

Inspection of Sandwell Learning Centre

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 March 2022

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 grow in confidence and make friends at this school. They enjoy physical activities such as bushcraft and football in the extensive grounds. Pupils are kept safe because they are supervised well. They form strong professional relationships with adults in the school, including their key workers, so that they have someone to talk to about any concerns.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and all that they will achieve. Pupils were polite and respectful to inspectors, reflecting maturely on their experience of school. Pupils receive lots of support so that their behaviour and attendance improve. On occasions when pupils have difficulty managing their behaviour, staff are swift to help them to make the right choices. Staff are alert to any bullying and work closely with pupils to resolve any fallings out.

Teaching, support and clinical staff get to know pupils very well. They encourage pupils to learn more about subjects that spark their interests and gain knowledge and skills that are useful to them in everyday life. Pupils have opportunities to discover and develop their talents, for example in art, music and cookery. Pupils typically have the view that, at the school there are 'a lot of fun things and learning as well'.

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

Pupils have the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects. Subject leaders have thought carefully about the key facts and understanding that they want pupils to develop over time. They ensure that subject content matches the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum, while adapting teaching to meet the needs of each pupil.

Staff work with health and social care professionals to ensure that everything is in place to meet each pupil's needs. Leaders have rigorous systems to assess pupils' starting points and to check regularly how they are doing. The clinical team works with teachers to identify strategies and resources to help pupils settle in school, to become motivated and achieve well.

Leaders have a clear intention that the curriculum offer for each pupil is fully personalised to their specific interests, strengths and areas to develop. For a few pupils, this is in the early stages of becoming established as they receive extensive support to adjust to the new routines and life in school.

Leaders place great importance on developing pupils' reading skills. Leaders have launched a new scheme to support pupils who need the most help with early reading. Staff have received training so that they identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and support them to catch up. Staff make sure pupils read books that interest them while enabling them to practice the sounds they have learned. Pupils develop an

interest in reading, becoming more confident to read independently and choose books from the well-stocked library.

Pupils develop positive attitudes to their education and experience of school. Leaders' meticulous tracking of behaviour incidents leads to pupils getting the right support to overcome barriers to their learning. Staff promote good manners and have consistently high and clear expectations so that pupils' behaviour improves.

There are well-planned programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education. Age-appropriate coverage of themes including healthy relationships and different family structures build over time. Leaders ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to consider issues like concepts of right and wrong and the impact of their actions on others and the environment.

Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities. All pupils have contributed to the work of the student council, making recommendations to leaders about aspects of school life. New rewards initiatives and changes to the school menu have been introduced because of pupils' ideas.

Leaders identify what pupils need to be ready for their next steps when they leave school. Pupils receive careers advice and guidance and do work experience relevant to their career aspirations. Staff work continually on boosting pupils' confidence and resilience. They run well-considered activities to develop pupils' social skills.

Staff ensure that pupils make the most of the school's rural setting, with outdoor pursuits in the woodlands and tending the vegetable gardens. Pupils have started visiting a nearby centre for pastimes like wall climbing. Leaders are extending the opportunities for pupils to take part in activities in the local community and beyond to further enrich pupils' learning in different subjects.

The proprietor maintains a close eye on the work of the school. The school board, representing the proprietor, has an accurate view of the strengths and priorities for development. There are strong systems to check the quality of procedures, for example for health and safety, and curriculum provision. This ensures that the independent school standards are met and the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Leaders provide initiatives to support staff mental health and well-being. Staff appreciate the daily debrief sessions when they can share and resolve any concerns. Some staff are worried about their workload and this has a negative effect on their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable about up-to-date safeguarding requirements and ensure that staff are alert to safeguarding risks to pupils. Leaders ensure that staff are

suitably trained and provide regular updates about specific challenges pupils might face.

Staff know the school's referral systems. Leaders follow appropriate processes when concerns are raised, including regular communications with local authorities.

Key aspects of the curriculum help pupils to recognise and avoid risks to their own and others' safety. High levels of supervision and pupils' positive relationships with staff mean that pupils have trusted adults to turn to with any concerns.

The school's child protection policy is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- A few pupils are in the early stages of accessing the school's full curriculum offer. Leaders should continue their work to develop provision for each pupil so that all pupils access a wide-ranging curriculum that is tailored to their specific needs and aspirations.
- Some staff have concerns about their workload and that this has an impact on their well-being. Leaders should review the uptake and impact of their procedures for supporting staff well-being to ensure that staff concerns are considered and resolved.

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.

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	148112
DfE registration number	931/6024
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10214667
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	8
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Fabia Cipolat
Headteacher	Chris Williams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£94,531
Telephone number	01855 509150
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/our-locations/integrated-therapeutic-provision-learning-centre/sandwell-learning-centre/
Email address	chris.williams@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school offers specialised provision for up to 15 pupils aged eight to 19 years. Pupils have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils currently on roll have been placed by local authorities. Most have education, health and care plans.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has left the school. A regional director of the proprietor group has taken up the role of acting headteacher and a head of school has been appointed.
- The school uses alternative provision at Trax, Oxford OX2 8JR.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with school leaders, including the acting headteacher, the head of school, the group health and safety leader, and the proprietor's representative. They also held meetings with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science and PSHE. This included meeting with subject leaders, visiting lessons, meetings with staff, discussions with pupils and looking at pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the school's curriculum in other subjects, including mathematics, history, geography, religious education, art and English.
- An inspector toured the school site accompanied by school leaders to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspection of safeguarding included meeting with school leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, speaking with staff and pupils, and a review of safeguarding records, including the register of pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including those relating to health, welfare and safety, risk assessments, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and improvement planning.
- Inspectors considered the responses to surveys completed by staff and parents and carers. There were no responses to the pupils' survey.

Inspection team

Amanda Carter-Fraser, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

James Broadbridge

Her Majesty's Inspector

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