

Inspection of Brantwood Specialist School

1 Kenwood Bank, Nether Edge, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S7 1NU

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 June 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school engage in learning through a practical curriculum. Pupils learn that they can achieve, create wonderful things and that they can care for the environment and animals within it. Through this practical curriculum, pupils learn social and academic knowledge and skills. The atmosphere in the school is generally calm and attitudes to learning are strong. Pupils are well supervised. Adults are very good at identifying when pupils' behaviour is becoming less than good. They calmly manage behaviours to minimise disruption. They know their pupils well.

The majority of pupils join this school having had lengthy times out of education. Generally, pupils' attendance improves dramatically once they enter the school. This is because transition into school is well planned and the curriculum helps pupils focus on learning. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem quickly improves.

The majority of parents are positive about the school, making comments such as, 'this school has turned my child's life around', 'all the staff do an amazing job' and 'my child is thriving at this school'. However, a small minority of parents expressed concern over some aspects.

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

All leaders have a clear vision and philosophy for the curriculum. This is based on giving pupils the best personal and academic opportunities. This vision is shared and valued by all staff. The director of schools has leadership responsibility for this school. Her strategic vision is shared and agreed with other trustees. Practical solutions are shared and agreed with the school leadership team to ensure strategies are realised effectively.

Trustees have a firm commitment to the investment of time and money in training middle and senior leaders. Some training has been completed. However, development of middle and senior leaders has been slowed slightly due to the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has caused difficulties in recruitment and in the accessing of training programmes which has impacted on the quality of leadership roles. In addition, some leaders are not sure when their role starts and someone else's begins. The quality assurance of the curriculum is not as robust as it should be.

Pupils access a broad curriculum. Each subject area has a clear plan of how pupils will make progress through the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Planning and teaching on a daily basis takes account of pupils' individual needs as identified in their education, health and care (EHC) plans and individual learning plans (ILP). However, the documented journey from overview plans to individual plans is often complicated. This increases workload for teaching staff and makes the curriculum complicated to quality assure. Nearly all staff who returned the Ofsted questionnaire said they are proud to be a member of this school. However, almost half considered that workload is an encumbrance to them. Teaching staff know the pupils extremely

well. This means that they direct learning to pupils' plans and to the specific social and emotional needs of pupils.

The curriculum allows pupils to engage in learning about subjects that really interest them. For example, pupils learn blacksmith skills and the associated language. They learn the science behind the craft. Pupils create amazing and high-quality objects through complex processes. Other pupils learn through wool craft or silverwork, for example. Mathematics, English and science are securely embedded in the curriculum. This includes reading. Leaders make sure that pupils at the earlier stages of reading have their needs met.

The school has a comprehensive careers programme with associated work experiences. This helps pupils to consider what academic studies they need to achieve to meet their new goals and aspirations. Teachers support pupils in their practical and academic curriculum to help them meet their goals. Transition arrangements are good. Staff ensure work experiences, visits and external careers advice help pupils as they move on to new experiences. Pupils who have left the school in the last three years have moved on to higher education or work placements. Leaders follow their progress and several pupils are now in independent accommodation while in universities or colleges.

Behaviour in school, although generally good, can occasionally be erratic. Some pupils find it difficult to focus on learning and socialising with others for extended lengths of time. Staff are extremely good at dealing with pupils' behaviour. They calmly and quietly support and redirect pupils where appropriate. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. A range of different therapy staff support pupils on a regular basis. They in turn work with teachers and other professionals to find highly individual ways to support pupils.

The impact of the pandemic has limited face-to-face communication with parents. Senior leaders recognise that a small minority of parents are not happy with the care and education their child receives. The school is now restarting engagement activities with parents. Coffee mornings and workshops are now becoming a regular occurrence; they are well attended and feedback has been very positive.

The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards continue to be consistently met. He commissions external and internal evaluations to ensure that the quality of the care and education pupils receive is constantly checked and evaluated.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding pupils is central to everything that happens in this school. Every morning, a staff briefing lets staff know of anything that has happened to pupils that may influence behaviours or raise any potential safeguarding concerns. Staff are regularly well trained. A large safeguarding team work closely together under the

direction of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL in turn works with external agencies, the therapeutic team, the local authority, trustees and the rest of the safeguarding team to ensure pupils and their families receive the support they need.

The proprietor has ensured that the safeguarding policy and accompanying documents take into account government guidelines and are available on the school website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some of the curriculum planning documentation is overcomplicated. There are several layers of planning from the long-term planning to pupils' individual learning plans. Some curriculum planning lacks the clarification of specific key knowledge and vocabulary that need to be learned and remembered by pupils. This means that teachers' workload is overly burdened with planning documentation. It also means, at times, subject leaders struggle to focus clearly when quality assuring the subject they lead. Ultimately, this impacts negatively on the quality of the curriculum pupils receive. Curriculum planning needs to be simplified, while clarifying the key vocabulary and knowledge pupils need to learn as they make progress through the curriculum.
- Senior leaders have not defined leadership roles clearly. There is inconsistency in how well leaders' expectations are articulated to staff. Consequently, expectations of teaching staff are not always clear and quality assurance of some subjects is confused. For example, the teaching of mathematics and complex vocabulary is embedded in the curriculum. However, it is not clear who it is that checks pupils are remembering and understanding these elements of the curriculum so that they can use them in their future learning. Senior leaders need to ensure that roles are clarified and that senior and middle leaders are given the skills and knowledge to perform their role successfully.

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	136936
DfE registration number	373/6002
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	10233164
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Aonghus Gordon
Chair	Helen Kippax
Headteacher	Eric Knutsen
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,400
Telephone number	0114 258 9062
Website	rmt.org/brantwood
Email address	enquiries@brantwood.rmt.org
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 January 2019

Information about this school

- The school's previous inspection was a full standard inspection in January 2019 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The school uses two alternative providers. One, ON board in Sheffield, is unregistered and the other, Hillsborough College, is a registered provider.
- Brantwood Specialist School accepts pupils between the ages of seven and 19 years. All pupils have an EHC plan and have social, emotional or mental health difficulties and/or a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder.
- The school has a specialist craft and land-based curriculum called Practical Skills Therapeutic Education.
- The school is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust. This is a national charitable trust that runs other special schools and colleges for adults with complex needs.
- The director of schools for the Ruskin Mill Trust has overall leadership responsibility for this school.

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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- This standard inspection was commissioned earlier in the cycle than previously planned due to concerns raised with the Department for Education (DfE).
- Inspectors met with the director of schools, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. They also met with other directors of the trust, including the chair of the Brantwood board of trustees. The proprietor was unavailable and was represented by another trustee.
- Discussions were held with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), the local authority safeguarding officer, over 13 pupils and more than 18 members of staff. Documents were studied, including recruitment checks and records of behavioural incidents. All evidence gave inspectors an in-depth view of safeguarding within the school and considered the areas of concern raised with the DfE.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, English, science and personal, social and health education. Inspectors met with subject leaders, studied planning documentation, considered pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning. Visits were made to lessons and behaviour was observed throughout the three days.
- Inspectors visited all three of the school's sites.

Inspection team

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tricia Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

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