

Inspection of Blue Mountain Education

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

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 December 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are well cared for at Blue Mountain Education. Staff take time to get to know each pupil. They support pupils to develop their strengths and work with them to face the aspects of school life they find challenging. The school's core purpose is to put the needs of pupils first and help them to experience success.

Typically, prior to joining the school, pupils have had a negative view of education. They will not have attended school for some time. Once at Blue Mountain, pupils are able to develop a 'can do' attitude to school and try hard. Their behaviour improves over time because they are given the help they need to manage their feelings. Pupils regard the school as a safe place. Their confidence and self-belief improve because they feel welcomed and accepted.

The school has high expectations for pupils' academic achievement and social development. Its long-term goal is that pupils will leave the school well prepared for their future lives. Pupils gain important new knowledge and are supported well to understand that they need to consider others' viewpoints.

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

The school's curriculum has been crafted with care. It is a bespoke offer, designed with pupils' individual needs and personal interests in mind. Literacy and numeracy skills are prioritised to ensure that pupils secure firm foundations for further learning. Pupils also study a broad range of subjects that support them to develop their knowledge of science, the humanities, technology, physical and mental health, and the creative arts. Pupils are provided with interesting activities that help them to progress through the curriculum. For example, in a history unit on 'crime and punishment' pupils completed a murder mystery, acted out a court case and role-played interviewing suspects. Pupils in post-16 education study courses that prepare them well for adult life after school. This includes building a home, relating to people, being healthy, starting their career and managing money. Pupils achieve well and have opportunities to gain a range of qualifications and awards.

When pupils first join the school, they have significant gaps in their knowledge. Staff methodically check what pupils know. They plan the curriculum to address missing knowledge. Units of work set out precisely what pupils will learn and sequence knowledge in a logical order. These strategies help pupils to gain new knowledge and deepen their understanding.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school completes individual education plans that set out pupils' long-term targets as well as the small steps they need to make to achieve their goals. These plans are used well to provide the right support for pupils and to help them to achieve well and experience success.

Pupils' personal development is at the core of the school's work. This work is underpinned by the personal, social and health education curriculum. Pupils cover a wide range of topics. They receive drugs education and learn how to respond to peer pressure in order to avoid potentially risky situations. Units of work are chosen based on pupils' needs. Staff track what pupils have covered to ensure that no key learning is missed.

Pupils are encouraged to think about future careers based on their interests. They can access a broad range of information and advice that helps them to consider the options open to them. Pupils have a wide range of experiences that give them a chance to develop their own interests and talents, including, for example, cookery, gardening and sports. They have regular opportunities for off-site visits. Each of these has a clear purpose and supports the school's work to develop pupils' character.

The school recognises the importance of reading. Pupils who are not fluent readers receive phonics lessons. Staff are skilful. They work with determination to support pupils to acquire the sounds they need to know to read. They persist when pupils are reluctant to complete this work. While pupils' reading skills improve, many are reluctant readers and a very small number read for their own enjoyment. The school recognises that it has not strategically planned how it can provide pupils with opportunities to experience the joy of reading, including from high-quality texts.

Staff consistently follow the school's behaviour policy. Individual rewards are given when pupils make good decisions and choices. When they do not, staff help pupils to reflect on their actions and consider how they can avoid making the same mistakes again. While the school has taken effective action to improve the attendance of many pupils, some still do not attend school often enough.

A key part of the school's success is the close working relationships staff have established with the residential homes. Leaders say, 'We are joined at the hip.' Information is shared so that everyone has a well-rounded understanding of pupils' day-to-day needs. Staff appreciate the support and encouragement they give to one another. Most staff agree that leaders are supportive and considerate of their workload and well-being.

The proprietor's vision for the school is closely aligned to that of school leaders. The proprietor ensures that he receives plenty of information about the school. There are systems in place for him to hold leaders to account for their work and to assure himself that all decisions are taken with pupils' best interests in mind. The independent school standards are met. The school also meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equalities Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- The school has not sufficiently promoted a love of reading. Pupils do not routinely have the opportunity to read from a range of high-quality texts and few pupils choose to read for their own enjoyment. The school should ensure that its work to engage pupils with reading and ensure that pupils can read well raises the profile of reading for pleasure across the school.
- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. They miss important learning, and this slows the school's capacity to fill gaps in their learning and help them to catch up. The school should ensure that those pupils who are frequently absent receive the support they need to be in school on every day possible.

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	131536
DfE registration number	891/6026
Local authority	Nottinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	10342025
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Pradeep Manaktala
Headteacher	Alison Widdowson
Annual fees	£29,000 to £33,000
Telephone number	0115 932 1153
Website	www.bluemountain-homes.com
Email address	alison.widdowson@bluemountain-homes.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	15 to 17 March 2022

Information about this school

- The school is an independent special school which provides education for up to 15 looked-after children. Pupils live in residential care homes that are run by the same company, Blue Mountain Limited. The company has a single proprietor.
- The school caters for pupils with social emotional and behaviour difficulties. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and many have educational, health and care plans.
- The school operates across four sites at Willow Farm, Toll House, Holly House and Bluebell House.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in March 2022, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- Pupils who are above compulsory school age study a curriculum that is appropriate to their stage of education.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

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 held meetings with the headteacher and met remotely with the proprietor and the operations director.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and personal social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also considered other subjects. An inspector listened to pupils reading to a member of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.

- To inspect compliance with the independent school standards, the lead inspector reviewed documentation, including policies and plans, and toured each of the school's four sites with the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and spoke to pupils to gather their views about the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey and spoke to members of staff about their well-being and workload.

Inspection team

Caroline Poole, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

George Huthart

Ofsted Inspector

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