

Hope Corner School

70 Clifton Road, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 4TD

Inspection dates

29–31 January 2018

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors are ensuring that good teaching sustains good outcomes for pupils as the school expands. All staff are highly motivated and dedicated to helping pupils re-engage with education.
- Staff succeed in their vision to improve pupils' life chances. They successfully support pupils to overcome barriers and realise their potential.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils thrive in the supportive atmosphere. They grow in self-belief and develop a positive self-image.
- Staff are highly skilled in analysing behavioural barriers to learning and helping pupils overcome them. The analysis of pupils' knowledge and skills is not as detailed, however, so academic targets in their individual plans are not as specific and measurable.
- Leaders work effectively with external agencies to safeguard pupils and meet their special needs. Pupils feel and are safe in school.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. It is managed well so the school is typically calm. Pupils show respect and develop good attitudes to learning.
- Good small-group teaching and personalised tuition support pupils to make good progress. Teaching is planned with care to build on pupils' interests, attend to their special educational needs and fill gaps in their learning.
- Many pupils make rapid progress as they gain confidence and build on their learning. All pupils gain useful qualifications. There are times, however, when the work provided for the most able pupils is easy for them and does not deepen their learning.
- Pupils' learning is good across the curriculum and they develop many new skills. Their progress in writing is not as strong as their progress with other skills. They do not always have the support they need to develop writing skills systematically.
- The school is in the early stages of developing partnerships with local schools.
- Pupils' excellent personal development and their good academic progress prepare them well for their next steps. All those who have left at the end of Year 11 have sustained further education.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise pupils' progress by:
 - making sure that the activities and tasks that are provided for the most able pupils give them enough challenge to sustain their interest and deepen their learning
 - ensuring that pupils' academic targets are analysed with the same depth as their personal targets, are specific and measurable and support learning across the curriculum
 - ensuring that pupils develop the skills they need to write independently, including their understanding of key features of different text types.
- Develop partnership work with schools in the area in order to broaden the curriculum offer.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has established a culture of continual improvement and is starting to draw on external expertise to share best practice. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are successfully leading the school as the number of pupils on roll increases and the school evolves to cater for a wider range of needs. Leaders and governors are sustaining good provision and ensure that all the independent school standards and other requirements are met.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for further development. Staff feel well supported and work together to ensure that pupils' individual learning and personal needs are met.
- Staff are highly motivated, stating for example, 'I love working here; our success is in seeing young people transformed, turned on to learning and realising who they are and what they can achieve.' Staff are dedicated to helping pupils re-engage with education so they 'can realise their potential and have bright futures'. These comments accurately reflect the ethos of the school.
- The first priority when pupils join the school is to support them to develop positive behaviours and re-engage with learning. Staff are highly skilled in analysing behavioural barriers to learning and helping pupils overcome them.
- The analysis of pupils' academic knowledge and skills is not as highly effective as the assessment of their personal skills. Consequently, the academic targets that are set in pupils' termly individual education plans are not as specific and measurable as those set for their personal development.
- Procedures to check and improve the performance of teachers are thorough and supportive. Teachers observe each other and provide good-quality feedback to each other to develop practice. The deputy headteacher uses a range of information from observations, lesson planning, assessment and scrutiny of pupils' work, to review and evaluate performance. The procedures are effective in identifying any support or training needs for teachers and ensuring that teaching continues to improve.
- Investment in training ensures that teachers are well equipped to meet the needs of pupils. Staff are keen to develop their skills. For example, they have attended training in supporting pupils with autism, promoting mental and physical health and helping pupils to overcome negative behaviours.
- The curriculum is planned carefully to meet each pupil's needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans for special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and attend the school for two years or less within key stage 4. They typically have large gaps in their education. Pupils are successfully re-engaged in education. They are supported to achieve qualifications, including level 2 functional skills, that can be completed within a short period of time and are suited to their aspirations and abilities.
- There are suitable arrangements to ensure that pupils can exercise each day and access the outdoors. Pupils regularly go for walks and can use an allotment. They go off site for physical activity, which includes climbing and archery.

- The broad curriculum gives pupils experience of a range of subjects. Alongside core subjects of English, mathematics, information technology and science, pupils have weekly lessons in French and music. Themed weeks and additional projects broaden pupils' learning in a number of subjects and deepen their understanding of various topics.
- Pupils' learning is enriched by trips out and contributions from visitors to the school or talks via video links. For example, in their recent topic on slavery, pupils learned about the history of slavery and debated moral issues. Their learning was enhanced by a visit to the slavery museum and discussion with experts on the subject.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted highly effectively. 'Culture weeks' have sparked pupils' interest in countries around the world and supported their understanding of different faiths and cultures. Pupils' spiritual understanding and social skills are promoted expertly, helping pupils to develop self-knowledge and self-esteem.
- The excellent personal, social and health education, citizenship and life skills programmes support pupils to overcome barriers that make integration difficult and prepare them well for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils learn about managing money, they participate in voluntary work, shop for food and cook their own meals. Their participation in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award helps them to develop resilience and self-reliance.
- Pupils are explicitly taught about British values and principles of equality, which are reflected in the school's values. They show respect for people regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.
- Parents and carers are kept well informed and involved in their children's education. There were insufficient responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, to register. However, school questionnaires and discussion with parents and carers confirm that they are very pleased with the provision. Typical comments are 'my child is learning to control feelings and behaviour' and 'the focus on personal skills helps them become ready for learning so they can go on to do other things'.
- Staff work closely with local authorities and other agencies to ensure that pupils' personal and educational needs are met fully and the school gives value for money. Leaders are outward-looking and keen to develop partnership working further. They network with other independent special schools to share and develop best practice. They are developing links with local primary schools and there are plans at early stages to extend partnerships with local high schools and colleges to broaden the curriculum offer. This is an important development as the number of pupils on roll continues to increase up to the school's full capacity.

Governance

- The governing body is chaired by the proprietor. The school is founded on clear principles to support pupils to overcome barriers to learning, promote their academic, personal and emotional growth and help them to reach their potential. Governors are wholly committed to these aims.
- Governors have the right skills and knowledge to oversee the work of the school and provide support and challenge to leaders. They have a good understanding of the school's performance and a clear vision for its future.

- They make sure that money is invested to increase the skills and knowledge of teaching staff and ensure that the school is well resourced. They ensure that the headteacher keeps meticulous accounts, which detail fully how fees are spent to ensure that pupils make good progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders identify safeguarding as the highest priority in the school. Procedures to ensure the safe recruitment of staff meet requirements. Safeguarding and related policies are published on the school's website take account of current government guidelines. Staff have a full understanding of their responsibilities. They are vigilant in identifying safeguarding concerns and in ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils.
- Staff are well equipped to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities. The designated safeguarding lead is knowledgeable and well qualified for the role. Staff have all completed necessary training in safeguarding, e-safety, the 'Prevent' duty, health and safety, first aid and fire safety. Staff have completed additional training in how to de-escalate behaviour and reduce pupils' exposure to risks associated with child sexual exploitation, peer-to-peer abuse, sexting and social media. Regular briefings ensure that they are up to date with latest guidance.
- The school liaises with a range of external agencies to safeguard pupils, including local authority SEN and disabilities teams, social care, child and adolescent mental health services and virtual schools. Leaders engage effectively with parents and carers to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe. Pupils' attendance is tracked carefully and followed up diligently if necessary.
- The school premises are safe and secure. Risks assessments are thorough and ensure that pupils are safe in school and when on trips out. Pupils feel safe and cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is characterised by positive, constructive relationships in which pupils' personal needs are a prime consideration. Teachers give pupils encouraging feedback that builds their self-esteem and supports them in forming positive behaviours for learning.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP), including social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. They usually have had negative experiences in mainstream schooling and missed long periods of education. Pupils' personal needs are assessed thoroughly when they enter the school and teaching is adapted effectively to respond to their individual needs and minimise barriers. Teachers use positive strategies to support pupils to grow in confidence and re-engage with education. EHCPs are reviewed annually with the placing authority.
- Pupils' independent education plans are reviewed every term and reports to parents outline pupils' personal achievement and targets in detail. These targets support all teachers and parents to know what pupils are currently working on in their personal development and support them appropriately.
- Pupils' academic targets are not as specific as their personal targets, however. They refer

only to the courses being completed and do not identify specific strategies, skills and knowledge needed to promote pupils' academic achievement. Consequently, opportunities to reinforce and link pupils' knowledge and skills across the curriculum are missed.

- Good-quality teaching supports pupils to gain functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and information technology (IT). Assessment is used effectively to identify pupils' starting points and progress with course units, which ensures that teaching fills gaps and prepares pupils to cope confidently with examinations.
- Occasionally, the most able pupils are not stimulated by their work. Sometimes they find the work easy, finish quickly and are not provided with anything else to sustain their interest and deepen their learning.
- Very effective teaching in life skills, personal, social and health education, citizenship and developing emotional awareness and listening supports pupils to become increasingly independent. Pupils are given a strong foundation for further learning.
- Imaginative teaching in topics, science and IT helps pupils to represent their learning in a variety of ways so they have visual records of their work to look back on.
- Pupils often struggle to express themselves in writing. At times, they do not have enough support to develop skills to write independently and confidently in different genre. They are not sure enough of the key structural and language features of different types of text. Teachers sometimes do not make the most of pupils' interests or learning in other subjects in supporting them to write.
- The school is well resourced and has been carefully planned and equipped to meet teaching and learning needs. Information technology is used effectively to support teaching and learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **Good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils feel valued, saying, for example, 'Staff show interest in you; they treat you as a whole person and look after all your needs.' In the words of one parent, pupils 'blossom during the time they are in school'. They thrive in the positive atmosphere, develop a positive self-image and approach life with renewed confidence.
- Records of pupils' behaviour and personal needs are exceptionally thorough. They support staff in identifying effective strategies to minimise behavioural and emotional barriers to pupils' personal success.
- Pupils' safety, physical and emotional well-being are everyone's prime consideration and are promoted in all aspects of the school's work. Pupils say that they feel safe and staff ensure that they are safe in school.
- Pupils are free from bullying and harassment. Records show that there have been no bullying incidents in the last two years. Pupils are knowledgeable about different types of bullying, including homophobic, disability and race-related bullying. Some have been subjected to bullying in their previous settings. They confirm that they have not experienced bullying of any kind in this school.

- Staff are knowledgeable and effectively educate pupils in how to minimise risks to their well-being. Staff training in e-safety each half term ensures that staff are well informed and able to advise pupils and parents of how to stay safe online. Pupils are taught about risks to their health and safety outside school, including, for example, the risks associated with extremism, exploitation, substance misuse and ill-informed decision-making.
- Leaders seek out additional support to enhance pupils' personal development where appropriate. For example, 'equine-assisted therapy' supports pupils to grow in confidence and understand personal relationships while handling horses and other animals. Halton authority health and well-being team have provided training for staff and workshops for pupils to promote physical and mental health.
- The curriculum supports pupils to develop skills they need to succeed in further education and live independently. Staff take account of their interests, capabilities and aspirations when planning the curriculum and supporting them in their move from school. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their next steps as a result.
- Pupils receive excellent careers advice that is impartial and appropriate to their needs. Further advice is sought from special needs advisers as appropriate. Well-planned work experience enables pupils to follow their interests, for example in working with children and animals.
- All pupils who have left at the end of Year 11 have sustained places in further education. Staff take care to assist them in accessing suitable courses, for example in special or mainstream sixth forms, or further education colleges. Pupils have gone on to achieve qualifications to support their aspirations, for example in animal care, health and social care, GCSE and A level.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff record and analyse any significant incidents in detail so that effective avoidance and de-escalation strategies can be used. They support pupils to improve their behaviour significantly as they settle into the school. Pupils learn to manage their behaviour well in the trusting and supportive environment.
- The expectations for pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons are clear and consistent. Pupils follow the rules and develop increasingly positive attitudes to learning. They are attentive and cooperative in lessons and disruption is rare.
- Pupils respect staff and show consideration for each other. At social times, they interact considerately. They give each other space and quiet time when needed and show understanding of each other's needs and feelings.
- Attendance is good for the vast majority of pupils. Staff do everything possible to support those who do not attend regularly, for example visiting them at home to build confidence.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Well-planned group work and personalised tutoring supports pupils to make good progress from starting points that are unique to each individual. Teaching is pitched appropriately to take account of pupils' SEN and/or disabilities and fill gaps in their learning.

- Pupils gain useful qualifications that are achievable during the short time they are in school and appropriate to their needs. Pupils typically gain level 1 or level 2 qualifications in functional skills in English, mathematics and IT.
- Vocational and work-related experiences equip pupils to make decisions about their next steps. Employability and life skills are developed very effectively, for example in ASDAN courses, life skills and PSHE lessons.
- Pupils often make accelerated progress in speaking and listening and reading as they become more confident. The work in pupils' books reflects their good progress in mathematical, scientific and technology skills. They experience a good range of learning and develop their skills across other subjects within the curriculum.
- Pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as their progress with other skills. This is because pupils often have more limited writing skills when they enter school and they are not given enough support to develop skills systematically across the curriculum.
- Pupils become increasingly productive the longer they are in school. Those with low starting points often make rapid progress as they build on their skills systematically. The most able pupils make good progress and attain useful qualifications. However, their progress is not as rapid as it could be because work is sometimes lacking in challenge and does not deepen their understanding.
- The excellent personal development and good academic progress prepare pupils well for the next steps in their education and employment. They leave the school more with confidence and better equipped to cope with challenges.

School details

Unique reference number	138597
DfE registration number	876/6014
Inspection number	10012923

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	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Hope Corner Community Church Trust
Chair	Mark Finch
Headteacher	Maria Houghton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,778–41,057
Telephone number	01928 580860
Website	www.hopecornerschool.co.uk
Email address	maria@hopecorner.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 July 2013

Information about this school

- Hope Corner School opened in September 2012. It occupies the first floor of a building which serves as a church and community centre for Hope Corner Community Church Trust, the owners of the school.
- The school is an independent special, day school which is registered for up to 12 boys and girls aged from 14 to 16 years who have autistic spectrum disorder, moderate learning difficulty and/or behavioural social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- There are currently six pupils on roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan.

- The school accepts pupils who have been excluded from other schools and other provision and who are nearing the end of their statutory education. Pupils are typically in school for less than two years and have gaps in their education.
- The school has a Christian ethos. It accepts pupils of any or no religion.
- Since the last inspection, in July 2013, a new executive headteacher has taken up post and a deputy headteacher has been appointed to lead teaching and learning. The number of pupils on roll has increased and their needs are more varied.
- The school registered a change of name from Hope Corner Academy to Hope Corner School on 31 July 2017.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector examined the premises, observed teaching and learning and scrutinised pupils' written work.
- She spoke with pupils to gain their views on the work of the school
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including action planning, self-evaluation, monitoring of teaching and performance management, pupil progress tracking, safeguarding procedures, school policies and risk assessments.
- The inspector met with teaching staff, the executive headteacher and five governors including the chair who is also the proprietor. She spoke with a representative of a placing local authority by telephone.
- There was insufficient response to parent view to register but other sources of parents' views were taken into account. Six responses to the staff questionnaire were considered.

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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