

Inspection of Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

1 Hall Flat Lane, Balby, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN4 8PT

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Every pupil is welcomed into Sycamore Hall Preparatory School. Pupils say that they feel included from the moment they join the school. Many expressed how they appreciate the calm and purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and around the school building. Pupils behave well. They know that staff have high expectations for their education and want them to achieve well. Parents and carers and pupils all say that they feel part of a family in this small independent school setting.

Pupils are taught to behave respectfully. Leaders have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils are able to explain why bullying does not happen here. They demonstrate strong friendships both in class and throughout the school day. The school's ethos is based on development of the individual child with a focus on kindness, good manners and good citizenship. However, leaders show a lack of understanding of their wider safeguarding duties. This contributes, in part, to pupils not being prepared well for wider British values or life outside the school gate.

Pupils are not supported to gain an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships through the relationships education offered to them. Protected characteristics, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, are not discussed. Leaders have not delivered learning that encourages pupils to respect those with different sexual orientation or gender reassignment. They do not learn about civil partnerships or marriage when this is not between a male and a female. Pupils do not learn how to look after their mental health.

Some pupils worry about whom they can speak to if they have concerns. Leaders are not teaching pupils enough about how to stay safe. They do not keep records of low-level concerns around pupils' well-being. Not all staff have received the safeguarding training that they require. Pupils are potentially at risk because leaders are not carrying out their safeguarding duties robustly.

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

Since the previous inspection in November 2019, leaders have taken steps to secure improvements to the school's quality of education. Leaders have improved the curriculum by ensuring that planning is formalised. They have carefully sequenced what it is they want pupils to learn. Leaders meet regularly to review their academic offer to ensure that they are building on what pupils already know. This supports pupils to meet ambitious outcomes that prepare them academically for Year 7 and beyond.

Fostering a love of reading is a high priority in this school. Staff understand the specific reading needs of each of their pupils. Teachers ensure that there is additional support available for the small minority of pupils who find reading with fluency more challenging. Reading sits at the very heart of the curriculum in all subjects. Pupils have the opportunity to read a wealth of high-quality texts. They

talk about the books they have read with enthusiasm. They show an impressive depth of knowledge.

The wider curriculum continues to include a range of experiences for all pupils. There are high expectations and a carefully planned curriculum in all subjects. The curriculum is exciting and encourages pupils to want to know more. For example, when discussing the different staging styles for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', pupils were able to make links between the set design and the defining characteristics of each particular historical period. They could articulate which they felt best supported the play and why.

Teachers work with each pupil closely to assess what they have learned and to move them on with the next stage in their learning when they are ready. While there are no pupils currently attending this setting with special educational needs and/or disabilities, this personalised approach supports all pupils to access the curriculum.

More widely, however, leaders do not sustain the improvements they set out to make. In the previous three standard inspections, there are common threads that remain unmet. Leaders do not check on the independent school standards (the standards) routinely to ensure that they are meeting all statutory requirements. As identified in 2016 and again in 2018, pupils still do not have the opportunity to learn about different communities. They are not taught about different relationships or how to be mentally healthy.

The fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships are not delivered as part of the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Leaders do not follow the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance for relationships education in primary schools. The expected outcomes for the end of primary school are not met. Pupils do not have the opportunity to learn about friendships, family relationships and relationships with other children and with adults in a way that supports them to understand different families. They cannot talk about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Pupils say that they are not taught about puberty.

During the inspection, leaders revised their policy on relationships and sex education (RSE). They consulted with parents on these changes overnight. Despite this, the school's personal development curriculum still does not cover the necessary content to meet the standards or the expectations of the DfE statutory guidance. This means that pupils are missing vital knowledge to prepare them for life in modern Britain.

Leaders do not ensure that the standards are consistently met over time. There are several unmet standards. Leaders struggle to stay up to date with and meet the standards consistently. They have not been able to maintain an overview of the school's systems and procedures to ensure that these are working well. The school does not meet some of the standards contained in parts 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8 of the independent school standards. This includes aspects of both the learning and development requirements for pupils' personal development and the safeguarding

and welfare requirements. The school's website does have the headteacher's contact details, but does not specify that the headteacher is also the proprietor. Leaders have ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Since the previous standard inspection, school leaders have ensured that a safeguarding policy is available on the school's website for parents and carers to access. This policy pays regard to the most recent guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Staff are familiar with this policy and receive regular safeguarding training. However, leaders do not ensure that they implement the policy.

Leaders do not keep detailed records of incidents that occur in school or more widely. There have been no incidents recorded since the previous full inspection in 2019. This means that staff are unable to build a complete picture of each pupil. This could mean that changes in pupils go unnoticed.

Leaders cannot articulate the distinctiveness of their local context and are not alert to potential wider community pressures or concerns that pupils from this setting may face. At the start of the inspection, safeguarding leaders had not undertaken training in the 'Prevent' duty. This means that leaders are not prepared with up-to-date guidance on protecting pupils from radicalisation and extremist views. During the inspection, the safeguarding leader and one further member of staff undertook this training.

The single central record was not compliant with statutory guidance at the start of the inspection. Leaders completed the outstanding checks on staff before the end of the inspection.

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

- Leaders' knowledge of statutory safeguarding requirements is not secure. At the start of the inspection, leaders had not undertaken all the required checks for adults working at the school. Leaders had not completed the required training in the 'Prevent' duty, as detailed in the statutory guidance issued under section 29 of the Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015. This potentially puts pupils at risk. Leaders must ensure that this training happens and these requirements are met consistently.
- The arrangements to safeguard pupils are not effective. Leaders are not alert to the importance of tracking smaller concerns relating to individual pupils or how these may build to form a bigger picture. This means that they are unaware of the dangers pupils may face. They do not take prompt action to keep pupils safe from harm. Leaders must follow up all safeguarding incidents thoroughly. They must ensure that all staff receive adequate training and guidance, so they are

alert to any potential wider community pressures and the risks that pupils may face.

- Leaders have not taken the required action with regard to the statutory guidance for the teaching of RSE in primary schools. Consequently, parents had not been made aware of the school's policy and the RSE curriculum until part-way through the inspection. While leaders undertook a simplistic consultation with parents during the inspection, the materials shared did not typify the curriculum offer that those pupils in school receive. Leaders must address this so that they follow DfE statutory guidance.
- The teaching of RSE is not well planned as part of the school's PSHE education offer. This does not comply with statutory guidance. The PSHE education curriculum does not include adequate coverage of the protected characteristics. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships are not detailed in the curriculum overview, and pupils do not learn about same-sex relationships. As a result, pupils' understanding is not as developed as it could be. Leaders should revisit their curriculum thinking in consultation with parents as a matter of urgency.
- The proprietor does not have a system in place to ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently. She has not maintained improvements detailed in the March 2021 progress monitoring inspection. The proprietor needs to establish a robust process through which she can be assured that all the independent school standards are met.

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

Unique reference number	106816
DfE registration number	371/6010
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	10220894
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jane Spencer
Headteacher	Jane Spencer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,950
Telephone number	01302 856800
Website	www.sycamorehallschool.co.uk
Email address	sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 November 2019

Information about this school

- This school was last inspected on 3 March 2021. That was an unannounced progress monitoring inspection carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.
- The school's previous standard inspection was from 5 to 7 November 2019. This was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.
- Sycamore Hall Preparatory School is a non-selective independent school for boys and girls between the ages of two and 11 years.
- The school is located on the site of the proprietor's home.
- The school is registered for up to 45 pupils. There are 34 pupils on roll between the ages of four and 11.
- The proprietor is also the headteacher. Her sister is the only other full-time teacher.
- The proprietor manages the before- and after-school care for pupils attending the school.
- Children in Reception are taught as part of the infant class.
- This school does not use 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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, who is also the proprietor, and the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors toured the school site to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils reading with familiar adults in school. Deep dives were carried out in reading, mathematics, history and French. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and during lunchtime.
- Inspectors examined safeguarding records, including the single central record and recruitment checks on staff.

- Inspectors considered the views of parents by reviewing the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and in the setting.
- There were no responses to the online surveys for staff. Inspectors spoke with members of the staff team throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils through their responses to the online surveys and through meeting with pupils in small groups during the inspection.

Inspection team

Zoe Lightfoot, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Marcus Newby

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively;
 - 2(2)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which–
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(a) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with primary education at the school is provided with relationships education,
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
 - 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
 - 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act;

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–

- 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school;

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(a) the information specified in sub-paragraph (2) is provided to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate;
 - 32(2)(b)(i) where the proprietor is an individual, the proprietor's full name, address for correspondence during both term-time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which the proprietor may be contacted, or
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 32(3)(c) particulars of the policy referred to in paragraph 2;

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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 2022