

Inspection of The Watkin Centre

14 Royle Green Road, Northenden, Manchester M22 4NG

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 December 2024

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?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join The Watkin Centre having had difficult prior experiences in education. Some of them have spent prolonged periods out of school. For many, starting at this school provides a positive reintegration into education. They develop warm and supportive relationships with staff. They are made to feel valued. This helps them to feel happy and safe.

Staff support pupils to make appropriate choices about their behaviour. At times, some pupils find this difficult. Staff recognise this and spend time with these pupils to help them understand their reactions. Pupils learn how to modify these and respond appropriately. Pupils appreciate 'brain breaks' to help them when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

Although the school is ambitious for pupils to do well, not all pupils achieve as well as they should. This is because the school's curriculum is not taught consistently well. This limits pupils' knowledge and understanding of important subject content.

Pupils enjoy being involved in decision-making about their school. For example, when the school first opened, they helped to devise the school rules. Pupils are keen to take up positions of responsibility, for example, on the school council.

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 be successful in their future lives. It has designed an ambitious and varied curriculum. In some subjects, this is carefully mapped out, identifying the specific knowledge and skills pupils need to develop. However, in a few subjects, this curriculum design is not as precisely thought through as it needs to be. This means that teaching does not prioritise the most important learning. In addition, some activities are not the most appropriate to help pupils to learn new concepts. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they should.

On the whole, teaching identifies and addresses any misconceptions in pupils' understanding quickly and accurately. However, in some subjects, checks on what pupils have learned are not sufficiently precise. This is because teachers are not always clear about what knowledge they are measuring. This is because the content that the school wants pupils to learn and remember is not explicit or clear. As a result, teachers sometimes do not know what subject content pupils need to revisit and practise before moving on.

The school has prioritised reading. It assesses pupils' reading ability when they join the school. There is appropriate support in place for those pupils who are not yet accurate and fluent readers. The school has invested in developing the range of books available in the school library. Pupils enjoy their teachers reading to them.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). When pupils join the school, a clear picture of their starting points and additional needs are swiftly identified. Staff use this information about pupils' specific needs to inform teaching across the curriculum. The school frequently reviews pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan targets. In response, regular training focuses on how best to support individual pupils. This work is complemented by interventions, such as speech, language and block therapy.

Pupils appreciate the consistent, calm and positive approach to behaviour that staff provide. Typically, the school environment is calm. When pupils are dysregulated, skilled staff help pupils to return promptly to learning. Pupils are given a voice. They learn that it is important to share their feelings. Over time, pupils learn how to manage their emotions well.

Many pupils' attendance quickly improves once they join the school. The school works closely with families, carers and external agencies to support regular attendance. However, not enough pupils attend school regularly. This hampers their learning. The school is constantly seeking different ways to support this group of pupils to overcome their personal barriers which prevent them from attending school regularly.

The school ensures that pupils are well prepared to lead independent lives in modern Britain. For example, pupils are provided with appropriate opportunities to learn about relationships and sex education in accordance with statutory guidance. Pupils develop an understanding of different beliefs, values and perspectives. They learn the importance of keeping physically and mentally fit. Increasingly, pupils benefit from being active citizens in the community. For example, they speak enthusiastically about hosting a coffee morning and baking cakes for members of the nearby church.

Pupils receive quality careers advice and guidance. They meet with independent advisers to discuss their career choices. This successfully helps pupils to think about their future pathways.

Staff are enthusiastic to play their part in the school's continued improvement. They appreciate the additional training and development opportunities that are available. Many staff speak highly of the school's efforts to ensure that their workload is purposeful and manageable.

Since the school's opening in September 2024, the proprietor has put in place a governing body. In addition, the proprietor has appointed additional teaching staff in key areas and a leader with oversight for staff training. These decisions have been made with the intention of increasing leaders' capacity to make further improvements.

The proprietor, chair of governors and headteacher are aware of their statutory responsibilities, including with regards to safeguarding. The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards ('the standards') are met consistently and

securely. The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, the school is still identifying the specific knowledge that it wants pupils to learn. As a result, some pupils do not learn in these subjects as well as they should. The school should ensure that all curriculums set out the important knowledge that pupils should know and the order that this should be taught.
- In a few subjects, teaching activities are not well matched to what the school intends pupils to learn. Occasionally, this hinders pupils' learning of new knowledge. The school should support teachers to design learning that closely reflects the intended curriculum so that all pupils learn as well as they should.
- The school's checks on what pupils have learned are not fully effective. They do not pinpoint what content pupils have remembered and where their learning is not secure. The school should refine its approaches to assessment and ensure that staff have the expertise they need to accurately check what pupils know and remember.
- Some pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, do not attend school regularly enough. This further exacerbates the gaps in these pupils' learning. The school should ensure that these pupils are supported to improve their rates of attendance.

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	150525
DfE registration number	352/6034
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10361104
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	11 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	First Steps Together Ltd
Chair	Matthew Bonilla
Headteacher	Natalie Ogden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,000 - £69,000
Telephone number	03301180974
Website	www.firststepstogether.uk
Email address	Admin@firststepstogether.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is located on one site at 14 Royle Green Road, Northenden, Manchester M22 4NG.
- This was the school's first standard inspection of the school. The school was registered by the Department for Education (DfE) on 25 April 2024.
- The school does not currently employ any supply staff.
- The school provides full-time education for up to 36 pupils aged between 11 and 14 years. The school caters for pupils who are struggling to cope with mainstream education by providing them with a smaller, nurturing environment. All pupils have SEND and an EHC plan for social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The proprietor has registered two other schools separately. The first is the Kershaw Wood School, Talbot Street, Glossop, Derbyshire SK13 7DG. The second is Peak Forest School, Stockport Road, Hyde SK14 3QF.
- The proprietor has a limited company called First Steps Together Limited. The proprietor body is made up of two directors.
- The school makes use of two unregistered alternative provisions for a very small number of 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 evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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.
- Inspectors spoke with the chair of the proprietor body and the headteacher. They also spoke with other senior leaders, subject leaders and a representative of a local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. 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. The lead inspector also evaluated the curriculums in 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 reviewed the school's policies and documents related to pupils' welfare and their education. They talked with staff and pupils about pupils' personal development and pupils' behaviour and attitudes. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the standards. As part of these checks, an inspector made a tour of the school's premises, accompanied by a school leader.

The school's proposed change to the age range of pupils

The school has applied to the DfE to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school meets the relevant standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The school's proposed change was to the age range of pupils from 11 to 14 years old to an age range of 11 to 16 years old (including Year 11).
- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**

Inspection team

Kate Bowker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024