

Inspection of Armley Grange School

Armley, Leeds LS12 3QH

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 October and 10 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Armley Grange is a caring school. The school leaders and staff focus on helping pupils to develop trust and positivity about school. They support pupils to share thoughts and feelings constructively and teach them how to communicate with others. This is important, as many pupils join Armley Grange having experienced significant disruption to their education previously.

The school is bright and calm. Most pupils are positive about attending the school. Pupils feel safe here. Pupils value the care and respect that leaders and staff show them.

At times, some pupils find it difficult to manage their emotions and behaviour. The school knows the pupils well. Staff use clinical assessments effectively to identify the best support they can give to individual pupils. When pupils are dysregulated staff help them to return swiftly to classes or to use the therapeutic spaces in the school to calm down.

The therapeutic care pupils receive is supporting pupils to enjoy learning and is a strength of the school. However, some areas of subject-specific knowledge are not mapped out with sufficient clarity or detail. In reading and mathematics, for example, learning opportunities do not match some pupils' needs. Some subject-specific expectations are not high enough. Staff do not have sufficient support to plan learning which challenges pupils. The school has yet to fully introduce systems to check that its policies and practices are embedded and consistent.

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

The school has a clear vision and ambition for pupils to succeed. Since opening, leaders at all levels have focused on ensuring pupils settle quickly in the school. Pupils' transition into the school is an important aspect of the school's approach. Part of this is the care taken to match pupils to an appropriate curriculum. The school utilises clinical and therapeutic resources effectively to identify pupils' barriers to learning. Staff build positive relationships with pupils to help pupils overcome these barriers. However, while the social and emotional support pupils receive is highly effective, their learning needs in some subject areas are not consistently as well met.

The aspects of the school's curriculum which are subject specific are still at the earliest stages of development. A range of different curriculum resources for subjects such as reading and mathematics have been put in place. However, these are not sufficiently utilised or understood by staff in the school. In some academic subject areas, the key knowledge the school wants pupils to learn has not been identified. Staff need more curriculum guidance to ensure that the curriculum helps pupils to learn more and do more over time. Staff do not routinely check pupils' learning in some subjects, although there are plans in hand to strengthen the quality assurance of the subject-specific curriculum. Great emphasis is placed on pupils

being emotionally ready to learn. However, when they are ready, some pupils are not sufficiently supported to achieve academic success. The precise subject knowledge the school wants pupils to learn is not mapped out in sufficient detail or coherence. Teachers do not have enough support to identify how the often broad outcomes and provision set out in pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plans) should be broken down into the small steps in learning that many pupils need to achieve in academic subject areas.

The school is starting to identify how they will prioritise reading. They are ambitious in their aim to reignite pupils' interest in books through a focus on 'remarkable reading'. This approach will ensure that there is daily reading in all classes using planned texts that interest and engage pupils. This is at the earliest stages of development. The school has identified a number of different approaches to support pupils who are struggling to learn to read. Resources for phonics and sight-word approaches are available in the school. However, they are not yet utilised regularly or consistently. Staff have not all had the necessary training to implement these approaches in lessons or with individual pupils.

A substantial aspect of the school's provision is its person-centred curriculum, which is designed to meet the therapeutic needs of pupils. The therapeutic aspects of 'pathways 2 and 3' are a strength of the school. Pupils are well supported through a coherent, connected and consistently applied approach to the use of therapists' assessments and recommendations. Such therapist support includes occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and sensory therapy. Education psychologists' recommendations are an additional source of guidance which are translated into meaningful, appropriately challenging but attainable small steps. The school also makes use of the relevant outcomes and provision in EHC plans in building pupils' person-centred curriculums. Pupils benefit from these effective aspects of the curriculum.

At times, some pupils find it difficult to regulate their behaviour. They challenge staff and can show aggression to other pupils. The school's therapeutic approaches are reducing these incidences. Pupils are becoming more willing to discuss their behaviours and recognise how they impact others. Staff remain calm and patient if pupils are at crisis. They use short breaks and the outside space effectively to help pupils to become calmer. Pupils speak positively about the support staff give them to calm down. However, record-keeping is not yet consistently used to ensure behaviour issues are recorded in a timely way. This is also the case for safeguarding records. Some instances of pupils' risk-taking behaviour are not recorded accurately or robustly.

The personal development curriculum is a high priority in the school. There is a well-planned curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education in place, which identifies learning for all pupils across all key stages. Important learning about relationships and sex education and health education has been carefully planned to ensure that it is age appropriate for all pupils. Individual pupils' vulnerabilities linked to their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well understood. While leaders know there is more to do to embed this curriculum,

learning is planned to encourage independence, respect and tolerance of others. Pupils who find sharing resources or physical space difficult are given opportunities to work alongside others in the cookery rooms or the 'social café'. Pupils are taught about safety, both in the online world and the world beyond the school. The school's 'immersion room' is used well to give pupils opportunities to try out new experiences such as going to the hairdresser or the dentist, using technology. This enables pupils to overcome fears about the world beyond the school.

Careers guidance is well planned. The school uses resources from the proprietor body effectively to ensure that pupils are well informed about further education, employment and training.

The school has a clear vision for future development and embedding the curriculum. However, the implementation of the academic curriculum requires closer monitoring. Many staff are new to the school or at the earliest stages of their career. While they feel supported and are positive about working in the school, greater support and training are needed to enable them to meet the varied learning needs of the pupils.

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 identified how the reading curriculum will be used to support pupils to secure the key reading skills and knowledge that they need. The school's resources are not understood or utilised effectively. This means that pupils whose EHC plans identify specific reading support are not receiving it. The school must ensure that the reading curriculum is understood and used consistently to enable pupils to become confident and fluent readers.
- In some academic subject areas, the school has not identified the key subject knowledge it wants pupils to learn. As a result, teachers do not have a clear understanding of, or sufficient support for, planning and delivering learning that builds over time at the right level for pupils. This means that it is also difficult for teachers to check what pupils have learned and remembered and for leaders to monitor the quality of pupils' academic learning effectively. The school should ensure that in all subjects, the curriculum contains sufficient detail to ensure that learning builds coherently and progressively so that any gaps in learning are swiftly identified and addressed.
- The academic targets set for pupils with SEND are not precise enough. This means that there is insufficient guidance for teachers to plan to meet pupils' needs. The school should ensure that the plans for all pupils include precise academic targets which will enable them to make progress across the curriculum.
- The proprietors have not ensured that all school policies are implemented effectively. Systems to record safeguarding concerns or behaviour incidences are

not used robustly. The curriculum is not implemented consistently in all subjects. This means that the independent school standards are not all met. The proprietors need to establish a robust process through which they can be assured that records and concerns are recorded consistently and that teaching at the school fulfils all the independent school standards.

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	149399
DfE registration number	383/6017
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10286505
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	P Bloom Ltd
Chair	Richard Powers
Headteacher	April Boyd
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,000 to £90,000
Telephone number	0113 826 7709
Website	www.armleygrangeschool.co.uk/
Email address	admin@armleygrangeschool.co.uk

Information about this school

- This is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school was registered as a school by the Department for Education in October 2022.
- The headteacher joined the school when it opened. When inspectors visited in October 2023, a senior leader appointment was very recent. When inspectors visited in November 2023, the school was still in the process of recruiting permanent staff to some roles.
- The school is registered to accept 40 pupils aged between five and 19 years.
- The school accepted its first pupils in January 2022. Since then, numbers have risen to 40 pupils, 18 of whom started in September 2023 and four in November 2023.
- All pupils attending the school have EHC plans. Pupils are referred to the school by a number of different local authorities. Pupils have a range of needs, including social, emotional and mental health difficulties, autism and communication and interaction needs.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is owned by Options Autism Ltd, which is a fully owned subsidiary of the proprietor body P Bloom Ltd. They are part of Outcomes First Group, a provider of children's services with a range of schools and homes catering for children and young adults with complex health needs and learning difficulties.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the course of the inspection, the inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders from this school, as well as a leader of one other school in the group.
- Meetings were held with the chief operating officer for Options Autism,

representing the proprietor body, the chair of governors for the proprietor group, and a regional director of education for Outcomes First Ltd.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English and early reading, mathematics, creativity, PSHE and the school's specialist person-centred curriculum. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also listened to pupils read to staff members and visited informal learning situations such as the social café.
- 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 looked at a range of different documents during the inspection, including records relating to behaviour, bullying and attendance. They observed behaviour at less formal times of the school day, such as playtimes and in the dining hall.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection.
- The lead inspector reviewed the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school premises to check leaders' compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspection was deemed incomplete after the first two days. Two of His Majesty's Inspectors returned on 10 November 2023 to gather additional evidence about the quality of education.

Inspection team

Andrea Batley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mary Cook	His Majesty's Inspector
Stephanie Innes-Taylor	His Majesty's Inspector
Steve Shaw	His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.

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

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