

Sheridan House School

Thetford Road, Northwold, Thetford Norfolk IP26 5LQ

Inspection dates

29–31 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The restructuring of the leadership team has allowed leaders to be more strategic and less operational in their approach to school improvement.
- Members of the governing body know the school's strengths and weaknesses and hold leaders to account well.
- Pupils are well cared for in the school and they are kept safe and secure. Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong.
- Pupils develop a range of essential life skills during their time at school, particularly the ability to work independently.
- Pupils' behaviour is sometimes challenging due to the nature of their special educational needs, but this is managed very well by staff.
- Effective teaching across a range of subjects enables pupils to make good progress from their often very low starting points.
- Different groups of pupils make similar progress, including those eligible for the pupil premium. However, there is currently no formalised strategy for spending the pupil premium.
- Pupils' progress in science in key stages 3 and 4 is slower than in other subjects.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress using a range of approaches. Although pupils have targets set, many achieve these too readily.
- Additional adults typically contribute well towards pupils' learning and progress. However, a few are not proactive enough in helping pupils learn.
- Pupils do not read widely enough and for pleasure.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is supplemented well through a range of off-site activities which pupils enjoy.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Parents, carers and staff support the school's vision and welcome the regular contact between them.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education after school and receive good-quality careers guidance.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards').

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure strong and sustained pupil progress by:
 - setting pupils targets which are more challenging than at present
 - ensuring that outcomes in science match those achieved in other subjects
 - making sure that additional adults in the classroom maximise their contribution towards pupils' learning
 - encouraging a love of reading.
- Produce a formalised strategy for spending the pupil premium which enables governors to monitor its use for impact on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have a clear vision for this school. This vision is shared by staff, parents and pupils alike. Leaders wish to provide pupils with a suitable education which enables them to function in modern British society and they achieve this goal very well.
- Leaders have established effective systems to monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school. The school's self-evaluation document accurately assesses the school's strengths and areas for development. The inspector's findings supported leaders' judgements of the school's effectiveness.
- The self-evaluation document links closely to the school development plan. This plan is regularly checked for progress and updated as and when necessary.
- Regular auditing against the requirements of the independent school standards ensures that all of these are met.
- The restructuring of the leadership team has helped the school to run more smoothly. This is because it allows the head of school and the recently appointed deputy headteacher to be more strategic. Together, the head of school and the senior leadership team have a secure understanding of the school's stronger features and they have drawn up suitable plans to address the weaker aspects of the provision.
- The management of teaching is effective. Systems to monitor the quality of teaching over time are becoming established and draw on a wide range of activities. These include: observations of learning; scrutiny of data; looking at work in pupils' books; and talking to pupils about their work.
- Since September 2018, the deputy headteacher has had oversight of teaching and learning. The revised approach to planning for learning through the school's 'FACE' strategy is improving the quality of teaching. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in incorporating the school's four key elements of 'feedback, adaptability, challenge and engagement' when planning for learning.
- The school's monitoring of the quality of teaching triggers appropriate support for those teachers whose teaching is not yet consistently good. Appropriate training is targeted towards weaker teaching through in-house and external courses. Leaders are prepared to take firm action when teaching does not improve as a result of this support.
- The carefully considered curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of pupils well. This is particularly important as pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. The curriculum is regularly reviewed for its impact on pupils' outcomes.
- The creation of transition groups for pupils in key stages 2 and 3 has proved to be effective. Pupils in these groups are exposed to fewer teachers and feel more secure in their learning.
- The addition of alternative provision, including visits to a local farm and riding horses at a nearby stables, enhances the learning experience of pupils. Pupils told the inspector they appreciate the benefits of this extra-curricular provision. The inspector also saw pupils enthusiastically preparing for their first ever dodge ball league tournament against pupils in a local mainstream school.

- Leaders make good use of the additional funding for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to ensure that they achieve positive outcomes.
- Pupil premium funding is used to diminish the differences between disadvantaged pupils and others. However, there is no formalised strategy for spending the pupil premium, which makes it difficult for governors to hold leaders to account for this aspect of the school's work and to monitor the impact of the funding.
- Parents who spoke to the inspector were positive about the work of the school. When talking about the impact of the school on their child, one parent, whose comment was typical of others, said: 'The school has totally transformed my child.'
- Communication with parents and carers is effective. This takes place through regular telephone calls home and detailed termly and end-of-year reports. These reports outline the gains made by pupils and what they need to do to maximise their potential.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils work well together in small groups, and take part in charitable activities to help those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils also demonstrate a good understanding of fundamental British values. They understand the importance of democracy and are keen to have a say in how the school is run through the voice of the school council.

Governance

- The increase in the number of governors to five has improved this aspect of leadership and management. The chair of the governing body described the previous arrangements for governance as 'too cosy'. This is no longer the case. There is a good range of skills among the governing body, which enables the governors to manage the school effectively and hold the school's leaders to account.
- The chair of the governing body makes sure that governors have a range of detailed information that covers all aspects of the provision, which they use well to discuss important issues and measure impact and progress.
- Governors ask challenging questions and test out for themselves the information they are provided by the head of school.
- Governors ensure that all statutory policies are reviewed and made available to interested parties.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a suitable safeguarding policy published on its website.
- Staff at the school have received all of the statutory guidance on the safeguarding of pupils. All staff in this school are trained to level 3, which demonstrates the importance the school places on safeguarding in a school which caters for pupils who are particularly vulnerable.
- Staff know the procedures for raising a concern about pupils. The safeguarding policy is implemented effectively.
- Records of confidential documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils are securely stored, well maintained and contain detailed information on the involvement of external

agencies, as well as whether a case was resolved to the school's satisfaction.

- Pupils are well supervised during breaktimes, lunchtimes and when they are out of school on school excursions.
- Arrangements to meet the requirements of the Fire Safety Order (2005) are robust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. They plan for learning using a variety of resources and materials to maintain pupils' interests.
- Questioning is used well to test for understanding and to rectify any misconceptions pupils may have about what they are learning. Teachers often relate the current learning to skills or knowledge that pupils have acquired earlier on. This enables pupils to build on their skills and to put what they are learning into context.
- Teachers use their training appropriately to manage pupils' behaviour, which can sometimes be challenging. Staff form positive relationships with pupils in teaching groups which are small in size. They skilfully recognise signs of when pupils are likely to become anxious about their learning and adapt lessons in order to keep pupils engaged.
- Teachers inform their planning based on information they hold on pupils through detailed education, health and care plans and personal education plans. This planning takes account of pupils' different starting points to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- The teaching of reading, writing and numeracy is covered across a range of subjects. Although teachers emphasise the importance of reading, not enough pupils read widely enough and for pleasure. Pupils are encouraged to write neatly and to meet their teachers' high standards for the presentation of their work.
- There are a large number of learning support assistants in the school. Some of these have a greater impact on pupils' learning than others. While most are proactive in helping pupils to understand what they are being taught, a few require further guidance on how to support the pupils in their care.
- Where additional adults are effective, they really make a difference. The inspector observed two learning support assistants take the lead and start a key stage 3 food lesson. Teaching pupils about healthy eating, they clearly explained the difference between baked and fried crisps. They required pupils to note their thoughts in writing and allowed pupils to take risks when cooking meat and vegetarian sausages on an electric hob. By the end of the lesson, pupils clearly understood how to interpret healthy eating information on food packaging and to make wise decisions about what constitutes healthy food.
- Teachers assess pupils' understanding and progress through the use of a number of 'I can' statements created by the school for every subject. Targets are set for pupils based on a points system, taking account of the number of learning objectives they achieve over a term. While this system is a clear indicator of progress, too many pupils exceed these targets at present. Targets are not sufficiently challenging and limit the potential for more pupils to make substantial and sustained progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders maintain detailed risk assessments for the day-to-day running of the school and activities which are organised outside of school. Leaders will not release the keys for the school's people carriers to take pupils off-site until staff have completed a proforma that anticipates all types of risk. Seating plans are also insisted upon when using the school's transport facilities to ensure that pupils are suitably supervised.
- Given the complex nature of many pupils' personal, social and mental health needs, the small classes are a key factor in ensuring pupils' well-being. Pupils told the inspector they like these classes as it removes any anxieties they may have. When starting the school, pupils join one of the nurture classes, which helps them to settle down with their learning. When pupils are not ready to move up to the next key stage, they join a transition group until they are ready to do so.
- Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe in the school, and that the school does its best to keep them safe. The school's recently introduced policy of handing in mobile phones on arrival at the school means that pupils are not distracted during the day or placed at risk through the use of social networking sites. E-safety is taught well and understood by pupils.
- Pupils are known as individuals and their well-being is important to staff as much as their academic progress. Pupils are regularly discussed at staff meetings and their social and emotional development is regularly evaluated. For example, staff are made aware if a particular pupil has experienced difficulties before coming to school so that teachers are prepared to respond to unpredictable behaviours.
- The school employs the services of a number of experts to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils. Leaders' review of education, health and care plans triggers access to a music therapist, a play therapist, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist or a clinical psychologist. All of these services promote pupils' personal development and well-being effectively.
- Good-quality careers education is delivered to pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Pupils are encouraged to explore a range of pathways and the school works with them to ensure that they make the right choices. Pupils in Year 11 who met with the inspector had a clear idea of what they wanted to do when they leave school at the end of the year. Leaders work hard to give pupils a taste of the world of work by arranging work placements which correspond with pupils' interests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The high level of need of some pupils when they join the school means that some can present unpredictable and challenging behaviour. Pupils respond well to teaching which sustains their interest and staff are skilled at de-escalating potentially poor behaviour.
- Behaviour in lessons is typically calm because teachers and other adults are well informed of pupils' individual needs through daily meetings, education, health and care plans and

other documentation. They deploy a range of appropriate strategies to meet these needs so that learning can progress smoothly.

- Teachers will not accept any derogatory comments pupils may make to one another. They make clear their high expectations of what is acceptable and quickly challenge any pupil whose behaviour falls below these expectations. Pupils are rightly encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and on the impact it might have on their classmates.
- Bullying is not tolerated in the school. On the rare occasions when bullying occurs, pupils know to report this to an adult and are confident that it will be dealt with. They have a good understanding of the different forms bullying can take. They are very accepting of each other's differences.
- Pupils have typically had a history of poor attendance at their previous school. Regular attendance is encouraged and rewarded by staff at the school. The school presented some impressive case studies of pupils whose attendance has notably improved since joining the school. For example, one pupil had an attendance rate of 12% at their previous provider and this has risen to 89% at Sheridan House School.
- The school maintains up-to-date attendance and admissions registers. Leaders are able to account for the destinations of pupils when they leave the school.
- Records show that behavioural incidents tend to spike at the start of the year. However, once pupils settle into the school and their routines become established, the number of behavioural incidents fall.
- Leaders are prepared to use fixed-period exclusions when all other support mechanisms have been exhausted. The number of pupils who receive repeat exclusions continues to fall. This is evidence that the school's efforts to modify pupils' behaviour is reaping rewards.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress from their often very low starting points. Poor attendance and previously disrupted education mean they arrive at the school with significant gaps in their acquisition of key skills and their knowledge and understanding. Leaders assess pupils' knowledge and skills on entry in order to plan programmes which enable them to make progress.
- As pupils progress through the school, the school's support mechanisms develop their confidence and their ability to work more independently. Pupils' self-esteem clearly improves the longer they are at the school.
- Pupils in key stage 2 make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The primary model which leaders adopt to deliver lessons means that pupils get to know their class teacher well and the class teachers understand the academic and emotional needs of the pupils in their class.
- As pupils move through key stage 3 into key stage 4, they continue to develop their literacy, numeracy and communication skills which places them in a secure position to access the range of qualifications on offer.
- There is little difference between the progress made by different groups of pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their non-disadvantaged

classmates.

- Pupils have access to a range of external accreditations, including entry level certificates and GCSEs.
- There is now a purpose-built science laboratory which is reasonably equipped. The school's own data on pupils' achievement in science shows that pupils in key stages 3 and 4 make slower progress in this subject than in other subjects.
- Pupils in Years 5 to 11 who benefit from alternative provision attend regularly, achieve well and are kept safe. Staff escort pupils to these providers and witness pupils' growth in confidence and a strong development of their self-esteem and ability to work individually or as a member of a team.
- The inspector's scrutiny of pupils' work across a range of subjects as well as the school's own information on pupils' progress confirm that the overall progress made by current pupils continues to be good, taking account of their starting points. However, in some cases, progress is not rapid and sustainable because targets given to pupils are too easy to achieve.
- Transition to further education or employment is smooth and effective due to the good-quality guidance and support pupils are given. Last year, there were no pupils who were not in education, employment or training after having left the school.

School details

Unique reference number	121246
DfE registration number	926/6133
Inspection number	10056557

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

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Simon Coles
Chair	Michelle Smith
Head of School	Paul Sanderson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,820
Telephone number	01366 726040
Website	www.priorygroup.com
Email address	sheridanschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	24–26 May 2016

Information about this school

- Sheridan House School is part of the Priory Group's education provision. The school is a specialist therapeutic school for boys and girls aged eight to 19 located in rural Norfolk.
- The pupils have complex needs which include social, emotional and mental health difficulties. An increasing number of pupils also have additional needs, including autism, post-traumatic stress disorder or attachment disorder.
- There are 63 pupils on roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan. Pupils are placed by local authorities in the east of England. All pupils are at risk of exclusion or have been excluded permanently from their mainstream schools and/or maintained

special schools. Some pupils travel long distances to attend the school.

- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few girls. The majority of pupils are in key stage 3. Many pupils are entitled to additional funding through the pupil premium.
- The school makes use of alternative provision, including: Brambles Care Farm; Open Road Training; and Eden Meadows Stables.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was a standard inspection commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). The school's previous inspection was in May 2016 when it was judged to be good.
- The inspector observed learning across all year groups, accompanied by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work across a wide range of subjects.
- Meetings were held with the head of school, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, four governors, and a group of members of staff.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's self-evaluation summary document; school improvement planning documentation; policies; information on pupils' outcomes; records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and information on pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.
- The inspector spoke with pupils in lessons and also met with a group of four pupils.
- There were five responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and five free-text responses. The inspector spoke to four parents on the telephone.
- The inspector took account of the 29 responses from staff to the online survey. There were insufficient responses to the online pupil survey for scrutiny.

Inspection team

John Daniell, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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