

Inspection of The Holden School

Former St Peter's Infant School, Firs Lane, Leigh, Greater Manchester WN7 4SB

Inspection dates: 4–6 February 2020

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils appreciate the education that The Holden School provides. They told us that the school has helped them to get back into education. Most pupils now have much more positive attitudes to learning because of the school's work.

Pupils are fond of the staff. Staff help pupils to behave well for much of the time. Parents and carers are grateful that their children attend the school. They told us that their children have been happier and more settled since joining.

Pupils feel safe in school. Staff encourage pupils to be kind to each other. Some of the pupils are starting to become good friends with each other. Bullying is rare. Any incidents are dealt with by staff.

Staff are ambitious for all pupils. They expect pupils to concentrate and work hard, particularly in English and mathematics.

Pupils benefit from a range of activities that enhance their personal development. For example, pupils enjoyed a recent visit from a pair of owls and a trip to Knowsley Safari Park.

Pupils develop an understanding of how we are all different and special. They develop their knowledge of different religions by learning about celebrations such as Rosh Hashanah.

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

The proprietor and headteacher have ensured that the independent school standards are met. The school building was totally refurbished before the school opened in September 2019. The building is immaculate and reflects the high expectations that leaders have for pupils' education. The curriculum develops pupils' understanding of British values and encourages respect for different faiths and cultures.

The school's policies and practices make reasonable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have made sure that the promotion of pupils' welfare is central to the school's work.

The school has responded quickly to new pupils joining the school. By leaders' own admission, some aspects of the curriculum became ad hoc during the school's first term. This was because staff were trialling different ways to meet the needs of new pupils who joined the school. Leaders have quickly devised plans to tailor the curriculum more effectively to pupils' needs. Much of the curriculum is now building pupils' learning in a more coherent way.

Staff have made significant improvements to the teaching of reading. The school has effective systems in place to assess how well pupils can read when they join the

school. Some staff are knowledgeable and experienced in how to teach phonics. They match their teaching to pupils' needs so it builds on what they already know. This enables pupils to steadily read more letters and sounds.

The staff promote reading well. Pupils who are in the earlier stages of learning to read are given books that match their knowledge of phonics. Pupils who are more fluent read novels such as 'George's Marvellous Medicine' by Roald Dahl. Staff are skilled at encouraging reluctant readers to pick up a book.

The design and delivery of the mathematics curriculum has also improved. Staff now have a clear understanding of what pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it. They know how to cater for pupils' different needs within the same lessons. Teachers focus on building pupils' basic mathematical knowledge. This is filling gaps in pupils' knowledge and helping them to apply their understanding more fluently.

Leaders are less advanced in their plans to improve the curriculum in subjects beyond English and mathematics. However, leaders are in the process of planning what pupils should learn in other subjects and how new knowledge should be ordered and delivered. Plans are also in place to give teachers the support and training that they need to improve the design and delivery of different subject curriculums.

Pupils improve their behaviour when they join the school. This is because staff take the time to get to know pupils well. The school's routines are carefully planned. The staff carefully manage transitions between activities. This helps to keep pupils calm. It also helps to improve their well-being.

Staff are alert and attentive. They often de-escalate situations when pupils start to become anxious. However, staff are not routinely provided with the information that they need to meet the social and emotional needs of different pupils. There are times when this leads to pupils showing signs of distressed behaviour. This sometimes leads to pupils showing aggression towards themselves or others.

Most pupils attend well. This is because they enjoy coming to school. Pupils respond very positively to the rewards that they receive for regular attendance and showing a positive attitude to school. Pupils are keen to win enough points to go on the weekly reward trip to places such as the cinema or bowling alley.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to enhance their personal development. The school prioritises the promotion of pupils' physical health. Pupils take part in regular activities, such as swimming and football. The day is carefully planned to ensure that pupils eat well. The structure of the school day provides a balance between activity and relaxation.

The school is led and managed well. In a short time, the staff have won the confidence of parents. The staff have shown great teamwork to get the school up and running. Leaders are considerate of the well-being of their staff. The proprietor

has overseen the work of the school well. It has made sure that leaders have responded swiftly to the needs of new pupils.

The proprietor has made sure that the school complies with The Equality Act 2010 by setting out a clear accessibility plan.

Leaders intend to cater for pupils of up to 16 years of age at the school. The intention is that these pupils will be taught in an outbuilding. This is on the same site, but separate from the main building. This outbuilding is very well maintained like the rest of the premises. Leaders have appropriate plans in place for what these pupils will be taught.

Leaders have clear plans for how pupils receiving secondary education will receive up-to-date and impartial careers guidance. The school is likely to meet all of the independent school standards if it is registered to teach pupils from five to 16 years of age.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all appropriate checks on staff are carried out before they join the school. Staff receive regular training on matters relating to pupils' safety.

Staff are vigilant and report any concerns to leaders promptly. This enables leaders to take appropriate action to support pupils who are vulnerable.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations. For example, they learn about road safety. Staff manage risk well, both at the school and on trips and visits.

What does the school need to do to improve?

Information for the school and proprietor

- Staff have recently made significant improvements to the way that mathematics and reading are taught. However, leaders have not given enough thought to what pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it in other subjects, such as history. This limits pupils' wider learning. Leaders should therefore enact their plans to develop the curriculum for subjects other than English and mathematics.
- All staff are new to the school. They have taken part in a wide range of training that has enhanced their ability to care for pupils and manage pupils' behaviour. They have not yet received training that has improved their ability to develop the design and implementation of the curriculum. This contributes to the variability that exists in the delivery of different subjects. Leaders should therefore ensure

that staff receive specific training that will enable them to improve the design and delivery of the curriculum in different subjects.

- Almost all pupils have improved their behaviour and well-being since joining the school. However, there are still times when pupils exhibit distressed behaviours. Sometimes this leads to pupils needing to be restrained. Staff have received training on the general principles of de-escalation and how to use positive handling to restrain pupils safely. However, they do not routinely receive information on how to manage the behaviour of individual pupils. Leaders should therefore ensure that staff receive the information and guidance that they need to meet pupils' social and emotional needs.
- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to plan the upcoming curriculum and train staff in how to deliver it that they are in the process of bringing this about.

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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	146988
DfE registration number	359/6004
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10128835
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	James Joyce
Headteacher	Debbra Procter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,313 to £71,057
Telephone number	01942 932540
Website	www.theholdenschool.co.uk
Email address	info@acorncare.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2019.
- It caters for pupils who experience challenges in relation to their social, emotional and mental health.
- The school caters for pupils with SEND. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils have joined the school following considerable time out of formal education. Some have been electively home educated before joining the school.
- Most pupils have joined the school within the last three months.

- The school is located within Wigan, but pupils attend the school from a number of local authorities.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a material change to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve this change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

The outcomes of this part of the inspection is: The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.

- We met with: the headteacher; members of the governing body, including its chair who is also a representative of the proprietor; and a further representative of the proprietor.
- Mathematics, history, reading and personal, social, health and economic education were considered as part of the inspection. Inspection activities included discussions with those responsible for designing and delivering the curriculum, visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils about their learning. We also listened to pupils read and looked at pupils' work across the full curriculum.
- A tour was made of the school.
- We checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and the school's single central record. We met with leaders, staff and pupils to check how effective safeguarding is in the school.
- We spoke with a number of parents by telephone to seek their views. We also considered three comments that were made by parents via Ofsted's free-text service. Three parents completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.
- We considered five responses to Ofsted's survey for staff. There were no responses to the Ofsted survey for pupils.

- During the inspection, we met with groups of pupils and spoke with them informally at different times of the school day. We observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the day and at breaktime.
- We examined a range of documents. These included the school's policies, behaviour and attendance analyses and plans for the curriculum.
- As part of the inspection we considered the school's request for a material change. The school has requested a change to its registration status. It has requested a change in the age range it is registered to teach from five to 11, to five to 16.
- As part of the material change inspection, we spoke with leaders, toured the intended premises and scrutinised leaders' proposed curriculum plans. We looked at how leaders intend to fulfil the requirements of the independent school standards that relate to the provision of up-to-date careers guidance.

Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ian Hardman

Her Majesty's Inspector

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