

# Inspection of Utopia

The Vikes, 40 Thorsway, Rock Ferry, Merseyside CH42 1NW

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Inspection dates: 2 to 4 July 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

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

Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending Utopia school. They settle into school life quickly and they establish strong and trusting bonds with their peers and staff. Pupils' behaviour is praiseworthy. They are impeccably polite, greeting visitors openly and with warmth. Pupils play their part in ensuring that the school is calm and purposeful.

Most pupils have spent long periods of time out of education prior to joining this school. However, staff nurture pupils' skills and interests to re-engage them in learning. They expect pupils to achieve well academically. Pupils respond positively to the school's high expectations. This helps them to achieve highly in most areas of the curriculum.

Pupils have a strong appreciation of fundamental British values, including the rule of law. They develop their debating skills well. For instance, pupils discussed the importance of parliamentary democracy during the general election. Pupils like to discover new information about cultural and religious diversity.

The school enhances pupils' experiences in different ways. Pupils look forward to educational visits to science and natural history museums and art galleries. They enjoy woodland walks, crabbing, canoeing, horse-riding and beachcombing.

Many opportunities are available for pupils to explore their emotions and to promote their mental health.

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

The proprietor, along with the school, is highly ambitious for pupils and staff. It brings its many years of experience of working with vulnerable pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to support its effective running of the school.

In a short space of time, the school has created an ambitious, interesting and logically ordered curriculum which engages pupils. The school knows precisely what it wants pupils to learn, from when they join the school in Year 9 until they leave at the end of Year 11.

In most areas of the curriculum, teachers have a strong understanding of how well pupils are learning. This ensures that teachers correctly identify pupils' individual points and provides them with the support that they need to learn successfully. However, in a small number of subjects, the school is refining its approach to assessment. In these subjects, teachers do not accurately capture the small, but significant steps that pupils are making in their learning. Due to this, occasionally, pupils complete activities which do not build on what they already know and can do.

The school is creating a culture of reading. Pupils enjoy reading their favourite magazines and books during dedicated reading times. They are developing their appreciation of poetry. Pupils also enjoy graphic novels as well as the work of popular children's authors. A small number of pupils who find reading difficult access the school's phonics programme. However, some staff have not had the training that they need to deliver this programme consistently well. Consequently, some pupils do not develop their reading fluency as quickly as they should.

The school ensures that staff are aware of the targets in each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan and other support plans. Staff use these plans to help them make appropriate modifications to curriculum materials to enable pupils to access all areas of learning successfully. The school works with a broad range of external specialists, and parents and carers, to make sure that pupils with SEND get the extra help that they need promptly.

Despite their often poor previous experiences of education, pupils' attendance is high, their behaviour in class is exceptional and their work ethic is admirable.

Pupils are encouraged to develop their talents and interests in sports such as table-tennis, basketball and football. They enjoy arts and crafts including photography and crochet. They volunteer their services in the local community garden. Pupils develop their social skills in different situations. For instance, they enjoy shopping and ordering food in restaurants. They relish food technology and know how to keep themselves fit and healthy. They also learn about safe and appropriate personal relationships.

Pupils gain functional skills, GCSEs, and other qualifications in a wide range of subjects. They benefit from a comprehensive programme of in-house and external careers information advice and guidance. Pupils learn how to present themselves in interview situations. They have also visited local colleges and businesses. They are supported well to take their next steps into further education, employment or training.

Staff are highly positive about working at the school. They feel that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being. They are consulted before changes are made to the curriculum and when policies are revised.

The proprietor and governors have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement. They challenge and support the school to continually improve. The proprietor ensures that all of the independent school standards ('the standards') are met consistently well.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)**

- The school has not ensured that all staff who support those who struggle with reading, have received training to deliver the phonics programme. As a result, some pupils do not develop their phonics knowledge and early reading skills as quickly as they should. The school should ensure that staff receive the training and support that they need to deliver the phonics programme effectively.
- In a few curriculum subjects, the school has not finalised its approach to assessment. This means that it does not have an accurate picture of how well some pupils are learning in these subjects. The school should ensure that assessment systems in these subjects are finalised to identify and address any gaps or misconceptions in pupils' learning.

## **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>	149600
<b>DfE registration number</b>	344/6018
<b>Local authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	10322525
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	12
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Utopia Training Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Christopher Black
<b>Headteacher</b>	Christopher Black
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£48,005
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 644 1535
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.utopiaschools.co.uk">www.utopiaschools.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@utopiaschools.co.uk">office@utopiaschools.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The headteacher and deputy headteachers are also members of the proprietor body.
- This is the school's first standard inspection since it opened on 26 July 2023.
- The school operates from premises at The Vikes, 40 Thorsway, Rock Ferry, Merseyside CH42 1NW.
- The school caters for up to 20 pupils.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. Pupils' SEND includes social, emotional and mental health needs including autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and complex learning needs.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school has a newly formed governing body.

## 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 judgement 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 any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and other leaders.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- The lead inspector met with the members of the proprietor body, including the chair. The lead inspector also spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with representatives from local authorities responsible for placing pupils at the school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with parents. He reviewed the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. He also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector discussed reading with pupils. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects.
- Inspectors met with staff to discuss their workload and well-being.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school with the headteacher.

### **Inspection team**

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Kevin Sexton

Ofsted Inspector

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