

Mountwood Academy

Ward Green Lane, Preston PR3 3YB

Inspection dates

19–21 March 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is dynamic and forward-thinking. She leads a team of dedicated and creative senior and middle leaders who are highly effective in their various roles.
- The proprietor and governors, together with senior leaders, have secured rapid improvements since the previous inspection, including to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, and have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils benefit from an innovative, personalised and creative curriculum which secures their engagement and ensures their good progress. Some pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in music and art.
- Staff develop exceptionally strong bonds with pupils and provide outstanding care and support. The various clinical and therapeutic services available to pupils are exemplary.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are welcoming, eager to engage in class, always try their best and enjoy learning with their peers.
- Pupils say that they always feel safe in school. Their attendance is exceptionally high.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils and make learning interesting. As a result, pupils make good progress in acquiring speaking, listening and mathematical skills. Those able to write show marked improvement to their skills over time.
- Pupils have access to a somewhat limited range of reading materials and few opportunities to refine their reading skills across the curriculum.
- Mountwood's excellent partnership with Linton Special School enriches the curriculum with different forest and farm school and equine activities. However, plans for work experience for key stage 4 pupils and post-16 students are yet to be implemented.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about their children's good progress. Parents, and representatives from local authorities, say that children are safe and well cared for.
- Senior leaders' work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, as well as their appreciation of British values, is very effective.

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 the quality of teaching and learning by helping pupils to develop their reading skills across the curriculum and providing them with access to a wider range of authors.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by developing the curriculum for key stage 4 pupils and post-16 students, to include work-based learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is for it to be outstanding in all respects. She is highly ambitious and exceptionally well organised. This is most clearly demonstrated in the aspirational flight-paths charted for each pupil, highly effective systems for monitoring pupils' progress and focused improvement plans.
- The headteacher is methodically growing leaders, teachers and support staff, many of whom are new to the school since the previous inspection. However, leaders share the same ambition and drive as the headteacher. They are effective, innovative and determined to succeed.
- Together with all staff, and with the full involvement of the proprietor and governors, leaders are systematically addressing the areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection, most of which have been resolved. As a result, the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils are good. Leaders have made it a priority to develop post-16 students' and key stage 4 pupils' employability skills through securing appropriate work-related learning and work experience. However, these plans have yet to be implemented.
- The proprietor, governors and senior leaders work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are safe and their personal, social, moral and academic needs are well catered for. In addition, the proprietor and governors ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Senior leaders systematically assess the quality of teaching by checking the quality of pupils' work, talking with pupils about their learning and observing teachers' practice. Tailored training and support are available to ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to engage pupils in learning and support their strong, and in some subjects outstanding, progress. Feedback given to teachers and teaching assistants is clear, helping them to further develop their teaching skills.
- Staff morale is very high; all staff are working towards the same common goals. Teachers and teaching assistants who spoke with the inspector indicated that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support their improvement.
- All staff completed the inspection questionnaire and were eager to make it known that 'I enjoy every minute of working at Mountwood. We are supported well and have very good access to weekly training' and 'I am proud of the way we nurture our young people to be the best they can be and provide a safe, loving and fun place for them to exceed.' Typically, staff 'love' the challenge of working in the school and delight in seeing pupils thrive.
- All pupils benefit from outstanding therapeutic services delivered by highly trained specialists, teachers and teaching assistants. Compelling evidence is available, in pupils' progress files and flight-paths, of the positive impact of such therapies, which improve pupils' speaking, listening, language and communication skills and ability to participate in learning.
- Much of the curriculum is delivered through the medium of visual and performing arts, which support pupils exceptionally well in developing their musical composition, acting, painting, puppetry, mask-making and musicianship skills. Pupils' calculation and problem-solving skills are developed well across the curriculum, as are their writing and technology skills.

- Parents who spoke with the inspector, as well as those who completed the inspection questionnaire, were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of Mountwood school. Parents typically commented that 'the school meets our children's needs and ensures we are kept up to date with relevant information on their education and well-being.'
- Parents are highly complimentary about 'real-time' electronic means of communication. Remotely, parents can see what their children are doing in lessons and interact with them and their teachers. Representatives from placing authorities comment that pupils settle into school life quickly and make strong progress. They also indicate that communication is good.
- Leaders' promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their appreciation of British values is good. Pupils are aware of cultural diversity. They celebrate various customs and religious traditions, including Chinese New Year, and know of the achievement of patrons for peace, such as Martin Luther King.
- Pupils put democratic principles into practice on the student council and observe International Women's Day. They enjoy themed events such as Mexican and Caribbean day, where they sample curried goat, guacamole, samba and calypso music and immerse themselves in tropical customs. Closer to home, pupils read poetry and eat haggis during Burns Night and commemorate the patron saints of England, Ireland and Wales.

Governance

- The proprietor and governors hold senior leaders astutely to account for the quality of teaching and the school's work to promote pupils' personal, social and academic development. Governors know the school exceptionally well. They challenge leaders and teachers to continually improve and execute their responsibilities for safeguarding diligently.
- Leaders know that the quality of teaching is good because they come into school regularly to gain first-hand knowledge. Governors tour the school, visit classrooms and engage in discussions with pupils. They have a precise understanding of how well pupils are progressing because they receive regular, comprehensive reports from senior leaders.
- Governors know exactly what the school is aiming to achieve and are fully conversant with the school's strategic priorities. Governors ask searching questions. Their leadership skills and many years' experience of working in education give them an accurate overview of the school's success in meeting its priorities.
- Governors are fully involved in the headteacher's performance management. They are trained well and work closely with leaders to ensure that the school meets all safety requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and staff are highly vigilant. The school has a current safeguarding policy available on its website, which has been developed with close reference to the latest government guidelines on keeping children safe in education.
- Staff are trained well to spot signs of neglect and/or abuse and know precisely what to do if they are concerned about the welfare of a child. Staff, and most governors, have had

'Prevent' duty training, which is part of the government's agenda for tackling radicalisation and extremism.

- Designated safeguarding leaders are trained to a very high standard. They work effectively with external agencies to support pupils, many of whom are highly vulnerable, and are familiar with the risk assessments in each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- All appropriate checks are made on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. In addition, educational visits and activities at Linton school, including horse-riding, are risk assessed to ensure pupils' safety. Risk assessments are regularly carried out to ensure the safety and security of school premises.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and teaching assistants are trained to a high standard. They have a thorough knowledge of pupils' individual learning needs and are conversant with each pupil's targets, as detailed in their EHC plans. Teachers have exceptionally high expectations of pupils and employ a wide range of techniques to help pupils to participate in learning. As a result, pupils enjoy discovering new things and make strong progress in a range of subjects.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and therapists have excellent relationships with pupils, whom they care about deeply. All focus on developing pupils' communication skills and, whenever possible, their ability to cooperate and work alongside their peers.
- Across the school, mathematics teaching is good. Teachers make mathematics interesting and ensure that pupils know how to apply their calculation skills to various activities, including shopping. This was exemplified in a lesson where pupils explored healthy living. With teachers, pupils acted out a shopping scenario. The use of puppets gave pupils the confidence they needed to read shopping lists, purchase cheese, tomatoes and pasta and calculate the cost of a meal.
- Teachers use effective strategies to develop pupils' language and communication skills. This was evident in an 'attention autism' class. The teacher used symbols and non-verbal communication to help pupils identify and name various colours. Thereafter, different coloured blobs of thick paint were put onto a board which was then held up so that the paints slowly dripped onto a mat. Pupils were fully engaged as they described the speed of the colours and correctly identified the first colour to drip onto the mat.
- At Linton school, pupils engage in equine activities. Teachers ensure that pupils are fully aware of their environment, the importance of safety, animal care and hygiene. Pupils have a good understanding of different horse characteristics and markings and can identify horses 'bucking', 'kicking' and 'rearing'. They also have excellent horse control when trekking and being led around the paddock by the school's trainer. Pupils know how to urge horses on, bring them to a stop and canter. More experienced riders trot, canter and jump.
- Pupils love drama and music. This was observed as pupils created a piece of theatre, after the style of Lazzi (comedic routines that are traditionally associated with Commedia dell'arte). Pupils demonstrated their excellent understanding of Lazzi as they looked at the audience, then at each other, laughed and left the stage in a synchronised comedic walk. Pupils are happy to engage in impromptu performances. They can quickly scramble a

band, usually staff, and sing popular songs, such as A Million Dreams from 'The Greatest Showman' production, with supreme confidence.

- Teachers and teaching assistants are acutely aware that pupils at Mountwood experience the world in different and unique ways. Sudden loud sounds can lead to sensory overload, while the touch of soft fabrics and other materials can provide security and an excellent gateway into learning. For example, in a science class, pupils excelled in developing their understanding of growth when they planted sunflowers. Pupils enjoyed the smell, texture and warmth of the potting compost as they carefully placed seeds into pots and gently covered them over.
- Teachers encourage pupils to read; this the most able do regularly. However, few opportunities are available for pupils to practise and refine their reading skills across the curriculum. In addition, pupils are exposed to the work of a limited number of authors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are at the forefront of everything that staff at Mountwood do. An extensive range of techniques are employed by staff, which help pupils to participate in various activities and reduce unnecessary anxiety.
- Innovative occupational and speech and language therapies literally help pupils to remove layers, including weighted blankets, soft toys, hats and hoods, to make eye contact and express themselves verbally. Where pupils need the comfort of a stretching sheet or have the desire for a dark space, ambient and/or scented room, facilities are available.
- Pupils enjoy various sensory experiences, such as bouncing large format balls and exploring textured objects, which helps to develop their coordination, confidence and interaction with the world around them.
- The school's multi-disciplinary clinical and therapy teams work closely with teaching assistants and teachers to share tried-and-tested techniques which help pupils devise strategies to manage their feelings, emotions and fears. Outstanding art therapy supports pupils in coming to terms with past traumatic experiences, barriers to learning and factors which prevent them from working alongside their peers.
- Pupils at Mountwood make their thoughts and feelings known, in whatever way they can. This they do as members of the school council. Recently, pupils worked closely with staff and shared their views on the construction of a new play area, now complete, which includes a large swinging tyre, various climbing frames and soft-surfaced playing area.
- At Linton, Mountwood's sister school, pupils develop excellent horticulture and animal care skills. In addition, pupils benefit from outstanding horse-riding instruction and equine therapy, which help them blossom and develop their exceptionally strong horse-control and riding skills.
- Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living and healthy eating and regularly participate in sports and physical activities. A strong culture of safety is evident in the school. Pupils know that they can approach any adult at any time and have their concerns dealt with immediately.

- All pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they always feel safe at school. Parents are of the view that their children are safe and well looked after. Not all pupils use electronic means of communication; some are averse to technology. However, those who spoke with the inspector know precisely how to stay safe when online.
- Pupils benefit from good independent careers advice and are made aware of different education, training and employment options. Senior leaders are currently securing external work-based learning opportunities for pupils and post-16 students in garden centres, hair and beauty salons and with local businesses.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils flourish at Mountwood. They rarely miss a day of school because they love learning and thrive on the special bonds they have with teachers, teaching assistants and therapists. Attendance for most is 100%. On the rare occasions when pupils find it difficult to come to school, there is always a member of staff to provide a listening ear, therapy and/or massage.
- During the inspection pupils' behaviour was outstanding. Pupils enjoy lunchtime, where they can catch up with their friends and eat a healthy meal with staff. Pupils' dining etiquette and conversation are excellent. They ensure that the dining area is clean and tidy and look after the school, which is calm and purposeful.
- All staff who completed the staff survey indicated that pupils' behaviour is at least good and stated that the school has a culture that encourages high aspirations for all pupils. Staff manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well. They are expert at identifying triggers and averting inappropriate behaviour. In addition, staff implement many effective strategies to help pupils manage their own behaviour.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that there is no name-calling or 'nastiness' at school, indicating that behaviour is usually good. Pupils are of the view that school life is happy and peaceful, with very few upsets.
- The school's own records show that pupils' behaviour improves immediately after they start at the school. Parents and representatives from local authorities express surprise at how quickly children, some with previously challenging behaviour, settle into school life. There are few infringements of the rules. Inspection evidence indicates that behaviour is typically outstanding over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress. Over time, they develop their speaking, listening, verbal and non-verbal skills well. Pupils make outstanding progress in a range of other areas, including mathematics, music, art, drama and physical education. They secure excellent skills in equine studies and animal care and gain confidence in interacting with adults and their peers.
- Most pupils make strong progress and develop good reading skills. They enjoy reading challenging books while relaxing in the school's new play and activities area and can talk, with some authority, about characters and story plots. However, opportunities for pupils to read and develop their reading skills across the curriculum are somewhat limited.

- Pupils' progress is carefully monitored, giving teachers and senior leaders a secure understanding of how well pupils are performing in different areas of the curriculum. Each pupil has a personal flight-path which sets out the skills and knowledge they must gain in order to realise their potential. Specialist support, including one-to-one therapy and mathematics and verbal communication sessions, are available to prevent pupils from deviating from their flight paths.
- Where appropriate, pupils have access to different qualifications, including the Arts Award, ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), literacy, mathematics and science, AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) personal development and entry-level qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in drama, where they write interesting scripts, create and read storyboards, produce stage directions and perform for their peers, staff and families. Some pupils make outstanding progress in music and can master instruments such as the double bass, read and write music and produce their own compositions.
- All pupils are encouraged to follow their passions. Teachers encourage pupils to develop their aptitudes and abilities in areas such as model-making, pottery and fine art. Where pupils have the skills to function well in examination situations, they are encouraged to embark on GCSE courses.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their fine motor skills, as seen in the vast improvement in the quality of their written work over time. They participate in 'messy play' and various sensory and physical activities which limber them up and vastly improve their coordination. Pupils unable to hold pens and pencils communicate in other ways. For example, pupils use large formal brushes and express themselves through painting.
- All pupils at Mountwood have an EHC plan. The school's own records show that pupils routinely meet, and in some cases exceed, their personal targets and develop strong speaking, listening and calculation skills. The school's highly effective multi-disciplinary team and special educational needs practitioner know that there is always a way to help pupils participate in learning. The success of their work is evident in pupils' good progress and participation in many different areas of the curriculum.
- All pupils have progress and improvement plans, which identify their goals and aspirations and link to tailored curriculums. Plans identify pupils' next steps, indicating the support they need to successfully transition from one key stage to another.
- Pupils develop their entrepreneurial, communication and customer service skills well in the Creative Café. With a set budget, they take to the local shops to buy various ingredients, including for the cakes they bake and sandwiches, which are dispensed to peers and staff from the café. Such activities help pupils prepare for the next stage of their learning and/or employment after leaving school.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 136069 |
| DfE registration number | 888/6056 |
| Inspection number | 10067907 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 8 to 25 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 22 |
| Number of part-time pupils | None |
| Proprietor | Roc Northwest Ltd |
| Chair | Katie Stephens |
| Headteacher | Emily Haddock |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £50,000–£70,000 |
| Telephone number | 01524 762222 |
| Website | http://mountwoodacademy.lancs.sch.uk |
| Email address | Emily.haddock@mountwoodacademy.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 12–14 September 2017 |

Information about this school

- Mountwood Academy is an independent special school. The school is located on the outskirts of Preston. The school caters for young people with autism. They are all placed in the school and funded by different local authorities from across England and Scotland.
- The executive headteacher is also the headteacher of Linton Special School, which is based in Ribchester near Preston.
- Mountwood provides `... a spacious, calm and safe environment in which young people can thrive and learn ... facilities fully support our creative learning curriculum and a "Total

Communication" approach to education for children who do not use much, if any, spoken language.'

- All pupils have an EHC plan. The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision. Mountwood works closely with its sister school, where pupils engage in farm and forest school activities and horse riding.
- A material change inspection was carried out in July 2018 at the request of the Department for Education. This was because the proprietor applied to change the school's age range from eight to 19 to eight to 25 years. The school currently caters for 22 pupils and students; none is over the age of 19.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in a range of subjects, including English, science, mathematics, art, music, physical education (PE) and drama. The inspector also observed teaching and horse riding at Linton Special School. All lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Pupils' work and assessment files were scrutinised during observations and separately.
- Meetings were held with two governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Meetings were also held with the executive headteacher, assistant headteachers responsible for areas including the curriculum, outcomes, post-16 provision and pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance, and leaders responsible for training and development, maintenance and safeguarding.
- The inspector also met with the school's multi-disciplinary team, which is the school's specialist therapy and clinical team.
- Telephone conversations were held with parents and representatives from local authorities. The inspectors held informal discussions with pupils and students throughout the course of the inspection.
- The inspector read 12 text messages submitted by parents during the inspection and considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Responses to the inspection questionnaires completed by 30 members of staff were also considered. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- The inspector examined a range of documentary evidence. This included checks on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments, various records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour, development plans and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. In addition, inspectors scrutinised the school's development plans and reviews of its own performance.

Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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