

Peak Education Stoke

Cauldron Collage, Snow Hill, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 4LY

Inspection dates

6–8 March 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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have a strong, positive influence on the quality of teaching at the school. As a result, pupils make good progress in all year groups, including the sixth form.
- A broad, varied and often exciting curriculum successfully motivates pupils. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong.
- The extensive outdoor curriculum has a very positive impact on increasing pupils' confidence. As a result, pupils are able to build good relationships with adults and their peers.
- Safeguarding is strong. Pupils feel safe at all times. This security contributes to the growing confidence that pupils show in their attitudes to learning and developing positive relationships.
- A rigorous programme of performance management ensures that staff are highly motivated to improve their skills in caring for pupils with particular personal, social and emotional needs. This has a positive effect both on pupils' progress and on their behaviour.
- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- The recent employment of qualified teachers has significantly raised the quality of teaching and expectations of pupils. However, sufficient training in teaching skills has not yet been provided for less experienced members of staff.
- Leaders have set in place a clear framework of assessment that enables them to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. However, this framework does not allow staff to check pupils' progress towards achieving higher standards and success in GCSE examinations.
- The school has a new reading programme but this is not yet fully embedded into practice. As a result, some pupils are not improving their reading quickly enough.
- Pupils have good support in all lessons from their inclusive education practitioners. However, insufficient emphasis is placed on building a good knowledge and use of vocabulary.
- In English lessons, pupils' engagement is sometimes lacking because the tasks do not inspire pupils.
- The attendance of a minority of pupils is poor.

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 by:
 - refining and embedding the assessment framework so that it takes account of the possibility of reaching higher standards, including achieving GCSE qualifications
 - ensuring that less experienced teachers are supported by appropriate professional development and training
 - ensuring that pupils develop a good knowledge of subject-specific vocabulary in talking and writing about all subjects across the curriculum
 - ensuring that English lessons are based on subject matter that inspires pupils
 - ensuring that the new reading programme is fully embedded into practice.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that attendance improves for those who attend school less often.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders are determined to address the individual, social, emotional and learning needs of the young people in their care, and to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. Leaders have successfully created a very supportive environment. Pupils who have previously refused education, or have suffered significant trauma in chaotic lives, are now settled in school.
- The proprietor, executive headteacher and senior leaders have a good awareness of the school's effectiveness. Their self-evaluation is realistic and accurate. They have developed a clear set of priorities that have had a positive effect on the social, emotional and academic progress of the pupils.
- Effective internal monitoring of teaching, with the support of an outside consultant, has ensured that teaching continues to improve. A robust performance management system provides motivation for staff to develop their knowledge and skills through study. There is a clear hierarchy of roles and responsibilities that provides accountability at all levels.
- A recent change to school organisation has created three teams that have been organised to cater for the different academic abilities of pupils and their related personal needs. This has ensured that education managers are accountable for both the personal and academic progress of pupils in their care.
- Relationships at all levels are good. The vast majority of staff who completed the Ofsted inspection survey indicated that they enjoy working at the school and that the management are considerate of their well-being.
- The school keeps excellent records of all pupils and their individual needs. Records of each individual pupil's behaviour and starting points are thorough and provide a reliable basis for discussing their academic and social progress. Strong leadership ensures that pupils' individual needs are catered for well.
- Before pupils join the school, education managers carry out home visits to gather information, which assists with the smooth transition process. Close working with a variety of other agencies contributes well to sustainable improvements in pupils' personal and academic development.
- The leaders' recent decision to employ qualified subject teachers for mathematics, English and information and communication technology (ICT) has made a strong impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Leaders have successfully employed teachers who are highly motivated to support vulnerable pupils. Most of them are very capable and highly experienced with strong subject knowledge. However, those with less experience in teaching have not yet received enough professional development to support them.
- Instructors, employed to teach the wide variety of outdoor adventurous activities, are specialists in their areas. As a result, they are able to develop the skills of the pupils well and to ensure their safety.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a broad and balanced programme of activities and a strong core curriculum. The curriculum is enhanced by visits and visitors as well as special

curriculum days, such as the Festival of Holi, Mothering Sunday, No Smoking Day, World Poetry Day and Easter. Pupils also enjoy a wide variety of outside visits, some of which are offered as rewards for good behaviour.

- Leaders ensure that pupils have good opportunities to develop their understanding of fundamental British values during one-to-one sessions and in lessons. Pupils learn about themselves and about the world around them.
- Leaders have put in place assessment procedures to ensure that pupils' progress is effectively monitored and recorded in English, mathematics and ICT. However, these assessment procedures have not been refined to enable staff to track pupils' progress towards reaching higher standards, including their progress towards achieving success in GCSE examinations.
- Leaders also assess, monitor and track pupils' improvements in behaviour. They analyse behaviour patterns with a view to understanding what triggers the majority of outbursts and at what time of day pupils are most vulnerable. This enables them to be more supportive to pupils at certain times of day and in certain places.
- Leaders have created very strong relationships with parents and carers. The pupils' inclusive education practitioners collect them from home every morning and return them to their homes after school. As a result, there is secure transition between home and school, and inclusive education practitioners are able to discuss any issues with parents every day.
- Those parents who spoke to the inspector were all overwhelmingly appreciative of the work of the school in supporting their children. Typical remarks included: 'The school is absolutely brilliant! I can't fault that place. No one expected our child to make such progress. The school has stuck by him when no other school would keep him. It is exactly what he needs.'

Governance

- The proprietor keeps in regular contact with the school and plays a pivotal part in school leadership. He regularly challenges the senior management team to effect improvements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are robust. The safeguarding policy meets current government requirements and is available to parents and others on request.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of shared responsibility for protecting pupils and this permeates all areas of the school's work.
- All staff know who to contact if they have concerns about pupils. They are all appropriately trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns and ensuring that they inform outside agencies when a pupil is at risk or missing from education. Appropriate records are kept that detail safeguarding concerns and actions. Staff are well trained to recognise signs of extremism and radicalisation.
- The building is kept to an appropriately safe standard with clear access to doors and the fire escape in the event of fire. The building is regularly checked for fire risk and other safety hazards. Risk assessments for all aspects of school life, and for individual pupils where necessary, are rigorously maintained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- A calm learning environment in the classroom ensures that pupils feel secure and able to focus on their learning. Teachers and inclusive education practitioners care about pupils' personal well-being and educational progress. Relationships between adults and pupils are based on mutual respect. All of this helps pupils to become involved in their learning and to make good progress.
- Pupils enjoy a wide variety of exciting and motivating outdoor adventurous activities that strongly support both the development of the specific skills involved and the development of collaboration skills, leadership skills and self-discipline. Pupils gain a growing confidence in themselves that translates itself into their lives and into their academic work. Many pupils gain significant skills that, in some cases, could lead to later employment. The experienced and skilled instructors who lead the lessons make sure they keep pupils safe at all times. In addition, pupils learn to keep themselves safe. The application of practical science, mathematics and reading during these activities provides further educational opportunities.
- Teachers match learning to individual needs and challenge the most able pupils to do harder work. Over time, pupils make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. For example, in mathematics, pupils begin by identifying the names of two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) shapes and quickly progress to successfully measuring the area of compound 2D shapes.
- Teachers make good curriculum links to other subjects in their lessons. For example, during an ICT lesson, the teacher included a quotation that led to a brief heated discussion about equalities. There was also a good link to mathematics because pupils were required to find the average cost of cigarettes. A link to healthy lifestyles was also implicit in the lesson. Cooking lessons involve learning about practical science as well as safety in the home.
- Inclusive education practitioners, especially senior inclusive education practitioners, are extremely skilled in supporting pupils in a variety of ways because of the strong training over several years. For example, staff who have benefited from good training know exactly how to support pupils with severe autism so that they can make good progress. In recorded discussion lessons about drugs, alcohol and unwanted pregnancy, the skills of the inclusive education practitioner who was interviewing the pupils was clear. He was able to create a comfortable atmosphere where pupils felt able to give their opinions about these subjects that are close to their own lives. His questioning was skilful and sensitive.
- Pupils arriving at the school take assessments so that teachers can establish their starting points. Regular diagnostic assessment identifies gaps in learning that have developed because of the lengths of time that pupils have not been attending their previous schools. Teachers are then able to ensure that these gaps in learning are filled. The appointment of qualified teachers is now ensuring that the pupils are doing much more than filling gaps in their learning. They are catching up quicker and are being challenged with harder work.
- English lessons sometimes draw on the interests of pupils so that they are able to demonstrate their knowledge of technical vocabulary and their knowledge of the subject

area. For example, in an individual English lesson, the teacher gave the pupil the opportunity to choose what he would like to write about and found that he was interested in fishing. However, much of English teaching seen in pupils' books contains grammar exercises. Too many grammar lessons use vocabulary that is unrelated to any area of study or inspirational subject. Consequently, they fail to inspire pupils and fail to ensure that they understand the need to learn grammar.

- Pupils have group lessons as well as one-to-one lessons. Consequently, they have the opportunity to become accustomed to working in a classroom environment, as well as benefiting from individual support. The vast majority of pupils are supported in class lessons by their individual inclusive education practitioner. This means that each pupil has many opportunities to discuss his or her learning with the inclusive education practitioner and with the teacher. However, often the adult does most of the talking while the pupils ask brief questions or give one-word responses. As a result, pupils do not challenge themselves to use subject-specific vocabulary and speak confidently about their learning in a wide range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most of the pupils spoken to showed confidence in presenting their ideas and felt that they had developed well since arriving at this school.
- The combined support from adults, from the provision of outdoor adventurous activities and from individualised learning programmes contributes to pupils' growing confidence. Pupils gain much confidence from being able to cook a variety of interesting foods. Some would like to be employed as chefs in the future.
- Good-quality careers information, advice and guidance support pupils to consider their futures. All pupils spoken to had clear ideas of what they would like to do in their lives. Girls spoke about becoming, for example, a hair and beauty adviser, a photographer or a driver of heavy goods vehicles. Boys spoke about being, for example, a story teller, a games designer, a chef, a sailing instructor or a boxing coach.
- Peak Education Stoke ensures that all staff receive comprehensive training to ensure that they have the skills needed to de-escalate potentially challenging situations. Staff have the skills to deflect and diffuse the development of highly emotional behaviour caused by pupils' stress and anxiety. As a result, staff are highly skilled at recognising pupils' emotions and are able to pre-empt any difficulties that might occur in lessons. If necessary, pupils know they are able to remove themselves from lessons accompanied by their inclusive education practitioner before their emotions escalate. This ensures that the pupils know how much the adults in the environment want them to succeed and care about their emotions.
- Pupils say that they enjoy attending this school. They say that their behaviour was very poor in previous schools but that in this school it has improved. Typical comments included, 'I have learned more in these three months at this school than I learned in three years at the other schools,' and that 'students here help me out'.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural teaching supports pupils to develop their relationships

and understanding of the local community and the wider world. They spoke knowledgeably about the law in relation to protected characteristics and about situations where these laws would be important. Pupils spoken to showed very open and accepting attitudes to differences of all kinds.

- Pupils are confident to challenge racist statements and to say why they should not be tolerated. Written work on display showed pupils' writing about equalities: 'Freedom means you are free to do what is right'; 'Everyone doesn't have to do the same. People can be themselves.'
- Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community and the wider world. For example, they raised money for charity and they have volunteered to help in a local dog rescue home and a mountain biking centre for girls. They are also encouraged to make suggestions about changes that can be made to the school building and to the area. Recently, leaders conducted a survey of their opinions about how their common room could be improved. In this way, pupils learn how democracy works.
- Pupils all said that they are safe in school and they know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations and during adventurous activities. They say that there is no bullying at the school. They learn about how to eat healthily and how to keep themselves safe in relationships and in the locality. They have good opportunities to talk with their inclusive education practitioners during personal, health, social and economic education lessons about how to maintain relationships and how to keep safe.
- Extensive work with a wide range of external agencies supports pupils' well-being and helps to keep them safe. For example, the gang violence team visit the school to support pupils who are referred to them. Mentors from the Young People's Drugs Project also work with individuals when the school refers them.
- Pupils from other schools who access part-time alternative provision take part in chosen pathways alongside pupils registered at the school. They therefore have the opportunity to benefit from much of what the school does to enhance pupils' personal development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils over time is good. During the inspection, pupils conducted themselves well around the school and showed respect and consideration for adults. They were courteous when spoken to and showed politeness when holding doors open for adults. They were seen to enjoy relaxing with adults in the common room, either chatting or playing table tennis. They moved swiftly back to class when lessons began again.
- The school behaviour code is very clear to all pupils and their parents. Pupils understand the sanctions well. A variety of rewards motivate pupils to behave well and to apply themselves to learning in the classroom. Pupils receive awards from the executive headteacher, from education managers and from the teachers. Good behaviour is rewarded by treats and external visits. As a result, pupils are often highly motivated to achieve.
- The school keeps detailed records of behaviour patterns and analyses these patterns in order to support the pupils. Both positive and negative behaviours are recorded. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with where necessary by appropriate fixed-term exclusions from school. These exclusions become considerably fewer as the pupils settle into school and realise they can enjoy learning and that they are safe. Detailed behaviour

information shows that there are significantly more positive behaviours recorded and fewer negative behaviours as the school year progresses. This term has been particularly positive. Overall attendance is low compared to national averages but is improving. The vast majority of pupils have either good attendance or their attendance is improving steadily. The school works exceptionally hard to improve the attendance of the minority who attend less regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The vast majority of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 have made good academic progress from their starting points in English, mathematics and ICT. This includes those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This is because the accurate assessments made when the pupils arrive in the school are used to plan effective individualised learning programmes. A minority of pupils have not made strong progress due to their poor attendance.
- The vast majority of pupils in key stage 4 have already successfully achieved passes in entry level and level 1 in English and mathematics examinations achieved at the end of 2017. Pupils will be entered for further examinations at Easter and in the summer term, including GCSE examinations in English mathematics and ICT. This reflects higher expectations of the most able pupils.
- Pupils leave the school for destinations where they can continue their education. Destinations for pupils who left in July 2017 were either to a place in college or to an apprenticeship.
- Pupils have achieved a large variety of certificates for nationally accredited awards from their outdoor adventurous and other activities. In the first half term, between them, pupils achieved 55 certificates, while in the third half term pupils achieved 116 certificates. Some pupils have been identified as able to take up future careers in these activities, for example being identified to train as a boxing coach.
- Pupils have frequent opportunities to improve their reading skills in lessons and good opportunities to enjoy reading. Some of the pupils are keen readers, often reading at home. However, the new reading programme is not yet fully embedded into practice. As a result, those pupils who need to catch up are not yet benefiting from this and are not improving their reading quickly enough.

Sixth form provision

Good

- In line with the rest of the school, leadership of the sixth form is good. This is reflected in good-quality teaching, learning and assessment, as well as the good support for students' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Safeguarding arrangements are strong.
- Students are very well supported to make good progress by skilled teachers, instructors and inclusive education practitioners. They are given good careers advice and guidance and opportunities for work experience. Leaders take great care to ensure that the students have appropriate placements in further education or apprenticeships when they leave the school.
- Sixth-form students follow a similar curriculum to pupils in the rest of the school, with

programmes focusing on essential skills in English, mathematics and ICT. They also take part in outdoor adventurous activities.

School details

Unique reference number	143653
DfE registration number	861/6013
Inspection number	10041367

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	Paul Ball
Headteacher	Andrew McCreedy
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,525
Telephone number	01782 284 329
Website	N/A
Email address	info@peakpursuits.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in January 2017 after registration with the Department for Education. This is the school's first inspection.
- Peak Education Stoke is situated in Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. It is registered to provide full-time and part-time education for boys and girls aged 5 to 18. At present there are no pupils in Year 1 to Year 7. Only a very small number of students join the sixth form each year.

- The school provides education for boys and girls who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan or statement of special educational needs. Most have been excluded or were at high risk of being excluded from their previous school. The school offers places to pupils from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent local authorities.
- The school also offers alternative education to pupils from other schools on a part-time basis.
- The executive headteacher oversees other provision operated by Peak Education. Pupils attend a number of activity centres in the area that belong to the company.
- The aim of the school is to meet the specific needs of pupils and to ensure their educational and personal development. The school aspires to enable pupils to meet their full potential.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector jointly observed six lessons with an education manager and scrutinised a variety of pupils' books. She also observed two cooking lessons in the kitchen. She checked the independent school standards. She listened to several recordings of pupils' discussions in lessons.
- The inspector held meetings with the executive headteacher, education managers, teachers, inclusive education practitioners, the proprietor and two youth offending officers.
- The inspector scrutinised schemes of work and lesson plans as well as a variety of documents about pupils and safeguarding. She scrutinised risk assessments about the school building, individual pupils and external visits.
- The inspector toured the school premises.
- Although there are at present no pupils at the school in Years 1 to 7, the inspector scrutinised schemes of work for these age ranges.
- The inspector spoke to several parents on the telephone and several pupils, as well as the manager of one of the care homes where the pupils live.
- The inspector took into account 45 staff questionnaire responses and an email sent to the school by a youth offending officer. She also took account of one written text response from a parent on Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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