

Inspection of Manor House School

Stane Street, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0QX

Inspection dates: 29 June to 1 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy and safe at Manor House School. Most pupils have had negative experiences of other schools in the past and many had very low attendance. When they join, many pupils lack confidence and find relationships difficult. Adults work hard to change this. They create a friendly and calm environment. As a result, most pupils now enjoy school and their attendance improves significantly.

Pupils behave well. They know that if they struggle to manage their behaviour, staff will help. Bullying is rare and resolved quickly. Pupils' personal development is prioritised. Adults help pupils learn how to get on with others. For example, pupils enjoy learning together in the nearby park and woods. Pupils broaden their experiences of the world by visiting local shops and businesses.

Since the last inspection, there has been a lot of disruption to leadership and staffing. Some aspects of the school declined. However, things are back on track. Leaders are raising expectations. There is more emphasis on preparing pupils for their next stages in education. Pupils recognise the positive difference the school makes to their lives. As one said: 'It's fun. They make you do the work here. They've helped me change my attitude.'

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

Leaders and staff know pupils very well. They make sure that the right support is in place to meet the requirements of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Teachers expertly adapt what and how they teach to suit pupils' needs and interests. However, over time, pupils do not learn as much as they could. This is because frequent changes to staff have disrupted how the curriculum is planned and delivered. In addition, adults' expectations of what pupils can achieve have not been high enough.

Some aspects of the curriculum are consistently strong. This is typically where staffing has been stable and so curriculum plans are more established. Pupils learn new knowledge and skills especially well in practical subjects such as motor vehicle maintenance and food technology. Those who wish to can spend extra time learning art and music, which creates a joyful, happy atmosphere in the school.

Leaders and teachers have started to improve other aspects of the curriculum. Some subject areas, such as physical education and English, are becoming better planned and sequenced. As a result, pupils are learning more in these subjects than in the past. Leaders have made recent changes to the curriculum in mathematics. This is because work was not challenging enough for pupils and they were not achieving what they could. However, the curriculum is less well developed in other subjects, such as science and humanities. Consequently, pupils' learning across a range of subjects is uneven.

Leaders have wisely made some recent changes to the structure of the school to improve learning for younger pupils. Pupils up to the age of 12 are now taught most subjects by one teacher. This change has been made to better meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils who join the school now have fewer adults to get to know, which helps them to settle into school more easily.

Leaders have secure plans in place to improve how they teach younger pupils to read. Leaders have adapted their phonics programme to suit the special educational needs of pupils in the school. Adults identify pupils' gaps in phonics and spend time helping pupils to fill these. Pupils learn to read using books that are matched well to the phonics sounds they know. However, because of changes to the teaching structure for younger pupils, some current staff have not yet been thoroughly trained in the school's intended approach to teaching phonics. This has delayed the full implementation of the reading curriculum.

Plans to prioritise older pupils' reading are not well developed. Adults do successfully encourage pupils to read more, and pupils gain the confidence to talk about what they have read. However, leaders' plans do not include enough focus on identifying gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge, to improve their reading fluency.

Leaders intend that, by the time pupils reach the end of Year 11, they are ready to go to college. They help pupils to achieve this through a range of measures, including careers advice and work experience. Pupils are also supported to be able to cope with living in the wider world, for example through activities such as learning how to shop for food and how to use public transport. Pupils who need extra time to be 'college ready' are able to continue receiving this support at the school into Year 12 and 13. However, over time, leaders have not ensured that pupils are well enough prepared for their next stages. This is because, although some have achieved entry level qualifications and BTEC National Diplomas, leaders know that pupils could achieve more.

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes within Outcomes First Group to improve the governance of the school. New leaders rightly identified that the school needed to rapidly improve. The pace of change has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Improving pupils' life chances through improving the quality of education is at the heart of the changes leaders are making to the school's teaching structure and curriculum. However, checks by the proprietor's representatives to ensure that new leaders thoroughly understand the complexity of some systems and processes necessary to lead the school have not been timely.

The school site is well maintained. Appropriate checks are made to ensure that the health and safety of pupils is prioritised. Recent work to update the water systems in the school was timely and is evidence of the proprietor's continued capacity to meet the independent school standards over time.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say they feel safe and looked after in this school. They develop very trusting relationships with staff. They say that they feel able to talk to staff if they have any worries.

Recruitment processes are thorough and all the relevant checks are made for adults' suitability to work with pupils. Safeguarding leaders have received appropriate training but some are inexperienced.

Staff have an in-depth knowledge of pupils' needs and circumstances. They understand their responsibilities around safeguarding and report any concerns about a pupils' safety or well-being to the school's safeguarding leaders in a timely manner. Leaders act in pupils' best interests. They liaise with outside agencies to help keep pupils safe. However, the recording of safeguarding matters is overly complicated. This means that it can take leaders time to piece together all the relevant information they have about a pupil. Some minor gaps in record-keeping were corrected during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Information about pupils' safety and well-being is kept in several different systems and formats. This makes it harder for leaders to piece together all the relevant information when they need to make decisions. Leaders and managers must make sure that safeguarding records are well organised, so that they can be used efficiently to help keep pupils safe. Leaders must ensure that new safeguarding leaders are supported to continue to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the requirements of their roles.
- In the past, governance oversight and leadership within the school were not always strong. This has contributed to the decline in the quality of education in the school. New arrangements for governance and leadership are making a positive difference. Those responsible for governance must check regularly that improvements to the curriculum continue so that it is well organised and sufficiently challenging, and meets all pupils' academic needs.
- Often, pupils who join the school are reluctant to read. This is sometimes because pupils have gaps in their phonics knowledge. Leaders must continue to prioritise reading. They currently identify, and are starting to address, gaps in younger pupils' phonics knowledge. They must now consider how to do this for older pupils in the school.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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	131139
DfE registration number	938/6255
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10165137
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Outcomes First Group
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Lyndsey Jeffries (interim executive headteacher) Ed Owen (interim headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,000
Telephone number	01403790939
Website	www.acornmanorhouseschool.co.uk
Email address	ed.owen@acornmanorhouseschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 to 19 January 2017

Information about this school

- The school opened in 1996. At the time of the previous standard inspection in January 2017, the school was known as Hillcrest Slinfold School. At that time, it had places for 17 boys between the ages of 11 to 16. Following a material change inspection in July 2018, the school has changed its name to Manor House School. It now has places for up to 24 pupils aged between 7 and 18. The school admits boys and girls.
- Pupils who attend the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. Many have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan. Pupils have challenging behaviours and require a high level of support. Many have had gaps in their education or have been excluded from other schools.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Outcomes First Group (OFG), which owns several schools across the country. Governance has changed since the previous inspection. The current format is for governance to be provided by a governing body made up of the regional director, the headteachers from other schools within the OFG in the south east of England and a parent governor.
- All current teaching staff and leaders at the school have been appointed since the last inspection. The headteacher in post at the previous inspection left the school in December 2020. The school was then temporarily led by a head of service, who left the school in April 2021. Since then, the deputy headteacher has been promoted to headteacher, and an executive headteacher has been appointed to oversee the school. The headteacher and executive headteacher are currently interim leaders and due to take up their substantive posts in September 2021.

Information about this inspection

We 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.

- During the inspection, we met with leaders, teachers, pupils and the regional director for the OFG. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the chair of the proprietor body and two members of the local authority's safeguarding team.
- When considering the quality of education, we focused particularly on reading, mathematics and physical education. We also considered the curriculum in place to support pupils' additional needs, including through exploring personal, social and health education, music, food technology and outdoor lessons that take place in a local forest. We met with curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils, visited

lessons and looked at pupils' work in these subjects. We also spoke with pupils and staff about different aspects of the school.

- To inspect safeguarding, we scrutinised the records leaders keep about pupils' behaviour, attendance and safety. We explored the school's recruitment processes and checked the single central record. We spoke with pupils, staff, leaders and the local authority. We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection, including when the fire alarm sounded.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluations, action plans, policies and documentation associated with the independent school standards (ISS). We also toured the school site to check that it met the ISS.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to consider. We took note of the one response to the parental free-text facility, as well as the 12 responses from staff who completed Ofsted's survey of staff's views. We also considered the school's own surveys of the views of parents, pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Metcalf

Ofsted Inspector

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