

Inspection of The Wenlock School

Fossil View, Wrens Hill Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SS

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 November 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an exceptional school. It provides pupils with an ambitious education and gives them what they need in order to thrive. The school's expectations for pupils' achievement, behaviour and general outlook on life are high. Whatever challenges pupils may face, this school values them for who they are and what they can do. Pupils at Wenlock School are supported and challenged to learn, persevere and succeed.

Pupils study a broad, exciting curriculum. They work towards a range of academic and vocational qualifications and achieve excellent outcomes. Beyond lessons, the school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to learn valuable life skills and try new things. The quality of the school's facilities, and the opportunities provided, are superb.

Staff are patient, firm and kind. They manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. Any upsets are dealt with promptly and calmly. Staff prompt pupils to reflect on the consequences of their actions. This supports pupils to make significant improvements in the way they manage themselves. Everyone is able to engage fully in education.

The school's consistent approach means pupils know what to expect. Pupils like this. They feel safe, secure and content at school. They know that staff here have their best interests at heart.

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

Since the previous inspection, this school has continued to strengthen its work and performance. This is due to informed, ambitious leadership. The quality of the curriculum is excellent. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is equally impressive. Staff support all pupils to make the most of this outstanding offer. Consequently, pupils gain the knowledge, skills and self-belief they need to succeed in school and beyond.

When pupils first arrive, the school checks how well they can read. Staff identify those who need extra help and give them daily phonics lessons to help them catch up. This works well. Pupils of all ages read daily, both for pleasure and information. The school also does much to develop pupils' vocabulary and speaking skills. From debates and poetry to theatre and role play, the school provides a deliberate sequence of speaking and listening activities. On top of this, social times and form-time discussions support pupils to interact positively with others. This mix of formal and informal activities develops pupils' all-round communication and social skills.

The curriculum design across subjects is highly effective. The school has carefully considered what pupils need to learn. Staff break this down into manageable chunks so that pupils remember it. Staff are skilled at checking what pupils know. They also make sure that pupils can use their knowledge. In music, for example, staff prompt

pupils to call on their understanding of tempo, dynamics and melody in order to listen and compose with an informed ear. Furthermore, pupils study towards demanding academic qualifications. Indeed, the school's successful focus on academic achievement is a notable strength.

The school's vocational study programme is equally ambitious. This aspect of the school's work has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection. There are well-equipped specialist rooms staffed by expert instructors. These include a mechanics workshop, a hair and beauty salon and a construction area. This excellent provision enables pupils to work towards technical and work-related qualifications. Many do, and with success.

As the school's curriculum offer has expanded, pupil numbers have grown. The sixth form, for instance, is now well established. The school plans study programmes to suit individual needs and aspirations. These include links with employers and colleges. From key stages 3 to 5, the school provides highly relevant careers advice. Pupils value this and talk with optimism about how the school supports them to plan their futures.

Beyond lessons, the school provides a wealth of high-quality activities that support pupils' personal development. Outdoor education plays a big part in this. Pupils can work towards the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which includes stays away from home and the option for an overseas trip. The school also offers a residential outdoor activity trip to all pupils and runs daily lunchtime clubs. Whether pupils are interested in playing chess or singing in a choir, there is something going on to capture and develop their interests and talents.

The school's careful and informed planning, based on its thorough understanding of pupils' needs, means that bespoke therapeutic and clinical support helps pupils to understand and manage their emotions. This support connects seamlessly with the rest of the curriculum. It enables pupils to make the most of their education and to feel good about themselves.

As well as the excellent indoor facilities, the school has spacious outdoor areas for recreation and physical education. The proprietor has invested time, money and thought in developing specialist provision. These informed and ambitious developments have enabled the school to extend and strengthen its impact on pupils' learning.

Communication between school and home is excellent. The school regularly invites parents and carers into school to find out what happens, to share ideas and get involved in school life. This open approach supports consistent messages about expectations. It helps everyone to make decisions in the best interest of pupils.

The proprietorial body has highly effective systems for oversight of the school. These include a tier of governance and checks by external experts, which add further levels of scrutiny and accountability. These efficient checks and support for the school ensure that the independent school standards continue to be met.

Excellent leadership at local and higher levels has created an open, reflective culture and supports staff and pupils to excel.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act. Leaders make sure staff understand safeguarding guidance and know what to do when concerns arise. All the required policies and information are published on the school's website.

Almost without exception, staff say they are well led and supported in their work. Inspection evidence supports this view.

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	145563
DfE registration number	332/6009
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10342136
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	22
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Simon Smith
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,860 to £87,680
Telephone number	01384 884883
Website	www.wenlockschoo.co.uk
Email address	info@wenlockschoo.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	25 to 27 January 2022

Information about this school

- The Wenlock School is an independent special school that caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans. Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities.
- The school is run by Acorn Care and Education Limited, which is part of Outcomes First Group.
- This is the school's third standard inspection since being registered by the Department for Education in 2018.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is registered to take up to 100 pupils and has section 41 registration. It currently has 107 pupils on roll. This is as a result of tribunal decisions that have required the school to admit additional pupils.

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met and talked with the headteacher, staff and pupils. They also had meetings with the regional director. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer from Acorn Care and Education Limited.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, science, geography, history and music. 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 looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- 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 observed staff and pupil interactions. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times during the day.

- Inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey. They also considered responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for school staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation published on the school’s website. They checked the premises and looked at documents and records kept in school.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Pamela Matty	Ofsted Inspector

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