

Inspection of White Trees Independent School

13a London Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 5NA

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Insufficient evidence
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

White Trees School provides pupils with a safe and nurturing environment. This is important. Many pupils have often had negative experiences of school. Staff work patiently to build positive and trusting relationships. They listen to their concerns and take time to help pupils get ready for their learning. Pupils respond to this well. They appreciate the encouragement and support they receive from staff. It helps to build their self-esteem and reignite their interest in education.

Pupils arrive each morning and are welcomed by adults. This provides a calm start to the day. There are times when pupils have greater difficulties at settling into school. Staff know how to turn this around. They use their knowledge of each pupil to help them to manage their behaviours. Staff never give up on any pupil and have high expectations of all. This means over time pupils' behaviour improves and their sense of self-worth increases.

Pupils take part in different outdoor activities. Many activities are new for pupils and help to broaden their horizons of what they can achieve. Adventurous sports such as paddle boarding and kayaking develops pupils' resilience. Looking after animals helps them to better understand about care and responsibility.

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

The school has designed a curriculum that responds to pupils' individual needs. The curriculum is driven by a clear vision, shared by a committed team. It carefully balances academic opportunity with support for pupils' social and emotional needs. A range of enrichment activities help to motivate and challenge pupils. Pupils receive the help they need to overcome barriers and re-engage into education. Pupils appreciate the way adults recognise and respond to their interests.

The plans for the curriculum have undergone recent change. The school's chosen approach makes use of 'steps'. The school has taken care to include information that pupils need to build secure foundations for new learning. Many pupils have missed significant periods out of school. This means that they have gaps in their understanding. Staff use the plans well to address these gaps. However, some plans are new. Not all staff have developed the expertise they need to deliver leaders' expectations well. On a few occasions activities are not appropriately adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils do not progress as well as they are capable of.

Reading is important at White Trees. There is a programme of phonics for any pupil at an early stage of reading. Pupils access high-quality texts as part of the planned English curriculum. Teachers use these texts skilfully to spark pupils' interests in reading. For example, pupils read aloud character parts from an adapted Shakespearean play. Books have been carefully selected so that they represent diversity and different cultures. As a result, pupils are reading more widely.

All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Adults receive detailed information especially where pupils have high levels of anxiety or low self-esteem. Personalised plans identify the strategies to help pupils learn and participate in education.

Some pupils struggle to attend school. Often this is because they have anxieties about coming to school. The school works hard to engage and make provision for these pupils. However, pupils' attendance can fluctuate through the year. This means they are missing out on the opportunities to learn.

Pupils' personal development is intrinsic to the ethos of the school. Opportunities help to develop pupil's interests to help build self-esteem and character. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme responds to the specific needs of pupils. Adults use it flexibly to help pupils learn about keeping safe and developing healthy relationships. Trips broaden pupils' experiences. Pupils gain vocational skills in construction or car wrapping. Careers guidance is well planned. Pupils receive one to one attention to help secure the next steps in their education.

Governors have a key role at the school. They make effective use of their different skills to check the work of the school. Robust questioning holds school leaders to account for the decisions they take. The proprietor has ensured that all the independent standards are met. The school complies with the 2010 Equality Act. All the school sites are well maintained. They provide a secure space essential for meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils. Staff appreciate the support the proprietor makes for their well-being, such as counselling services. However, a few staff consider there have been more demands on their time owing to staff turnover. The proprietor understands this and has been successful recruiting new staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Not all staff have secure subject knowledge to implement leaders newly devised plans effectively. They do not adapt the curriculum in a timely way to match learning to pupils' individual needs effectively. This means pupils do not make the progress they are capable of. Leaders should ensure that all teachers have the detailed knowledge of each subject they teach and guidance about how to adapt activities. This is to ensure pupils make the best progress possible.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This means that they are missing important aspects in their education and do not benefit from the wide range of opportunities and experiences staff provide. The school should continue to use its approaches and raise pupils' attendance.

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

Unique reference number	140655
DfE registration number	919/6053
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10321483
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	1
Number of part-time pupils	14
Proprietor	Emma Barr
Chair	Christina Wells
Headteacher	Laura Bull (Executive Headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,975 per term and £89,925 per year
Telephone number	01279 658518
Website	whitetrees-group.co.uk
Email address	info@whitetrees-group.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 November 2021

Information about this school

- White Trees Independent School provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. All pupils who attend the school have an education health and care plan (EHCP)
- The school makes use of an additional two sites. Woodlands is located in Little Hallingbury and Purley Farm which is located near Coggeshall in Essex.
- The school makes use of additional off-site locations for day to day teaching when pupils have difficulties attending school. The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.
- Inspection history:
 - On 18 December 2013, Ofsted carried out a pre-registration inspection.
 - On 24 February 2015, Ofsted carried out its first standard inspection of the school. The school was judged as good and met all the independent school standards.
 - On 5 November 2015, an emergency inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). This was following a complaint about behaviour and supervision of pupils. There were a number of unmet standards.
 - Following the emergency inspection, the DfE required the school to provide an action plan. The action plan was approved on 21 March 2016.
 - In June 2016, Ofsted carried out a progress monitoring inspection. All the independent standards that were checked during the inspection were met.
 - In November 2017, Ofsted conducted a material change inspection.
 - At the standard inspection in April 2018, inspectors judged the school as requiring improvement. Two independent school standards were not met.
 - The school's action plans were reviewed in September 2018 and 2019. Both plans were deemed not acceptable.
 - In May 2019, Ofsted carried out a progress monitoring inspection. All independent standards that were checked during the inspection were judged to be met. This inspection included an application to make a material change to its registration. The school was registered to take 16 pupils in the age range of 11 to 16 years. The request to extend the age range from 16 to 18 was granted in May 2019.
 - A material change inspection was carried out in July 2020. Two independent school standards were not met at this inspection.
 - An action plan was evaluated in March 2021. It was judged to be not acceptable.
 - At the standard inspection carried out in November 2021 the school was judged to be good and all the independent standards were met.

- A material change inspection was carried out in April 2022. The request to increase the number of pupils on the school roll from 24 to 38 was granted.
- A material change inspection was carried out in February 2023. The request to increase the number of pupils on the school roll was from 38 to 78 was granted.

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.

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

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the proprietor, the executive headteacher and senior leaders. The lead inspector also held a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and design and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, met with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- As part of evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders, governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. They considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including curriculum plans, policies and documentation for behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments submitted by parents during the inspection. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaires for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nathan Lowe

His Majesty's Inspector

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