

Inspection of Safe Start School

1, 2, 4 & 5 Henry Square Chambers, Old Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside,
Greater Manchester OL6 7ST

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 January 2025

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

This school provides education to pupils who have faced significant challenges in their lives. For many, their previous difficulties have left them with large gaps in their learning. Staff gently support pupils to put any prior negative experiences of school behind them. In turn, pupils come to appreciate education once more. They build trusting relationships with their teachers and gradually increase the time that they spend at school. Many pupils are well on the way to successfully re-engaging with their education.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school is determined to prepare them well for their future. Pupils are rightly proud of the progress that they make in their social and emotional development. This typically sets them up well for adulthood. However, the school's ambition for pupils' academic achievement is not fully realised. Pupils do not learn the curriculum as well as they should.

Pupils follow the school's routines and expectations calmly. They learn about the importance of equality and tolerance. This helps them to treat each other and staff, with respect.

The school ensures that pupils are equipped to lead independent lives in modern Britain. For instance, pupils learn how to budget, plan trips by public transport and organise cultural celebrations for their peers.

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

Staff and pupils have experienced a turbulent period in recent years. A succession of leadership changes brought instability to the school. In turn, this had a detrimental effect on pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. The proprietor has now successfully stabilised this situation. It has recruited new leaders with the expertise necessary to bring about positive changes. Their decisive action has quickly ensured that the school is a calm environment where pupils can learn. Incidents of negative behaviours have reduced considerably. Pupils benefit from a range of interventions to help them to regulate their emotions. Over time, this helps pupils to be ready for learning.

Some other improvements are taking longer to have the intended positive impact. For instance, new strategies to improve pupils' rates of attendance are only just beginning to be implemented. Pupils joining Safe Start typically have a planned transition into the school. This means that they gradually build up their attendance over a period of time. The school's ambition is for all pupils to work towards attending full time. This is successful for many; however, some pupils' attendance remains stubbornly low. Furthermore, changes in staffing have hindered the school's analysis of which strategies are the most effective in raising pupils' attendance.

The proprietor and leaders share a clear vision for pupils to gain the qualifications and life skills necessary for further education or employment. However, some of the school's work to develop the curriculum to meet this ambition is very recent. In many subjects, the school has not thought carefully enough about what pupils should know and remember. Moreover, some pupils' gradual reintegration to full-time education means that they do not currently study as broad a range of subjects as they should.

The school's sharp focus on functional skills means that pupils typically gain qualifications in English and mathematics which help them into positive college destinations. In most other subjects, pupils learn inconsistently. Most staff do not have a secure knowledge of the subjects they are employed to teach. Learning activities are sometimes poorly thought out. This hinders pupils in building their knowledge. Furthermore, the school does not use assessment strategies well enough to shape teaching around pupils' misconceptions. Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. They struggle to make sense of new learning. Overall, this means that pupils' learning is often not as secure as it should be, limiting their future options.

The school assesses and identifies pupils' needs thoroughly when they arrive. This includes any SEND along with any deficits in pupils' reading knowledge. This provides a wealth of information about pupils' starting points. However, some staff do not use this information as well as they could to adapt their teaching. Added to this, the school's support for pupils to catch up in reading is underdeveloped. Some pupils who struggle to read do not get the help that they need. This hinders how well these pupils achieve across the curriculum.

The school has prioritised supporting pupils' mental health and emotional development. On the whole, this is successful. Staff help pupils to form healthy habits, build their confidence and develop resilience. Pupils enjoy a range of activities designed to support their appreciation of the world around them. These include trips to local historic sites, fundraising for charity and learning about different religions and cultures. A suitable programme of careers guidance helps pupils to develop their aspirations and explore different options for when they leave school.

The school's policies, including a safeguarding policy that meets the current statutory requirements, are available to parents and carers on the school's website. The proprietor has also ensured that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. However, some of the proprietor's systems for ensuring consistent compliance with the independent school standards ('the standards') are not employed as well as they should be. For instance, inspectors identified some routine maintenance issues that had not been addressed in a timely way. Added to this, the proprietor's approach to the monitoring of fire safety lacks rigour. Although inspectors found that pupils were not at increased risk of harm, some of the school's fire risk assessments had not been updated since changes were made to the premises. Overall, not all of the standards about the welfare, health and safety of pupils, nor those about the quality of education, are met.

Staff recognise that much has changed at the school in a short time. Most staff consider these changes to have brought a renewed optimism to the school. However, some of the school's work to support teachers' professional development has only begun recently. The impact on the quality of education at the school is in its early stages.

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 has not thought clearly enough about the most important knowledge that pupils should learn. Staff sometimes lack clarity about what to teach, and the expertise needed to teach it effectively. This hinders pupils from building up their knowledge as well as they should. The school should ensure that it identifies clearly what pupils should learn and provide support for staff to help them to deliver the curriculum effectively.
- Some pupils who struggle with reading do not receive the support that they need to catch up. Added to this, some staff do not take deficits in pupils' reading knowledge into account when planning learning. This hinders how well some pupils achieve across the whole curriculum. The school should ensure that there is a systematic approach to helping pupils to read accurately and fluently.
- Systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's provision are underdeveloped. Too often, leaders and staff do not know how well the school's strategies are working. This includes strategies to improve attendance and how well staff deliver the curriculum. This makes it difficult to identify the actions that will have the intended positive impact on pupils. The proprietor should review its approach to quality assurance to ensure that this provides the most useful information to drive the improvement of the school.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the standards are met consistently and securely. Added to this, some records of checks and maintenance carried out on the premises are not as thorough as they could be. This further hampers the proprietor's oversight of the school. The proprietor must ensure that arrangements to check that all the standards are consistently met are effective.

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	147859
DfE registration number	357/6007
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10342162
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Number of part-time pupils	15
Proprietor	Safe Start School Limited
Chair	Rachel Pilling
Headteacher	Grace Speakman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,200 to £48,000
Telephone number	0161 523 5444
Website	www.safestarttameside.com
Email address	admin@safestartschooltameside.com
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 December 2021

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with SEND. Most pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan. Pupils are placed at the school by their local authorities.
- The school operates from three separate units within the same premises. These are numbers 1-2, number 4 and number 5 at Henry Square Chambers, Old Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside OL6 7ST.
- The majority of the school's staff have been appointed since the last inspection.
- The headteacher was absent at the time of the inspection. The school is currently led by an interim headteacher with support from the proprietor.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- Since the school's previous standard inspection there have been two material change inspections. The first of these was in January 2022 and the second in April 2024.
- The school is registered to admit up to 38 pupils. The school has added a key stage 3 provision since its previous inspection.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of 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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietor body, the interim headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including those relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- 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 considered the free-text comments shared through Ofsted Parent View and the responses to the Ofsted survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. However, inspectors gathered the views of a range of pupils during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, in lessons and around the school.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school premises to check the suitability of the premises and accommodation against the relevant standards.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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