

Birchwood School

Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington WA3 7PW

Inspection date

12 December 2024

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b) and 32(1)(c)

- The school has a suitable safeguarding policy that has regard to the latest statutory guidance. This policy is published on the school's website. There are robust reporting procedures for staff to report any safeguarding concerns.
- The school's procedures for recording safeguarding concerns are not used consistently. Due to this, some information relating to safeguarding is incorrectly recorded. This means that while many concerns are followed up appropriately, some others are not. This inconsistency does not provide sufficient reassurance that the school can keep pupils safe from harm effectively.
- The independent school standards ('the standards') in these paragraphs are not met.

Paragraphs 14 to 16

- The school deploys staff effectively in order to ensure pupils' welfare and safety. This includes staff with the required skills to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The school's admission and attendance registers are accurate, up to date and recorded as set out in the relevant statutory regulations.
- The school has ensured that staff take sensible steps to identify and reduce potential risks to pupils, including any additional risks that may arise due to pupils' SEND.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(1), 19(2), 19(2)(a) to 19(2)(d)(ii), and 19(3)

- The required checks on staff's identity and suitability to work with pupils are completed before they begin working at the school. This includes staff who are employed through a supply agency. Leaders have completed appropriate training to support the safe recruitment of staff.

- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

Paragraph 20(6), 20(6)(a) to 20(6)(c)

- The school has not ensured that the required checks have been carried out on members of the proprietor body. This includes checks relating to section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 and an enhanced DBS check. At the time of the inspection, a member of the proprietor body had been working in the school for several months. The school could not provide reassurance about whether checks on their suitability had been carried out.

- The standards in this paragraph are not met.

Paragraphs 21(1) to 21(7)(b)

- Some of the required checks on the suitability of members of the proprietor body were not recorded on the school's single central record (SCR). In addition, some information related to identity checks on other members of staff was also missing. Some of these omissions were rectified during the inspection. However, the school was unclear about the requirements to record them on the SCR.

- The standards in this paragraph are not met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 25

- The school's premises are safe, secure and well maintained. Classrooms and other teaching spaces are clean, tidy and appropriate for their intended use. The proprietor's arrangements for overseeing the standards related to the school's premises are thorough. There are regular checks made of the condition of the school's premises. Any necessary maintenance is carried out promptly to address issues which may arise.

- The standard in this paragraph is met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34 to 34(c)

- The proprietor's oversight of the school is in a state of transition. At present, lines of accountability are unclear. A governing body has recently been established. However, it has only just begun to fulfil its role.
- The proprietor's understanding of the independent school standards is uneven. There is a lack of knowledge and expertise related to the proprietor's statutory responsibilities. For instance, the proprietor was unaware of the required checks on the suitability of adults who work in the school.
- The proprietor has insufficient oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. It has not ensured that the standards relating to safeguarding are consistently met. These unmet standards have the potential to have a detrimental effect on pupils' well-being.
- The standards in this paragraph are not met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	148566
DfE registration number	877/6014
Inspection number	10371927

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	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Birchwood Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Aisha Dalal
Headteacher	Deb Chappel
Annual fees (day pupils)	£89,500
Telephone number	01925 202 448
Website	www.bwchildservices.com
Email address	deb.chappel@bwchildservices.com
Dates of previous standard inspection	21 to 24 June 2022

Information about this school

- The school operates from premises at Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington WA3 7PW. The proprietor previously operated a children's home on the same site. That provision has now ceased to operate.
- The school caters for pupils with autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. A variety of local authorities place pupils at the school.
- The school is registered for up to 40 pupils.

- The school admits a very small number of students over 16 years of age. These students are continuing their studies from key stage 4 because of their specific needs.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in June 2022. Since then, there has also been a material change inspection in October 2023.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- At the time of the inspection, the identity of the chair of the proprietor body was uncertain. The previous chair notified the Department for Education (DfE) of their resignation in October 2024. The proprietor body appointed a new chair in December 2024. This change has not yet been confirmed by the DfE.

Information about this inspection

- This emergency inspection was commissioned by the DfE because of concerns raised about safeguarding and pupils' well-being. It was carried out without notice.
- The inspectors considered whether the relevant requirements in Parts 3, 4, 5 and 8 of the independent school standards continue to be met.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the new chair of the proprietor body, other leaders and staff. Inspectors considered a range of policies and documents relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the school's single central record of pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors spoke with some pupils about their experiences at the school.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school's premises to check their suitability and safety.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rebecca Sharples	His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 20(6) The standard in this paragraph is met in relation to an individual ("MB"), not being the Chair of the school, who is a member of a body of persons corporate or unincorporate named as the proprietor of the school in the register or in an application to enter the school in the register, if–
 - 20(6)(b) subject to sub-paragraphs (7) to (8), the Chair of the school makes the following checks relating to MB–
 - 20(6)(b)(i) where relevant to the individual, an enhanced criminal record check.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
 - 21(3)(a)(i) S's identity was checked.
- 21(6) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is, in relation each member ("MB") of a body of persons named as the proprietor appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether the checks referred to in paragraph 20(6)(b) were made, the date they were made and the date on which the resulting certificate was obtained.

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.

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