

# Inspection of Blue Mountain Education

Willow Farm, Off Newton Lane, Ilkeston, Cossall, Nottinghamshire NG16 2SD

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Inspection dates: 15 to 17 March 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Staff provide education and care to meet individual pupils' needs well. They take time to get to know each pupil personally. They provide precisely planned support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This includes pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Staff cater well for pupils who have spent long periods of time out of education and have experienced significant difficulties in their lives. Staff are skilled in the way in which they support and nurture pupils. Pupils are made to feel welcome in the school environment. They develop trusting relationships with staff. Staff help pupils to become interested in education again.

There are high expectations for pupils. Staff expect pupils to behave well and they do. Bullying is very rare. Pupils say that they enjoy their time in school. They say they feel safe here. Staff deal swiftly with any incidents of poor behaviour. They help pupils to understand and manage their behaviour.

Pupils enjoy visiting the school farm. They learn how to care for the rabbits, donkeys and goats. They learn to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers. These opportunities help to reduce pupils' anxiety. They learn essential skills which serve to support the development of their mental and physical health.

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

The school is small and friendly. Each pupil has their own curriculum, personalised to their interests and linked to the targets in their personal education plan. Those pupils with SEND who also have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, have their curriculum linked to the outcomes in their EHC plans. Staff work with pupils on an individual basis to create broad and ambitious curriculum pathways. Pupils gain qualifications and awards in a range of subjects.

Curriculum subjects often follow recognised accredited schemes of work. These schemes help pupils to build their knowledge over time. Staff have good subject knowledge. They work one to one with pupils in lessons. They help pupils to be resilient and develop their self-esteem. They use creative strategies to help pupils learn essential knowledge through topics they enjoy. For example, pupils develop their computing skills while learning about diversity in society.

Staff know pupils well. They have a thorough understanding of the academic and personal progress pupils make. Staff check often what pupils know and can remember. They are flexible in their approach. Pupils appreciate being able to take short breaks during lessons. They enjoy using a variety of resources to support their understanding. These strategies help to keep pupils engaged in their learning.

Leaders prioritise reading. Many pupils arrive at the school unwilling to read. Staff encourage pupils to read for different purposes. They use a wide variety of genres related to pupils' interests. Pupils enjoy discussing different texts. Where appropriate, pupils study literature to GCSE level. While staff assess how well pupils can read when they first arrive at the school, there is no appropriate phonics programme in place to help pupils who may be at the early stages of learning to read.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' life skills and independence. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn respect for protected characteristics. They discuss and debate issues of national and international importance, such as the current crisis in Ukraine. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of relationships, sex and health education. The Beliefs and Values scheme of work is tailored to suit pupils' needs. Through this scheme, pupils learn about different cultures and beliefs and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Staff support pupils to prepare for their next steps. In addition to academic courses, pupils can access vocational studies such as car maintenance, engineering and rock climbing. A suitable programme is in place to teach pupils about their options for future careers. Pupils receive independent advice and guidance about further education, employment and training.

There are positive relationships between staff and pupils. Staff help pupils to manage their behaviour and develop their strength of character. They ensure that most pupils attend school well. Where some pupils struggle to attend, staff go to the care homes to deliver lessons. Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel valued by leaders. Leaders are considerate of their workload. Staff have time and support to manage their workload. There is effective teamwork between education and care staff to meet pupils' needs.

The proprietor has recently restructured the leadership of the school. This is to prepare for the continued growth of the company that oversees the running of the school. Leaders are in the process of redistributing leadership roles and responsibilities across the different education sites. However, this work is in the early stages of development. Leaders recognise that there are inconsistencies in some teaching and behaviour management strategies.

The proprietor has a good understanding of the context of the school. He ensures that all the independent school standards are met. School policies and procedures reflect the latest statutory guidance. The proprietor makes sure that the school sites are safe and in good condition. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor ensures that all staff understand their responsibility to safeguard children. Staff know the procedure to follow should they have any concerns about pupils' welfare. They know what to do if they are concerned about the conduct of an adult. Staff continually check on pupils' well-being. They teach them how to keep safe, including when online.

Staff work closely with care home colleagues to share safeguarding information about pupils. Records for safeguarding are detailed. The proprietor and directors keep a close eye on safeguarding arrangements. Leaders take swift action to follow up concerns. They involve external agencies when necessary.

The school's safeguarding policy, which reflects the latest guidance, is available on request.

## **What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Leaders have recognised that they do not have an effective phonics programme in place. This means that some pupils cannot develop the knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers. Leaders should ensure that a systematic, synthetic phonics programme is implemented and that staff have the knowledge and skills to teach phonics. This will enable pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read to receive the support they need to become confident readers.
- Blue Mountain Homes is a growing company. The proprietor has restructured the leadership and management of the school to prepare for the changes ahead. New systems and processes are improving the quality and consistency of education. However, this work is in the early stages. Some teaching and behaviour management strategies are not yet embedded across all school sites. Leaders should ensure that key staff across the school sites have the necessary knowledge and skills to support senior leaders in the consistent implementation of their improvement work.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131536
<b>DfE registration number</b>	891/6026
<b>Local authority</b>	Nottinghamshire County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	10124545
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	8 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	11
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Pradeep Manaktala
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alison Widdowson
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£28,600
<b>Telephone number</b>	01332 366337
<b>Email address</b>	alison.widdowson@bluemountain-homes.co.uk
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	20 and 21 June 2017

## Information about this school

- An acting headteacher was appointed in September 2021.
- The school operates across three sites. These are Willow Farm, Toll House and Bluebell House at New Ollerton. There are currently no pupils educated at the Bluebell House site.
- The school proposes to provide education at an additional site, Holly House, in Derby. Currently, no pupils are educated at this premises.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider and one registered alternative provider.

## 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 held meetings with the acting headteacher, the care director for the company that oversees the running of the school, the operations director for the company and several members of staff. Inspectors spoke on the telephone with some parents and carers. They also met with some pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into individual pupils' personalised curriculum. Inspectors looked at pupils' curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to some pupils reading in their lessons.
- Inspectors discussed with leaders and staff the school's approach to safeguarding pupils. Inspectors checked the single central record and reviewed records relating to behaviour, first aid and safeguarding. Checks were made on staff training and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors telephoned the alternative providers the school currently uses.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation and policies, including those relating to school improvement, curriculum, health and safety, and attendance and behaviour. The lead inspector toured each of the school sites.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys.

### **The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils and its premises, by operating from an additional site.**

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

- The outcome 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.**

- The independent school standards in Part 3 that relate to safeguarding, health and safety, fire safety and risk assessment are likely to be met should the DfE approve the material change application. The same policies and procedures leaders currently use will apply to the new site. The proprietor has robust safeguarding arrangements in place. Leaders deal swiftly with any health-and-safety concerns. There is an appropriate risk-assessment policy and procedure. Risk assessments, including those for pupils, identify potential risks and strategies to mitigate against them. Suitable measures are in place to supervise pupils.
- Part 4 of the independent school standards is likely to be met. The necessary checks are carried out on staff. Leaders keep a single central record to record the checks carried out on staff, directors and the proprietor.
- Part 5 of the independent school standards is likely to be met. The proprietor has ensured that the school can accommodate the proposed increase in pupils safely across the school sites.
- Part 8 of the independent school standards is likely to be met. This is because leaders have ensured that all standards are met currently. The same policies and procedures will apply if the material change is approved by the DfE.

### **Information about the material change inspection**

- The DfE commissioned a material change to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the school's application to make material changes to its provision. These changes are to increase the maximum number of pupils the school is registered to provide education for to 15, and to operate from an additional premises, Holly House, in the centre of Derby.
- The DfE commissioned the inspectors to check the school's continued compliance against standards in Parts 3, 4, 5 and 8.
- The lead inspector met with the operations director and the care director for Blue Mountain Homes, the acting headteacher and the unit leader for Holly House. She also met with several members of staff and leaders for safeguarding. She toured the proposed additional school site with leaders.
- The lead inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, risk assessments and health and safety.
- The lead inspector checked the school's procedures for recruitment and scrutinised the school's single central record.

### **Inspection team**

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Lowther

Ofsted Inspector

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