the better.

Leaders and the proprietor set clear strategy, hold themselves and staff to account and meet their statutory obligations. They accurately identify the school's strengths and what needs to improve. They have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards in a systematic and consistent way. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 134000 |
| DfE registration number | 893/6026 |
| Local authority | Shropshire |
| Inspection number | 10322580 |
| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent special school |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 70 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Acorn Care and Education Ltd |
| Chair | Richard Power |
| Headteacher | Andrew Huxley |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £60,564 to £86,909 |
| Telephone number | 01939 233 042 |
| Website | www.smallbrookschoo.org.uk |
| Email address | sbsenquiries@smallbrookschoo.org.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 21 to 23 September 2021 |

Information about this school

- The school is a special independent day school registered for up to 95 pupils between the ages of 7 and 19.
- All pupils attending have social, emotional and mental health needs, and many have secondary needs. Almost all have an EHC plan.
- A large proportion of pupils have had traumatic past experiences. Around half of the pupils are in residential care or looked after.
- All pupils have been out of education for prolonged periods of time before joining this school.
- Pupils are referred to the school by many local authorities.
- Although four pupils at the school are of sixth-form age. The school currently does not offer a post-16 provision. Therefore, the sixth form has not been reported on.
- The school has its own clinical team on site, working to support pupils' mental health.
- The school does not have a religious ethos.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and other senior leaders. The lead inspector held a telephone meeting with the proprietor. A meeting was held with the company's regional director, who is also the chair of governors for the school. Meetings were held with curriculum leaders and other staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education and the school's vocational and outdoor education offer. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and interactions during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes and spoke to pupils during the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of parents' free-text comments and the responses on Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Bianka Zemke, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Niall Gallagher

Ofsted Inspector

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