

Windlestone School

Chilton, Ferryhill, County Durham, DL17 0HP

Inspection dates 4–5 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good. Attainment is low, but improving securely. Students make good progress from their starting points, beginning to catch up to where they should be.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Behaviour is often excellent. Students show increasing ability to control their own behaviour.
- Attendance is improving, reflecting students' enjoyment of school. The proportion of students who are persistently absent is declining, but is still too high.
- Teaching is good. Leaders, managers and governors monitor the quality of teaching closely, resulting in improved teaching since the last inspection and rising achievement.
- Excellent relationships between staff and students create a highly positive atmosphere for learning.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is outstanding. The school successfully turns around students' negative attitudes, rebuilding students' self-esteem and confidence.
- The Personal Alternative Curriculum Centre (PACC) increasingly meets the needs of the most disaffected students. The centre offers a good balance between developing students' basic skills and work-related learning.
- The programme for improving students' literacy skills is proving effective. The school is poised to extend these approaches to the development of numeracy skills.
- Leadership and management are good. The school has made good improvement since its previous inspection. The curriculum is good, with exciting plans for further development.
- Governors provide appropriate support and challenge.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The overall effectiveness of the residential setting is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' attainment on leaving school is low.
- Weak literacy skills remain a barrier to learning for a good number of students.
- The proportion of students who persistently do not attend school is still too high. Attendance levels overall are not quite at national average.

Information about this inspection

- There were two inspectors, one for two days and one for one day. The lead inspector observed lessons on all three sites. Inspectors observed 10 lessons across the three sites and held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and with a governor and a local authority representative. They talked to staff and to students and heard some students read.
- On the first day of this inspection, a social care inspection of the residential provision was just finishing. Inspectors met with the social care inspectors and the headteacher to discuss the emerging findings of the inspection of the residential setting and received a copy of the evidence base that had been assembled by the social care inspectors. This included information about the views of parents and students. The report for the residential setting is available separately on the Ofsted website.
- Inspectors looked at examples of students' work and activities; scrutinised the school's records, including records related to students' behaviour and attendance; and considered the school's data on students' achievement in 2012.
- Inspectors visited the school's farm and discussed the curriculum plans for further use of this site.
- There were no responses to the on line questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors looked at the results of a survey of parents' views which had been conducted by the school; and surveys of students' attitudes. Inspectors considered the responses from those staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Honoree Gordon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kate Pringle

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Windlestone School is a residential special school for students who have difficulties related to their behavioural, emotional and social development. All students are statemented and most have had disrupted education.
- All but two of the current students are male. Over half of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This figure is much higher than the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. A very small minority of students are children who are looked after.
- The school occupies three sites. The main site at Chilton is a purpose- built special school which opened in 1996. Three quarters of the students on roll are educated on this site. This figure includes 20 residential students.
- There are two further, smaller sites in refurbished premises, one at Aykley Heads, Durham, a distance of eight miles away, and the other in Ferryhill at one mile distance. These sites are also managed by the governing body and provide an alternative education programme, the Personalised Alternative Curriculum Centre (PACC), for several schools in the authority. These centres provide a practical, vocationally-based education, including off-site work placements, each for up to 20 of the most disaffected students in the authority. These include a small number of students on the roll of Windlestone School. Students joining the PACC are referred there by the local authority, often as an alternative to permanent exclusion.
- Provision at the PACC sites was restructured in September 2012 to introduce more specialist teaching across the two sites. A senior leader runs the sites and a full-time officer supervises the placement programme.
- The school has gained the Artsmark Gold award and is a member school of the Comenius project that links up schools across Europe.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance further and reduce the proportion of students who persistently do not attend school by developing the curriculum further in innovative ways to widen the range of opportunities for learning and enhance students' enjoyment of learning.
- Raise attainment further over a sustained period of time by:
 - pursuing the school's literacy strategy for a more extended period
 - ensuring that a greater proportion of students acquire reading skills at a higher level
 - developing students' use of mathematical skills across the curriculum
 - promoting further the achievement of students following PACC programmes.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment at the end of Year 11 is low but rising securely. From very low starting points when they enter the school students make good progress. By the time they leave, nearly all students have gained a range of qualifications at entry level, and at GCSE where they are capable of this. These include accreditation for all students in the basic skills of English and mathematics. Attainment in science is a relative strength of the school. Students' work in art has been recognised as part of the award of Artsmark Gold.
- Students are beginning to catch up to where they should be as they increasingly fill in the gaps in their previous learning. All students leaving in 2012 gained at least one qualification in literacy at either entry level, key skills or GCSE. Half gained five GCSEs, although these were rarely at the higher grades.
- In lessons observed during the inspection students made good progress because of good teaching and good attitudes to learning. Students are highly engaged in learning and keen to succeed. For most this represents significant improvement in their behaviour and attitudes to learning compared to their recent past.
- The rate of progress made by students enrolled at the alternative education centres, PACC, is increasing as the provision in these centres has recently been reviewed and a more suitably challenging curriculum introduced. Accreditation at GCSE level for mathematics has been introduced and from September 2012 the range of GCSEs on offer has been increased. It is too soon to see the full impact of these changes on students' achievement but students' attitudes here are improving so that effective learning is taking place.
- PACC offers a good range of practical, work-related learning, with the school drawing on five main providers, and with access to many more. This more practical and relevant curriculum is engaging students more in learning and is beginning to boost their achievement. The persistently poor attendance of a minority of students holds back their progress. Student mobility is high; this currently affects their longer-term achievement.
- The achievement of students who are in receipt of the pupil premium is being encouraged specifically through the introduction of the reading programme and through developments in the practical curriculum, such as the provision of rural studies. The achievement of female students and of students who are looked after is in line with their peers.
- Students' progress in English and mathematics throughout the school has improved since the previous inspection, following the school's successful drive to promote literacy. The school's leaders have correctly identified students' weak literacy skills on entry as a barrier to their further achievement and have introduced school-wide initiatives to address this. The accelerated reading programme is successfully encouraging students to read. As a result students' literacy skills, in particular their reading skills, are steadily improving. Students are now keen to read. Staff in the residential setting encourage this further in the evenings.
- Students' writing skills are also improving. Students are encouraged to take care with spelling and presentation of work. Teachers across all subjects encourage students to write frequently and at length. Efficient use is made of information and communication technology to promote this further. Initiatives such as 'weekly writer' and 'weekly reader' nominations encourage this further.
- Following recent specialist staff appointments in mathematics, the school is poised to promote the use of mathematics across the curriculum in a similar way. The increased emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills is helping to prepare students better for their future working lives. This is reflected in the very low numbers of students who do not continue in education or employment.
- The school's leaders and managers recognise the need to promote students' attainment further. The pace of learning in the lower years of the school is a good indicator that the school is well on track to do this over time. 'Assertive mentoring' approaches are due to start, aimed at enhancing expectations of what students can achieve.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has many good features. Teachers plan effective lessons that move learning on, showing flexibility in adapting to students' changing needs as a lesson progresses. Students are keen to learn and make good progress in lessons.
- Assessment has improved. Teachers provide regular feedback to students during lessons, encouraging them well in their next steps in learning. Students' progress is tracked carefully over time.
- Teachers draw on a good range of resources and activities, typically including hands-on, practical tasks to secure and retain students' attention and concentration. As relationships between staff and students are so positive, there are very few occasions where behaviour falls short.
- The range of needs in classes can be wide and teachers are striving to ensure that, over time, they more finely tune their expectations for individual students, for example, in the quality of writing a student produces. Where teaching is best, students gain confidence and independence in taking on more responsibility for their own learning. On these occasions their progress accelerates.
- Good teaching is ensuring that students are beginning to make up the gaps in their previous learning. Students openly express their appreciation, including through 'mentions' at morning 'hub' assembly, for the efforts individual staff make to help them achieve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Parents are very happy with what the school provides. Their responses show that they feel students are safe, enjoy school and are making good progress. Parents comment on students' improved behaviour. Staff views are overwhelmingly positive. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. The school meets all current requirements. Excellent views were noted from the parents of residential students.
- Good procedures are firmly implemented for the control of attendance. These help to keep students safe. School routines are well established, reducing uncertainty for students and ensuring that the school day runs smoothly. Attendance is nearly at national average for all maintained schools and continues to improve. Although the proportion of students who are persistently absent has fallen, this figure is still too high, leading to underachievement for some students.
- Students are supervised appropriately, but not obtrusively. Students are increasingly encouraged to self-regulate their own behaviour and to reflect on it. This is helping to promote their independence and readiness for the next steps in their education, training or employment.
- There have been no permanent exclusions for three years. The proportion of fixed-term exclusions and the number of serious incidents have fallen significantly. Typical behaviour around school is good and often excellent. Students are courteous and considerate of others, fulfilling well the school's main 'rule': respect for oneself and for others. This leads to a calm atmosphere, highly conducive to learning.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and staff model consistently well the behaviour they expect from students. Relationships between students and staff are excellent, creating an atmosphere of trust. As a result students' confidence and self-esteem grow rapidly.
- The systems for rewards and sanctions work very effectively to modify behaviour. Staff manage behaviour very well. They are proactive, seeking to head off any signs of trouble and so rarely have to resort to applying sanctions. Excellent, well-designed premises help to support this.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A rich curriculum and much-improved opportunities for cultural development, including active links with two European schools and visits to these, open up horizons for students.
- Anti-bullying awareness and procedures are strong. Students say that they feel safe at school. They comment very positively and enthusiastically on their school and what it has done for them:

'It's mint!' (=great) is typical. Innovative opportunities, such as acting as tour guides for a city exhibition, work for the local community and outward-bound activities provide excellent opportunities for individual personal development.

The leadership and management are good

- Good leadership and management across all three sites are securing improving outcomes for students. There is a clear vision and drive, shared by the staff, for further improvement. Leaders and managers recognise that students' attainment is still too low but plans are already underway to engage students still further, such as developing the current provision for outdoor environmental education on site.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity highly effectively. Students are actively involved in their local community and beyond. In this way the school's leaders and managers foster positive relationships with others and help to tackle discrimination. The provision of alternative courses at the PACC is a direct example of the school's successful work in breaking down the barriers to students' achievement. Here, too, achievement of the most disaffected students is beginning to rise. Recent restructuring of this provision is leading to a more challenging and purposeful curriculum, relevant to students' futures. Most striking is the care taken to assure students' safety and well-being on work placements: attendance is scrutinised and progress thoroughly documented.
- The school's governors, leaders and managers monitor the quality of teaching closely and have ensured that this continues to improve and that students' achievement has risen. This is linked effectively to the arrangements for the performance management of staff. The local authority provides good support to the school in improving teaching: specialist input for staff training has had improved teaching skills further. The local authority has supported the school well in strategic planning for the alternative curriculum.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is effective. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge to the school's leaders and managers in their drive for improvement;
 - has ensured that the pupil-premium monies are being used in ways that have a direct impact on students' achievement, such as introducing the accelerated reading programme and enhancing facilities for outdoor vocational learning.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	is good
Residential pupils' safety	is outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	is good

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	114347
Social care unique reference number	SC007615
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	401428

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Number of boarders on roll	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alderman George Porter
Headteacher	Mr Tim Bennett
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2009
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