

Inspection of Elmbank Learning Centre

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 June 2024

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Attending Elmbank Learning Centre is life-changing for pupils. They join the school often having had a turbulent time. Many pupils arrive at the school after significant periods of disrupted education. Regardless of this, they are welcomed into a nurturing and supportive environment as soon as they arrive.

Staff take the time to get to know the pupils individually. They skilfully guide and support pupils to develop confidence in themselves and their studies. Pupils build trust in adults and quickly see themselves succeed. From the time that they join Elmbank, pupils rarely miss a day of school. Pupils are highly respectful to one another. They make the most of the opportunities on offer and flourish in this small rural setting.

Teaching staff and the therapeutic team work together to provide each pupil with a precise, bespoke package. The on-site support meets pupils' needs exceptionally well. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on their previous social and educational experiences before joining this school. This helps pupils to build resilience and plans for their future. Pupils usually leave this school with a broad suite of qualifications. These include GCSEs and functional skills awards. Consequently, they are ready for their next steps.

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

The school has an ambitious curriculum that reflects its high aspirations for all pupils. This curriculum is highly personalised to allow all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to study a broad range of subjects. The proprietor group ensures that pupils are taught by specialists in each subject. Teachers ask skilful questions to check pupils' understanding. They use assessment well to determine the appropriate learning activities for each pupil. Pupils gain accredited qualifications in a variety of subjects. Some pupils achieve qualifications that enable them to access further education.

Pupils' personal development is catered for extremely well. The curriculum equips pupils with the knowledge and understanding to thrive in modern society. Pupils explore challenging but important topics such as relationships, religion, and gender. They consider these with maturity, sensitivity, and respect. Pupils listen carefully to conflicting views and reflect on their previous experiences. Personal tutors support pupils to step out of their comfort zone and try new things. Pupils benefit from this and develop important life skills such as balancing a budget. The therapy provision in school complements the academic and personal development curriculum. The school provides these experiences in a coherently planned way. These considerably strengthen the school's offer to pupils.

Pupils receive independent and highly appropriate careers information advice and guidance. There is a sharp focus on expanding pupils' knowledge of what is possible in the world of work. This helps raise pupils' aspirations. Staff ensure that pupils visit

a wide range of work and voluntary settings, including appropriate work experience placements. They have opportunities to talk with potential employers. Staff tailor support for each pupil. They accompany pupils on placements and transition days whenever necessary.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Many pupils arrive at the school having found it difficult to manage their own behaviour. Staff know the pupils exceptionally well. They work with pupils to support them to regulate their emotions. As a result, there is a notable improvement in pupils' behaviour during their time in school. Pupil's attendance is very high. Pupils understand that staff want the very best for them. Pupils seek to take full advantage of all that is on offer to them at Elmbank.

Leaders have created a culture where staff can focus on making learning as enjoyable as possible. The site is well resourced. In class, pupils work in a peaceful pleasant space. High-quality learning materials are readily available. Staff receive excellent training in how to use these. Teachers draw on the expertise within the proprietorial group to access subject support. There is an emphasis on keeping up to date on educational research. Staff report high levels of morale and job satisfaction. They are proud of the difference that they make for their pupils.

The proprietor body works in a strategic way. Clear systems are in place to ensure accountability at all levels. The director of the school governing board visits the provision regularly. The directors and regional officers challenge leaders to make the school even better. They balance this with providing the right levels of support. They ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards. They ensure that the school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

The buildings and school grounds are safe and maintained well. The proprietors are constantly looking for ways to enrich the environment. They have recently committed to providing more facilities for outdoor learning and a garden area.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	146824
DfE registration number	808/6006
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10321505
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Limited
Chair	Stephen Hall
Headteacher	Ashley Roberts
Annual fees (day pupils)	From £63,253
Telephone number	01539566081
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	ElmbankLCAdmin@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 to 25 June 2021

Information about this school

- The proprietor body is Witherslack Group Limited. This proprietor body operates a large number of schools and care homes across the country.
- This small school is located in a rural setting in northern England. Members of staff, including the headteacher, work in this school and Wrenfield Learning Centre (URN 149482).
- There have been several changes in staff since the time of the previous inspection. The headteacher took up her appointment in May 2022.
- The school provides short- and long-term placements for pupils whose social, emotional and mental health needs mean that they are often unable to attend mainstream schools. This includes some pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils' places at the school are wholly funded by their local authorities.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Meetings were also held with subject leaders and pupils.
- The lead inspector met also with representatives of Witherslack Group.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives into English, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) and humanities. For each deep dive, the inspector looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke to pupils about their work and looked at pupils' books and samples of their work.
- Prior to the inspection, the lead inspector reviewed documents on the school's website, as well as published information about the school's performance and previous Ofsted inspections.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. They spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour and safety.
- 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 considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors took the views of staff into account through a number of meetings as well as their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzette Garland-Grimes

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024