

Inspection of Peterhouse School

Preston New Road, Churchtown, Southport, Merseyside PR9 8PA

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Peterhouse School enjoy learning and playing with their friends. They benefit from the supportive relationships that they form with staff. Pupils value Paisley the school dog. She, and staff, help pupils to have a successful start to the school day. Pupils feel happy and safe in school.

Pupils typically respond well to leaders' and staff's high expectations for their behaviour and conduct. Most pupils understand and follow the clear school rules and routines. Staff minimise disruption to learning. Leaders work effectively with pupils, and parents and carers, to sort out any rare incidents of bullying.

Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, enjoy a range of activities that help them to become active citizens. They litter pick on the local beach to improve the environment, and they visit the local fire and police stations. Pupils work as a team to report on school life in the Peterhouse Press newspaper. They value trips to the theatre, art galleries and to the local community.

Leaders and staff have increasingly high expectations of pupils' achievement. Pupils try hard in their lessons. However, leaders have not paid enough attention to the design and delivery of subject curriculums. This means that pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

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

All pupils at Peterhouse School have autism spectrum disorder. Leaders are ambitious and committed to pupils becoming successful adults. Staff identify, assess and meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. Most parents agree with this view. Pupils benefit from appropriate on-site therapy services. Therapists work hand in hand with leaders, staff, parents and pupils.

Leaders have established a broad curriculum that meets the ambition of the national curriculum. They make sure that pupils follow a tailored pathway based on their needs, not age. However, in several subjects, the knowledge that leaders intend pupils to learn lacks clarity. As a result, some pupils do not successfully build new knowledge on what they have learned before. This hampers their academic progress in some subjects.

Leaders have not ensured that staff deliver the curriculum consistently well. Some of the activities that teachers design do not give pupils the support and structure that they need to learn the subject curriculum content. Consequently, pupils do not deepen their knowledge as well as they should.

Older pupils, including students in the sixth form, benefit from accredited courses such as functional skills and GCSEs. Where pupils follow these accredited courses, the curriculum is more effectively designed as it links closely to the examination

specifications. Many pupils gain appropriate qualifications and transition to further education, employment or training. Students in the sixth form learn well.

Leaders prioritise the development of pupils' communication and language skills. They have recently launched a curriculum that introduces pupils to phonics in a systematic way. Staff have received some suitable training in the phonics programme. However, they are in the process of developing their confidence in delivering the programme. This is because the implementation of the phonics programme is in its infancy.

Pupils on the flexible education programme receive a well-designed package of support. Many pupils on this programme have found a love for learning due to the care, support and guidance of staff.

Pupils improve their behaviour over time. This is demonstrated in the positive attitudes shown by older pupils and students in the sixth form. Most staff use supportive approaches that help pupils to engage with their learning. However, a minority of pupils can lose focus at times because staff do not support them to learn the subject curriculum as effectively as they should.

Leaders promote pupils' personal development well. For example, staff ensure that pupils learn about a range of faiths and fundamental British values. Leaders design activities that successfully develop pupils' interests and talents.

Leaders provide suitable impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance to pupils. Older pupils, including students in the sixth form, take part in purposeful work experience with a range of employers. Leaders work well to ensure that these opportunities match pupils' aspirations for their future.

Governors have benefited from useful training. This has helped to improve the level of challenge that they give to leaders. Governors and leaders acknowledge that further improvements are required to the quality of education that pupils receive. They are acting to strengthen subject leadership and the curriculum that pupils receive.

While subject leadership and the curriculum have recently been improved, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes on pupils' achievement. Subject leaders are passionate and ambitious. However, many are very new to their roles and they have not had sufficient training or support to fulfil their duties as effectively as they could.

Staff, including those new to teaching, are proud to work as part of the Peterhouse School team. They appreciate leaders' consideration for their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to learn how to stay safe. For example, pupils learn how to swim and about the risks that they could face when online. Pupils receive carefully considered relationships and sex education, and health education. Pupils are confident that staff would help them with any issues that make them feel uncomfortable.

Staff are well trained to identify any signs of abuse or neglect. When required, they raise concerns promptly. Leaders involve suitable agencies that help to ensure that pupils and their families get the timely support and guidance that they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In several subject areas, leaders have not identified the knowledge that pupils must learn in sufficient detail. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that they pinpoint the knowledge that pupils must learn in each subject in sufficient detail.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff deliver the curriculum, or design learning activities, as well as they should. This impacts negatively on some pupils' academic progress and, at times, their engagement in lessons. Leaders should ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge required to deliver subject curriculums effectively.
- The recently introduced phonics programme is not delivered consistently well. This hinders how well some pupils acquire phonics knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff have sufficient training and support to deliver the phonics programme as intended.
- Some subject leaders have not had enough training or support to deliver their areas of responsibility as well as they could. This hampers some subject leaders' ability to develop the curriculum and evaluate its impact on pupils' learning. Leaders should ensure that subject leaders continue to receive support and guidance to fulfil their roles effectively.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	133748
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	10257068
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	17
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Eileen Heron
Headteacher	Calvin Wallace
Website	www.peterhouseschool.com
Date of previous inspection	27 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with autism spectrum disorder aged five to 19.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Places are commissioned by local authorities.
- More than half of the staff are new to the school since the previous inspection. Changes include the appointment of a headteacher and executive head of educational services in September 2022. The chair of governors was appointed in January 2022.
- Leaders are responsible for a flexible education programme. Places are commissioned by local authorities. At the time of the inspection, 13 pupils were part of this provision.
- The school is part of the Autism Initiatives group of companies.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- Leaders do not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

- 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 completed deep dives in early reading; personal, social, health and economic education; and art and design. They met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to staff and pupils. The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also considered the mathematics, computing, physical education and music curriculums. They met with subject leaders and reviewed pupils' work.
- At the time of the inspection, there were too few children in the early years to make a separate judgement for this phase. However, inspectors considered the early years curriculum and welfare requirements through their inspection activities.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. They spoke to the headteacher and other senior leaders throughout the inspection.
- The lead inspector met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke to a representative of Sefton local authority by telephone.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and checked the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and procedures. They observed pupils during lessons, at playtimes and at lunchtimes.
- The lead inspector met with two groups of staff to discuss their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Adam Sproston, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michelle Beard

Ofsted Inspector

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