

# Oracle

## Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Peter Toft

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

The school was founded in September 2006 as part of Oracle Care Ltd. Situated within a former mill in Congleton, the school provides special education for boys and girls aged between 10 and 16 years. Five of the six pupils who are currently on roll have a statement of special educational needs and all have complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; all are looked after in Oracle care homes, having been placed there by local authorities from a wide area. The pupils' previous experiences of education have been turbulent and fragmentary. The school aims primarily,

'to bring about a change in behaviour and social skills through a consistent and integrated approach. It functions as the "hub" of Oracle Care Ltd which is a specialist residential care service designed to support young people aged between 10 and 18 years who have complex needs requiring support, education and therapeutic intervention.'

The primary aim of the curriculum 'is to prepare pupils for positive citizenship, thus improving their life chances post 16 and enabling them to develop independence and employability.' The school was last inspected in January 2008 and aspects of the care provision were last inspected in June 2010.

## Evaluation of the school

Oracle School provides an outstanding quality of education and therapy; this is instrumental in helping pupils to control their behaviour, take learning seriously, and make good progress. The curriculum is outstanding, being broad and tailored exceptionally well to meet the severe and highly specific needs of each pupil. Teaching is outstanding and is supported by an exemplary range of assessment techniques, some of which are innovative. Procedures to promote the welfare and safeguarding of pupils are excellent and are implemented diligently by the well-trained staff; all but one of the regulatory requirements are met. The school has improved considerably since its last inspection and meets its aims exceptionally well.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

## Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding in its breadth and relevance to pupils. It is enriched by an extensive provision of outdoor activities and visits to places of interest. It is precisely tailored to meet the specific and divergent special educational needs of the pupils; this precision rests on detailed assessments of their needs. Pupils usually start at the school with very negative attitudes to learning and challenging, often violent, behaviour; they are given a period of intensive help and therapy to enable them to reflect upon and improve their behaviour to provide a basis for further academic learning and personal development. The school develops this basis exceptionally well through its closely-individualised curriculum. As attitudes improve, and they do so significantly, pupils are increasingly enabled to study a wide range of subjects and to develop basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The small number of teaching staff teach some of these subjects and teaching is reinforced by specialists who teach in such fields as physics or land-based studies, both in school and in a partner further education college. Courses are well planned to cover major areas of the National Curriculum. Given the intensity of the pupils' learning difficulties staff have to go to some lengths to ensure that planned lessons meet their needs and changing moods. They are adept at negotiating with pupils to ensure that what is covered in lessons is what was planned. Personal and social development and careers education are covered in specialist lessons and therapy sessions. Staff are highly effective in using a planned range of active teaching methods to promote pupils' interest in the curriculum. This is strengthened by off-site work experience for some pupils. Staff make detailed use of their assessments of pupils' progress as they routinely evaluate and develop the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. Staff have forged excellent relationships with pupils, and mutual respect is palpable in lessons. This has not been easy to achieve; it reflects intensive and painstaking efforts to overcome the barriers to learning with which pupils started at the school. Staff with specialist skills in care, teaching and therapy work very well together to plan and provide coherent programmes which promote pupils' progress and their capacity to overcome learning difficulties. There is an obvious sense of teamwork in the teaching. However, some of the care staff play little part in lessons or reviewing pupils' work, though they remain on the premises having escorted pupils to school. Some of them report that they are not sufficiently well aware of pupils' progress in school; this reflects the lack of time they spend tracking the progress of the pupils in their care while they are on the school's premises during lesson time.

Lessons are well organised and interesting and staff go to some lengths to help pupils to keep up with the pace and work at an appropriate level of difficulty. The excellent staff-to-pupil ratios in lessons and activities enable staff to give pupils the specific level of individual attention they need to remain engaged. Concentration in the lessons observed was good or excellent. The school's investment in training for all staff in therapeutic crisis intervention and a wide range of techniques to improve behaviour and concentration has paid dividends. Staff have developed considerable

expertise in meeting the severe needs of their pupils; this strongly supports their good progress.

Assessment procedures are extremely thorough and are carried out meticulously by the teaching and therapy staff. This is clear, for example, in the weekly meetings held to evaluate pupils' progress, behavioural and academic, and to agree targets to deal with problems and promote future learning. Subsequent teaching is modified effectively as a result of such evaluations and targets are used very effectively in lessons by the staff and understood by the pupils. The staff teaching courses leading to external qualifications are well versed in the external examination requirements. Annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are precise and closely focused. There is an impressively consistent use of assessment information and rewards in lessons; pupils find this appealing and this helps staff to keep them engaged. This assessment information is also used in regular discussions to plan future learning. Work is marked regularly, accompanied by written advice on how to improve and, more commonly, detailed individual discussions between staff and pupils to reinforce learning. Behaviour is observed and assessed using an innovative rating scale devised within the school. The teaching and therapy staff have extensive expertise in using this assessment of behaviour to bring about its improvement. The school's recording and administration of the assessment procedures are exemplary.

Pupils make good progress overall, reflecting the school's high expectations. Their improvement in behaviour, attitudes and the short-term progress made in lessons and projects are excellent. Over the long term, progress is good rather than outstanding because of the short time in which the current group of pupils has been on roll, the length of time it has taken for them to settle into learning and, for most, their sometimes limited recall of long-term learning. The school is aware that developing fully effective means of resolving the last of these issues remains a matter to be addressed.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. They enjoy their time in school very much. This is a particularly notable achievement given the negative experiences of education which most reportedly had before coming to Oracle; in the words of one pupil, 'I really like the school and the teachers help me with my school work'. As a result of intensive and precisely focused teaching and therapy, their behaviour is good, in marked contrast to the challenging or destructive behaviour which most displayed on or before starting at the school.

Attendance is high. The school has high expectations for pupils to respect their peers as individuals and each is required to take seriously the views of others; they are respectful and warm towards staff and co-operate well with each other. This strongly supports their social and moral development. The curriculum and additional activities contribute significantly to pupils' developing understanding of the variety of cultural and religious traditions and major public institutions in this country. This is supported

by the school's rich provision to encourage pupils to reflect on their feelings, and those of others, and to be aware of the consequences of their actions for other people and property. The school has developed excellent procedures, including the use of rewards, to help pupils significantly to improve their self-esteem and capacity to get on with others. The school works successfully to help pupils secure their future economic well-being in a variety of ways, including through providing intensive tuition to develop basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, encouraging them to plan ahead for work and study on leaving school, together with developing self-confidence as they make small steps in academic success.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision to promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding throughout the school. This is supported by the school's appropriate range of diligently implemented policies. The curriculum gives pupils ample opportunity to learn about living healthy lifestyles, including through teaching about food and nutrition and having opportunities for physical exercise. The premises are supervised vigilantly by staff, who are highly trained to promote good behaviour; pupils feel very safe in school. The school is highly effective in enabling pupils, some of whom have been prone to violent outbursts in the past, to take control of their feelings and to behave safely and considerately when with other pupils. Procedures to promote the safeguarding of pupils meet requirements and the school is assiduous in carrying them out and in keeping detailed records, for example of accidents involving pupils. Child protection training is up-to-date. Risk assessments are carried out for specific activities, the use of specialist rooms and equipment, and for each individual pupil. There are clear procedures in the event of a fire and fire practices are held. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school complies fully with requirements to check staff on their appointment and maintains a single central register of these checks as required.

## **Premises of and accommodation at the school**

The premises are spacious and provide ample facilities for the wide range of activities carried out within the school. Classrooms are very well resourced and have a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere. Facilities for outdoor play are limited but the school ameliorates this to an extent by enabling pupils to use local recreational facilities. Washrooms are adequate. The medical room does not provide adequately for a pupil to be able to lie down comfortably in the event of falling ill in school. The premises comply with fire regulations.

## **Provision of information**

Information is provided regularly on the Oracle company website, in documents and orally. The school frequently provides accurate, detailed and up-to-date information

to parents and carers about the behavioural and academic progress being made by pupils.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has very effective and well-published procedures for handling and recording complaints; they meet requirements.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation at schools and must:

- Provide appropriate facilities for pupils who fall ill, in accordance with regulation 5 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(k)).

## **What the school could do to improve further**

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve pupils' recall of past learning to help strengthen their long-term progress as they work to achieve academic qualifications
- ensure that the care staff responsible for pupils in their residential homes are clear about how well the pupils are progressing in school.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made)

## Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special		
<b>Date school opened</b>	September 2006		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	10-16		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 5	Girls: 0	Total: 5
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£87,313		
<b>Address of school</b>	Unit 2 Dane Valley Mill Havannah St Congleton Cheshire CW12 2AH		
<b>Telephone number</b>	0870 850 2949		
<b>Email address</b>	info@oraclecare.com		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Joanne Ingram		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Oracle Care Ltd		