

Inspection of Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

1 Hall Flat Lane, Balby, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN4 8PT

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 November 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Sycamore Hall merges traditional values with a great education for all pupils. Staff are enthusiastic and love engaging pupils in learning. As a result, pupils embrace learning opportunities and make excellent progress across the curriculum. The school's calm, orderly environment makes pupils feel safe. This leads to pupils having strong self-discipline and a love of learning. Clear routines and high expectations encourage good behaviour. The school's star-based reward system provides significant motivation for pupils. It fosters a culture of respect and purposeful learning among all pupils.

Pupils show respectful conduct, both in and out of class. Pupils are kind and provide each other with unprompted support and praise for good work. For example, pupils praise each other's singing in the school play rehearsal.

The school helps the pupils learn about different faiths, beliefs and relationships. Pupils are well-rounded individuals. Leadership opportunities are well structured. School prefects and mentors feel a strong sense of duty in their roles, ranging from feeding the fish to leading the sports day teams.

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

The school's ambitious curriculum serves pupils well. It helps all pupils to excel and meet the staff's high expectations. For example, in English, pupils study a wide range of Shakespeare's plays in great detail. It enables the pupils to give clear, reasoned views on why they prefer 'The Tempest' to 'Richard II'. Leaders have sequenced subject content well. All subjects have a clear progression in knowledge and skills. The curriculum's careful planning enables cumulative learning. Some lessons have engaging activities, for example the use of role-play in English. However, at times in some lessons, tasks do not support the intended learning as well as they could.

The school's strong focus on reading excellence yields great results. Teachers blend phonics with regular opportunities to enhance learning outcomes. The school is quick to identify pupils who struggle to read. This allows for swift, targeted help. When pupils have had reading support, it helps them to catch up and keep up with their classmates.

The mathematics curriculum teaches pupils how to work and think like a mathematician. Learners with additional needs receive bespoke support. This helps to make learning accessible for all pupils. The wider curriculum is broad and engaging. For example, in history leaders break down content into logical, small steps that increase in difficulty.

The behaviour of pupils is strong. Pupils know the school rules very well. When pupils drift off task in lessons, the staff refocus them without delay. Attendance in school is excellent. Pupils rarely miss any time at school.

The new PSHE curriculum is well thought out. But, at this stage, the curriculum is in its early stages. Staff are still learning the new content. Pupils know, in detail, British values and protected characteristics. They know the key parts of a healthy relationship. The school prepares pupils with great effectiveness for their next step in learning. The pupils enjoy participating in sports, drama, music and local trips. All of which add to the rich offer the school offers to every pupil.

The school's high expectations and teamwork drive improvement. They have clear policies and procedures that staff know and follow. The school makes a significant investment in professional development. This helps ensure that the staff have the skills and knowledge to teach the subjects well. Managing staff workload and well-being in a considered manner keeps ambition and morale high.

The proprietor ensures that the school is well led. It conducts regular checks on the school's effectiveness and takes action to address any relative weaknesses when they arise. The buildings are in good order. The school meets the independent school standards in full and complies with 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)

- Recent changes to the PSHE curriculum are not embedded. Staff are adapting to teaching the new content and getting used to addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school should ensure that they embed the curriculum and provide staff training so that it can be implemented effectively.
- On occasions, teaching and activity choices do not focus sufficiently on the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn. When this is the case, pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school must ensure that activities are selected carefully to support the pupils in learning the curriculum.

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	106816
DfE registration number	371/6010
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	10321493
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jane Spencer
Headteacher	Jane Spencer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,400
Telephone number	01302 856 800
Website	www.sycamorehallschool.co.uk
Email address	sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 and 30 June 2022

Information about this school

- The school is located at Hall Flat Lane, Blaby, Doncaster DN4 8PT.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in February 2022, when it is judged to be good. Since this standard inspection, Ofsted carried out a progress monitoring inspection in November 2023.
- The proprietor is also the headteacher.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- No children are currently attending the school in the early years foundation stage.

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 to the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including those relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including considering early reading, mathematics, history and PSHE. 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.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses from the Ofsted survey for staff.
- There were no responses from the Ofsted survey for pupils. However, inspectors spoke to all pupils during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime, in lessons and around the school.

Inspection team

Richard Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mehnaz Kauser

Ofsted Inspector

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