

Inspection of The Holden School

Firs Lane, Leigh, Greater Manchester WN7 4SB

Inspection dates: 30 April to 2 May 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

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 comfortable, valued and safe at this school. Despite the significant challenges that pupils have faced in their lives before joining the school, they quickly settle when they get here. Pupils build trusting relationships with staff. Over time, pupils attend school more often than they did at their previous setting.

The school has high expectations of pupils' social and academic achievement. There is a strong, shared commitment to making sure that pupils achieve everything of which they are capable. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2, and children in the early years, make positive progress through the carefully adapted curriculum and learn well. Through thoughtfully designed learning pathways, older pupils take qualifications in subjects that match their aspirations and ambitions.

Pupils are supported to behave well. Staff help pupils to develop their ability to cope when feeling upset or angry. They spot any early signs that may suggest that pupils are struggling. They act swiftly to avoid pupils' frustrations from escalating. Typically, classrooms are purposeful and calm.

Pupils gain valuable experiences outside the classroom that support their social and physical development. For example, all primary-aged pupils regularly go swimming. Older pupils enjoy visiting the gym, cooking and coding. Pupils and their families value the school's social events, such as bingo nights and a school disco. This helps pupils to develop a sense of belonging and self-confidence.

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

The school has designed an ambitious and well-structured curriculum. It has ensured that what is taught meets the needs and aptitudes of pupils. This includes opportunities for pupils to pursue vocational awards and recognised qualifications.

Since the previous inspection, the school has thought carefully about what pupils need to know and remember. It has ordered this learning logically from the early years to key stage 5. In this way, pupils develop a secure understanding of key concepts over time.

When pupils join the school, a clear picture of pupils' starting points and additional therapeutic needs are swiftly identified. Teachers use effective assessment methods to establish what pupils already know and design learning to fill in any gaps that pupils have in their knowledge. However, in some subjects, including in the early years, sometimes the activities that teachers choose to deliver new learning do not help pupils to learn well. At times, some pupils cannot understand what teachers expect them to do and lose focus. As a result, the delivery of the curriculum is uneven and some pupils underachieve.

Every day, everyone spends time reading. This helps pupils to develop their vocabulary and spoken language. The school thoughtfully selects books that

complement pupils' therapeutic needs. For example, pupils read stories which allow them to engage in pertinent themes, such as living with autism and anxiety in a supportive way.

All staff are trained in how to teach the school's phonics programme. Reception children are taught phonics from when they first start at the school. This continues through key stage 1 with daily phonics lessons. Beyond key stage 1, a small number of pupils in key stages 2 to 4 continue the school's phonics programme to help them to become successful readers. However, some pupils do not learn to read well enough. This is because some staff do not select the most appropriate activities to deliver the phonics programme consistently well. This hinders some pupils' ability to read with fluency and accuracy.

The school has ensured that all staff have been expertly trained to recognise, support and manage pupils' specific SEND. Pupils value carefully tailored lessons which support their individual targets linked to their education, health and care (EHC) plans. They receive targeted support, when required, throughout the day.

Typically, pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. Staff skilfully provide support to a small number of pupils who need help to improve their behaviour. This enables these pupils to better manage their emotions. When pupils are upset, staff help to calm them down gently and in a positive way. This helps pupils to behave well and to concentrate on their learning.

Personal development is at the heart of the school's work. Through personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons, the school carefully considers the important life skills and knowledge that pupils will need for their future lives. Pupils learn about healthy and safe relationships, mental and physical health and online safety. They also find out about different faiths, cultures and perspectives. Additionally, there are opportunities for pupils to get involved in the local community. For example, pupils volunteer to litter pick and host charity coffee mornings.

Pupils receive timely advice and guidance which helps them to make informed choices about possible careers. This information helps them to decide appropriate next steps when they leave the school.

Staff feel well supported. The recent changes to leadership roles at the school have had a positive impact on their wellbeing and workload. For example, those new to teaching have appreciated being supported by more experienced teachers.

The proprietor body has an accurate understanding of the school's performance. It holds leaders to account effectively for the quality of education that pupils receive. The proprietor body has robust systems in place to ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met consistently and securely. The school completes risk assessments around any activities in which pupils engage, including when at alternative provision. The proprietor body has also ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some staff do not select the most appropriate activities to support the effective implementation of the phonics programme. This means that pupils, including older pupils who are weaker readers, are not consistently well supported to read with increasing accuracy, fluency and confidence. The school should ensure that staff choose activities which best suit the needs of pupils so that they deliver the phonics programme more effectively.
- In a small number of subjects, including in the early years, the delivery of the curriculum is uneven. Some teachers do not consistently choose effective pedagogical activities to ensure that pupils learn new knowledge as well as they should. This means that pupils' subject knowledge is not secure. The school should support teachers to design learning that closely reflects the intended curriculum.

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	146988
DfE registration number	359/6004
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10322510
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Acorn Education and Care Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	James Joyce
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,313 – £74,941
Telephone number	01942932540
Website	www.theholdenschool.co.uk
Email address	info@theholdenschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 to 6 February 2020

Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 4 to 6 February 2020. Subsequently, the school submitted a material change application to the Department for Education. This was an application to increase the number of pupils on roll and the opening of additional premises to accommodate the increase in the number of pupils.
- Since the school's material change inspection in November 2022, the school has opened additional premises at 78 Chapel St, Leigh, Wigan WN7 2PQ.
- The school caters for pupils with SEND. All pupils have an EHC plan. Pupils have a range of social, emotional and mental health needs, and some have autism.
- Most pupils have joined the school following considerable time out of formal education.
- The school is located within Wigan, but pupils attend the school from a number of local authorities.
- The school uses five unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.

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.

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

- 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 spoke with the chair of the proprietor body and the headteacher. They also spoke with other senior leaders, subject leaders and a representative of a local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and PSHE. They talked to leaders and staff about the curriculums in these subjects. They also talked to pupils about what they knew and remembered. They looked at pupils' work and visited lessons. An inspector also evaluated the curriculum in other subjects.
- 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 reviewed the school's policies and documentation related to pupils' welfare and their education. They talked with staff and pupils about pupils' personal development and pupils' behaviour and attitudes. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the standards. As part of these checks, an inspector toured the school's premises, accompanied by a school leader.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, as well as for Ofsted's online pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Kate Bowker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gil Bourgade

Ofsted Inspector

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