

Inspection of Access School

Holbrook Villa Farm, Harmer Hill, Broughton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 3EW

Inspection dates: 5–7 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel truly valued by the staff. For many who previously struggled at school, starting at Access is a fresh start. Here, they are welcomed, cared for and feel safe. Most pupils enjoy coming to school. Greeted with a warm smile each morning, pupils are encouraged to take part in a range of purposeful activities to help them learn. Most pupils, who in the past would have refused to join in, show interest in their work and participate willingly. This is because teachers know pupils very well and usually plan suitable work.

Pupils understand that staff are determined to help them to manage their behaviour better, and on the whole, staff succeed in doing this. Bullying incidents do occur, but the school deals with these quickly to try to prevent them from happening again. Leaders place huge investment in pupils' personal development. Sometimes this is at the expense of ensuring that pupils make good academic progress. A few pupils will take themselves out of class and opt out of learning. Sometimes staff will allow this to happen without enough gentle encouragement to re-engage. When this happens, pupils do not achieve as well.

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

Leaders invest in making sure that the school meets pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. They do this well. At the heart of the curriculum is a therapeutic approach. This helps pupils to build their resilience and self-confidence. Staff help pupils to understand why education is important. The curriculum is broad and provides pupils with a wide range of experiences. Pupils gain an appropriate depth of knowledge in most subjects. However, leaders have not planned carefully enough for physical education (PE) in key stages 3 and 4. This limits pupils' ability to develop their physical skills and to participate well in sport.

Some curriculum subjects are better organised and planned than others. Teachers usually plan the order that concepts are taught so pupils can extend their knowledge. However, teachers do not consider well enough how learning in key stage 2 will prepare pupils for the key stage 3 curriculum. This means that pupils do not build upon their prior knowledge as effectively as they could.

Pupils' learning in mathematics is a strength. The well-designed mathematics curriculum is successfully delivered through effective teaching. In other subjects, leaders know where the curriculum does not build on what pupils already know. They are acting to put things right. Leaders have adapted the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme to make it even more suited to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils have a greater understanding and acceptance of others' differences, cultures and traditions.

Pupils' attitudes to reading are variable, and there are too many pupils who do not enjoy reading. This means that some do not read often or widely enough with good fluency and understanding. However, staff have embarked on a mission to make

reading more appealing. They have purchased new resources. They have encouraged reading through special events, such as celebrating World Book Day. These actions are beginning to make a positive difference.

Leaders enrich the curriculum through a range of trips and visitors. The weekly outdoor education day is popular with pupils. During this time, visits to places of historical interest and places of worship widen pupils' understanding of society's diverse culture. The school also offers a few extra-curricular activity clubs, including arts and crafts. Sports club has been offered this term, although there has not been any uptake. Teachers help pupils to think about the world of work and their future aspirations. They help them prepare for college or work. Careers guidance is good. Pupils undertake work experience to give them a flavour of jobs that they are interested in.

When pupils first arrive at the school, teachers use tests to check what pupils can do. They use this information to set work that is matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers keep an eye on pupils during lessons to make sure that they understand new content. They pick up quickly on any misconceptions and give pupils the support they need to help them achieve. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge well to explain tricky concepts to pupils. However, sometimes they do not consider the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans carefully enough when planning learning.

Almost without exception, highly supportive relationships exist between pupils and staff. Staff are thoroughly tuned into each pupil's emotional well-being. Some pupils can have extremely challenging behaviour as part of their special educational needs. But the learning of others is not usually affected by poor behaviour. This is because staff are good at spotting the triggers of unsettled behaviour. They intervene before it becomes problematic. Generally, the learning environment is calm and orderly. Most pupils get on with their work in lessons. But some staff do not have high enough expectations about pupils' presentation. A few pupils take little pride in their work.

The school is usually successful in improving attendance for pupils who previously spent minimal time at school. However, a few pupils choose to take themselves out of lessons. As a result, they do not learn as well, and further gaps form in their learning.

Without question, the headteacher wants the best for all pupils. She never gives up on those who are struggling to cope with school. Staff share this same commitment to supporting vulnerable pupils. The headteacher tries to be there for everyone. At times, she makes herself too available and does not spend enough time planning strategically. Sometimes leaders' action plans do not identify clearly enough what needs to be done to improve pupils' education.

The proprietor makes a positive difference to the school's provision. They ensure that the school is well resourced. The proprietor seeks external professional advice to get an independent view of leaders' work.

The school has a suitable accessibility plan. It complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The school meets all of the independent school standards.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand that keeping pupils safe is paramount. They do everything they can to prevent pupils from being harmed. The premises are clean, safe and secure. Staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures. They are vigilant and report any concerns to safeguarding leaders without delay. Record-keeping is thorough. The school works closely with other agencies to get the most appropriate support for pupils. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe through PSHE lessons. The school has published an appropriate safeguarding policy on its website. It has regard to the latest guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have not thought enough about how content in some subjects is sequenced when planning the curriculum. This is particularly the case for the transition between key stages 2 and 3. Some teachers in key stage 3 do not know what has been taught in key stage 2. This means that pupils do not develop their understanding as effectively as they might. Leaders need to ensure that concepts and ideas taught in one key stage prepare pupils well for making sense of new learning in later key stages. They need to amend curriculum plans accordingly.
- Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 do not benefit from a comprehensive, well-planned curriculum for PE. There are opportunities for physical development, such as hill walking in Lake Vyrnwy. However, teachers do not think about how pupils will develop their skills over time. Leaders need to ensure that secondary pupils experience a PE curriculum that helps them build their physical skills. It should also encourage them to experience and join in with sports, and to keep healthy.
- Teachers do not consistently use the objectives from pupils' EHC plans to inform their plans for learning. Leaders need to make sure that objectives in EHC plans are translated into practice through teachers' planning and lesson delivery. Teachers should do everything they can to encourage pupils to remain in lessons, so they benefit from teaching.
- Leaders know where there are weaknesses in the school's provision. But they do not invest enough time in thinking strategically about how to improve the curriculum to raise standards, for example pinpointing what needs to be done to address barriers to reading for pleasure. Leaders need to identify the specific actions needed to bring about positive change. The proprietor should ensure that leaders evaluate their work to see whether they are achieving the desired outcomes.
- Pupils do not consistently present some of their written work with care and

attention. Teachers should raise their expectations about pupils' presentation. They should, when appropriate, gently challenge pupils to do better.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	132772
DfE registration number	893/6096
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10103979
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	29
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Family Care Associates Group Ltd.
Headteacher	Sarah Earing
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,515
Telephone number	01939 220797
Website	www.family-care.co.uk
Email address	sarah.earing@family-care.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–15 September 2016

Information about this school

- The school had its last standard independent school inspection in September 2016.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, many of whom have experienced trauma. The school is part of Family Care Associates Limited. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not have a religious character or ethos.
- There were no key stage 1 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection.
- Access School is a small independent special school set in a rural location on the outskirts of Wem in Shropshire.

Information about this inspection

We 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.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator and a director from Family Care Associates Group Ltd.
- Subjects considered as part of this inspection were English, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education, and art. Inspectors carried out lesson visits to see these subjects being taught and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning. They spoke to teachers who taught these subjects and held discussions with subject leaders. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors took into account 19 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and five responses to the Ofsted pupil survey. There were insufficient responses to consider parents' views from Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors took into account the five free-text comments from parents.
- Inspectors talked to pupils to gather their views about school, pupils' behaviour, their safety and learning.
- Inspectors explored safeguarding arrangements by reviewing safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, talking to staff and pupils about how they keep safe, and checking the school's single central record. They met with the school's designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Tim Hill, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Catherine Crooks

Her Majesty's Inspector

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