

# Inspection of The Beeches Independent School

218 Dogsthorpe Road, Peterborough PE1 3PB

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Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Sixth-form provision

**Insufficient evidence**

Overall effectiveness at previous  
inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent  
school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

There is no denying that pupils are happy at this school. Pupils rise to the high expectations set out for their behaviour. However, shortcomings in the quality of teaching mean that pupils could achieve more academically.

Kind, cheerful behaviour is the norm. Pupils behave this way due to the care they receive from staff. Pupils benefit greatly from staff teaching them how to take turns in games and conversations. It shows in pupils being inquisitive and polite towards one another, staff and visitors to the school.

Pupils learn to understand democracy through their frequent discussions. Recently, pupils made requests about the books they want in the class library or what changes they would like to the school uniform. Ultimately, this creates an environment where pupils are safe, knowing that staff listen to them and take action.

Through weekly food technology lessons, pupils develop into keen cooks and adventurous, healthy eaters. They relish opportunities to visit local restaurants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a dessert parlour proves most popular. Trips like these give pupils a chance to practise life skills under the watchful eye of school staff. For example, pupils learn how to travel safely and how to talk appropriately to unfamiliar people.

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

Leaders have worked with drive and determination to develop the school, ensuring compliance with the independent school standards (the standards) and the Equality Act 2010. This has worked because the governing board, governors and school leaders share information and insights honestly with each other. This then helps leaders to identify and resolve issues.

Leaders recognised too that making many changes at once would burden staff and unsettle pupils. For that reason, leaders rightly prioritised pupils' safety and welfare in their improvement work. Leaders' expectations are now understood through clear policies, regular staff training and workable systems. It shows in the school running smoothly, making it a calm, pleasant place for staff to work in and pupils to learn in.

The quality of education is improving. Pupils mostly make sound progress. Those at an earlier stage of learning to read receive appropriate support, helping them to read the books they receive. Pupils recall some of what they learn, such as grammar terminology. However, there is more work to do to strengthen the curriculum and tighten up teaching. Some of this work is taking longer than it should because subject leaders lack the know-how to effect change. Still, senior leaders' track record of improvements in other areas of the school puts them in a positive position to push on with change.

Previously, the curriculum was underdeveloped. Leaders recognised the need to

introduce plans that teachers could follow so that pupils receive a more joined-up learning experience. Leaders are in the process of refining the curriculum content. Currently, where curriculum plans are not specific enough, teachers struggle to plot a series of meaningful lessons with clear aims. In some lessons, teachers attempt to cover too much important knowledge. This does not support pupils to learn successfully. Some pupils become confused and then lose concentration.

Staff do not routinely check what pupils know and can do effectively. In subjects like reading, staff sometimes pose questions which are confusing. Although pupils try their best to answer these, they become disgruntled when they cannot provide the answer that staff expect. Similarly, during lessons, staff do not always take account of pupils' learning difficulties. For instance, they do not break down learning into manageable chunks. Pupils get confused by staff's multi-step instructions or are unsure of what to do because staff have not shown them how to complete an activity. With all this, staff struggle to spot and put right how their teaching methods hinder pupils' achievement.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils join the school from several local authorities, each having their own approach to compiling education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Leaders have introduced a clear system for reviewing pupils' EHC plans in an effort to ensure all reviews occur as and when they should. Leaders guide teachers to use these plans to generate clear, short-term targets. These targets balance pupils' academic and pastoral needs, for example how to form particular letters when writing or how to show interest in others through turn-taking during conversations.

Some pupils demonstrate challenging behaviours. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. This is because of the training and support leaders provide, plus staff's own kindness and patience. Pupils are incentivised by the school's reward systems. They enjoy the daily 'golden time' where pupils chat and play. Pupils work hard to collect points for their behaviour. They save these to earn an extra trip out. Pupils' faces light up when they recall trips, such as to mini-golf or to enjoy a curry.

Leaders and staff cater suitably for pupils' personal development. Staff assist pupils in completing college applications and deciding what courses will help them achieve their goals. Staff sensitively cover important aspects of sex and relationships. Staff do not shy away from these. They recognise pupils' need to know and understand these to keep themselves and others safe. The religious education curriculum includes trips to different places of worship. Pupils find these visits interesting. They help pupils to identify similarities and differences between faiths.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure everyone understands the safeguarding policy. This is published on the school's website. Staff receive clear and regular safeguarding training. Staff notice and report any worrying indications that a pupil may be at risk of harm.

Leaders then take appropriate action, liaising sensibly with external safeguarding agencies.

Pre-employment checks on staff are thorough. Leaders manage any allegations against staff suitably, ensuring adults in school are safe to be there.

Pupils receive regular messages about how to keep themselves safe through assemblies and during lessons. Pupils are comfortable to tell staff their concerns. Staff are particularly vigilant with non-verbal pupils, noticing and reporting any changes to a pupil's appearance or behaviour that concern them.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Subject leaders are eager to do well, but they lack the training to make them experts in the subject they oversee. This makes it harder for them to identify how effectively their subject is taught and to address any weaknesses or issues. Subject leaders should receive high-quality training to develop their subject and teaching expertise. In turn, they should receive the time and support to monitor standards in their subject, allowing them to drive improvements so that all pupils achieve their very best.
- There are subjects where the specificity teachers need to plan a clear sequence of learning is lacking. Leaders should continue their work to develop the curriculum, putting in place curriculums that set out plainly the vocabulary, concepts and skills they want pupils to learn. Leaders should then guide teachers to realise these through the delivery of clear sequences of learning.
- Occasionally, staff present subject matter in a way that confuses pupils. Consequently, pupils become distracted or frustrated and do not learn the important content as well as leaders intend. Leaders should strengthen their programme of staff training, helping staff to develop their teaching expertise so that they impart knowledge and skills clearly and efficiently.
- How staff make and use assessment varies in its effectiveness. So, sometimes the way they go about checking pupils' understanding is inaccurate or unhelpful, making it harder for them to support pupils with their learning. Leaders should train staff in how best to check pupils' understanding, such as with clear questioning, so that staff learn how to use their checks to inform the support pupils receive.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139018
<b>DfE registration number</b>	874/6004
<b>Local authority</b>	Peterborough
<b>Inspection number</b>	10267082
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	16
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	3
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	3
<b>Proprietor</b>	Silver Birch Care Holdings Ltd
<b>Headteacher</b>	Abigail Brown
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£24,000 to £78,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01733 344448
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.beechesuk.co.uk">www.beechesuk.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@beechesuk.co.uk">info@beechesuk.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	8 to 10 March 2022

## Information about this school

- The school opened in 2012. The school changed ownership to Silver Birch Care Holdings Ltd on 1 August 2018. The current director of the company joined in March 2021. A governing board oversees the work of senior leaders on behalf of the proprietor.
- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan. Many have a diagnosis of autism and/or communication difficulties.
- Around half the pupils are children looked after. They live in children's homes overseen by the proprietor.
- All school placements, including for those pupils who attend part-time and/or receive home tuition from school staff, are funded by local authorities. School admission is through local authority referral.
- At present, the school is based in two buildings, on opposite sides of the road. The addresses are 218 and 301 Dogsthorpe Road, Peterborough, PE1 3PB.
- Leaders do not currently make use of any alternative provision for pupils.
- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school's inspection history:
  - In June 2012, a pre-registration visit was carried out and registration was not recommended.
  - The school's first standard inspection was carried out in October 2013. The overall effectiveness of the school was judged to be good.
  - In November 2014, a material change integrated inspection took place. At this inspection, it was judged that some standards were unlikely to be met if the material change was implemented.
  - In March 2015, the school submitted an action plan setting out how it would address the unmet standards. An evaluation of the action plan was carried out and the proposed action plan was judged to be acceptable.
  - At the progress monitoring inspection in June 2015, some of the standards were judged not to be met.
  - In August 2015, the school submitted an action plan setting out how it would address the unmet standards. An evaluation of the action plan was carried out and the proposed plan was deemed not to be acceptable.
  - In November 2015, the school submitted a revised action plan setting out how it would address the unmet standards. An evaluation of the action plan was carried out and the proposed action plan was deemed acceptable.

- A standard inspection took place in September 2016. The overall effectiveness of the school was judged to be good.
- A standard inspection was carried out in December 2019. The overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement and some of the standards were not met.
- In March 2020, the school submitted an action plan setting out how it would address the unmet standards. An evaluation of the action plan was carried out. The proposed plan was deemed not to be acceptable.
- At the standard inspection in March 2022, the overall effectiveness was judged inadequate. Several standards were not met.
- In September 2022, the school submitted an action plan setting out how it would address the unmet standards. An evaluation of the action plan was carried out. The proposed plan was deemed not to be acceptable.
- At the progress monitoring inspection in November 2022, all the standards that were checked were deemed to be met.

## **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.

Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, head of operations and the chair of the board of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, art and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and education support staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to two pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The lead inspector reviewed documentation relating to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, including their EHC plans and the in-school support plans.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and deputy designated safeguarding lead to review documentation and records. This included reviewing the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. Inspectors also spoke to a governor, staff and pupils about



safeguarding. To check health and safety measures, the lead inspector toured the existing and proposed premises, reviewed policies and scrutinised record-keeping.

- As part of the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and minutes of governing board meetings.
- Inspectors met with pupils, with a member of staff present. This helped pupils to talk confidently about their school experience. Inspectors also took account of the three responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the six free-text responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, along with the seven responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

### **The school's proposed change to its premises and the maximum number of pupils**

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school 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 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.**

### **Information about the material change inspection**

- The school has applied to move the school premises to 45 Thorpe Road, Peterborough, PE3 6AN, and increase the number of pupils on roll to 32.

### **Inspection team**

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul Wilson

His Majesty's Inspector

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