

Pontville Residential School

Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire, L39 4TW

Inspection dates	12–14 March 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding. There is a calm, purposeful learning atmosphere in the school. Pupils make outstanding progress and are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The curriculum is outstanding; it is broad and balanced and provides high-quality experiences in all areas of learning.
- Behaviour and personal development are outstanding; this is accomplished through excellent behaviour management, pastoral support and therapeutic interventions.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding; weekly sessions for meditation and reflection teach pupils to be mindful and considerate towards others.
- Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding; policies and procedures are robust and there are exceptionally high levels of care.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Governors and senior leaders share a consistent drive for excellence; as a result, the provision, teaching and achievement are constantly developing and improving.
- The residential provision is outstanding in all aspects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice. An inspection of the boarding provision took place at the same time as the inspection of the educational provision.
- The inspector observed 12 lessons all taught by different teachers.
- The inspector looked at pupils’ work and held meetings with members of the senior management team, staff, the proprietor and pupils. The inspector took account of the views expressed in 50 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and 36 from staff. The social care inspector conducted meetings with boarding staff, senior educational staff and groups of pupils and boarders.
- The inspector looked at the school’s documentation including schemes of work, teachers’ planning, records of pupils’ progress, assessment records and records related to the professional development of staff. He checked the school’s compliance with the regulations for independent schools.

Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Scully

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pontville Residential School is part of the Witherslack group of schools. It opened in 1910 and is located on the outskirts of Ormskirk.
- The school caters specifically for pupils with social and communication difficulties. It is registered for pupils aged from five to 19 years of age but ages upon entry vary and not all pupils stay until they are 19 years of age. Currently, there are 83 pupils on roll aged from 10 to 19 years of age, the vast majority of whom are boys.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and are placed in the school and funded by their local authority. Most pupils attend daily, but nine pupils board in the residential provision.
- The school was last inspected in October 2009 and by Ofsted's social care inspectors in February 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the overall effectiveness of the school by:
 - ensuring that pupils are given homework on a consistent basis which is well matched to their individual capabilities
 - displaying more pupils' work in corridors in order to further promote their self-esteem and pride in their achievements
 - further developing pupils' knowledge of different cultures, especially at Key Stage 3.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Achievement is outstanding. The vast majority of pupils make rapid and sustained progress over time in all areas of learning considering their capabilities and starting points which are usually very low. Some of the pupils come to school having not succeeded in previous placements and some have not attended school at all. In school, pupils make excellent progress in developing their skills in reading, writing, mathematics and especially communication; they apply these skills in a wide range of subjects very effectively. By the time they leave the school, most pupils are exceptionally well-prepared to further their education and most go on to attend college. Pupils take learning seriously. They respond very well to the learning environment at school and acquire knowledge quickly, developing their understanding of different subjects at a rapid rate.

In order to track rates of progress, pupil data is collated as soon as pupils start school. The school system is based on age-related mainstream expectations as well as national guidance for working with pupils with special educational needs. Assessment data show that over the last three years standards of attainment in all subjects, including reading, are high and often exceed those of pupils with similar difficulties in other schools. Pupils are fully involved in their learning. They offer insights, take part in discussions and debates and respond to challenges enthusiastically. They consistently apply themselves to their studies. These factors, coupled with the high-quality work that they produce and records of tracking and assessment, indicate that levels of achievement are exceptional.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Pupils enjoy learning and appreciate keenly how important academic success is for their futures; as a result, they are usually fully engaged and take great interest in their lessons. They work very well both independently and in collaboration with their peers. Lessons run smoothly. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are warm and friendly; many go out of their way to welcome visitors to the school. Pupils get along very well together and instances of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils unanimously agree that they always feel safe both at school and on trips due to very high levels of supervision and care. They understand what constitutes safe practice, are aware of potential dangers and keep themselves safe.

The school provides an excellent learning environment that has a strong impact on pupils' achievement; as a result, attendance is very good and pupils are punctual to lessons. The school places great emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills and this has a major impact on how they develop emotionally and socially. It provides excellent therapeutic interventions and weekly sessions for meditation and relaxation that give pupils meaningful insights into spirituality and help them make exceptional progress in their social interactions, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils love school. One pupil said, 'This is the best school I've been to'; another asserted, 'I didn't enjoy school before I came here!'

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Self-awareness sessions help pupils grow spiritually and help them improve extremely well in their moral awareness and social skills. An example of this was observed in one session where pupils were encouraged to appreciate the effects that body language and facial expressions have on people around them. Pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence as they succeed in their studies. The school has a carefully considered and very effective system whereby pupils are awarded points at the end of every lesson. This helps them acknowledge their accomplishments and areas that need to be improved. Pupils that have achieved a specific number of points are entitled to an extra measure of independence around school. This point system and an extremely complimentary,

positive approach taken by staff help pupils feel good about themselves and their achievements.

Pupils are very inquisitive and are interested in others' cultural traditions and beliefs. The school has enjoyed productive links with a school in Cambodia and pupils in the residential home prepare foods from different countries for friends and staff. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have lessons in religious education that are complemented by visits to selected places of worship. This provision is optional in Key Stage 3, where for those pupils who opt for other subjects, their understanding and appreciation of different faiths and cultures and their preparation for life in a multicultural society is not quite as strong. Pupils take part in a good variety of fundraising events and have a good understanding of the charities that they work for.

Pupils who are accommodated in the residential setting gain immeasurably from the guidance, support and care that they receive from care staff. This contributes to their outstanding personal development. Behaviour management in the residential setting is exceptional. Staff's innate understanding of each pupil's behaviours, triggers and vulnerabilities enable them to devise effective strategies to support the pupils. Staff are highly skilled in de-escalation techniques when pupils become agitated or aggressive. Consequently, pupils are able to consider their behaviour and to look at ways to manage their feelings and anxieties. Pupils thrive in a warm, caring, nurturing environment. Staff's commitment and dedication to ensuring that pupils achieve to their full potential is inspirational, for example, collecting pupils at the beginning of the week to help them engage with their education. Pupils are valued as individuals and staff have high, realistic aspirations for them. Innovative ideas such as 'come dine with me' when pupils prepare a themed meal for friends and staff, significantly enhance pupils confidence, self-esteem and independence. Care planning is exceptional and effectively takes into account the diverse needs of each pupil.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers use a very good range of well-chosen resources and lessons are paced very well. They make lessons interesting and engaging; often encompassing an excellent range of topics and subjects. An example of this was a Key Stage 3 religious education lesson on Noah's Ark and keeping promises that effectively integrated aspects of science and personal, moral and social development. As a result of successfully integrating a range of subjects in interesting ways, pupils make rapid and sustained progress in their learning. Teachers communicate very high expectations to pupils both in terms of academic achievement and personal development. They have cultivated an extraordinary learning environment where pupils strive to succeed. Planning is consistently excellent; it is based on a thorough knowledge of pupils' abilities and is geared to challenge pupils and ensure that they access the curriculum fully. Pupils enjoy warm, supportive relationships with their teachers. They acknowledge that teachers are 'nice and kind' and that they 'help us calm down and focus'. Education and care staff work exceptionally well together to establish effective working links between school and the residential setting; these have a strong impact on pupils' appreciation of learning.

Teachers systematically assess and track pupils' progress and adjust lessons and individual education plans accordingly. Reading, writing and mathematics are taught very effectively and these skills are developed in all of the subjects taught. The teaching of communication skills is fully embedded within all lessons and pupils make exceptional strides in the ways that they communicate during lessons with their teachers and peers. Teachers use marking as a means to acknowledge pupils' strengths and to inform them about areas in which they need to improve. This, coupled with consistent, constructive feedback ensures that pupils make excellent progress. Pupils receive homework regularly, but it is not always sufficiently challenging for the more able pupils. Generally, classrooms are not decorated with pupils' work in order not to distract them from their learning. Some pupils' work is displayed in corridors in order to foster pride in their accomplishments but displays are not as prominent as they might be to further promote pupils' self-esteem and celebration of their achievements.

Quality of curriculum**Outstanding**

The curriculum is outstanding. It provides pupils with an excellent range of activities including formal lessons in all areas of learning, vocational pursuits, land-based studies and enrichment activities. Pupils particularly enjoy the range of extra-curricular activities and clubs provided by the school to enrich the curriculum. The school has a small farm and vocational facilities on site that enable pupils to practise their skills and provide them with memorable experiences and opportunities to enhance their learning. These facilities help pupils appreciate their own potential and help them understand the many routes that are available to them in the future.

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and helps them develop exceptionally well in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. It is supported by excellent schemes of work and medium- and long-term plans that help teachers challenge pupils who have a range of abilities. The curriculum provides clear and rapid progression in all subject areas for all ages and ability groups. A designated teacher offers pupils excellent careers guidance; transition support for pupils when they leave school is excellent. The impact of the curriculum is that pupils who have the extra challenge of dealing with their significant special educational needs are helped to overcome many of their difficulties and, in fact, to take pride in their achievements. They grow into well-rounded individuals who have a keen appreciation for learning and are very well prepared for their future lives.

In the residential setting, pupils are provided with an extensive range of activities which truly engage their interests. They relish the opportunities to take part in activities, such as Thai boxing or going to the local sports centre with staff. The opportunities to engage in activities outside of school effectively support pupils' social skills and abilities to interact with others. Pupils are really pleased that they are able to invite friends to specific events, such as helping them to celebrate birthdays.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Outstanding**

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding and all independent school regulations are met. Staff care for pupils exceptionally well. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust; policies for child protection and the safe recruitment of staff are of a very high standard. Staff are trained in child protection and other aspects of child welfare to the required levels and at regular intervals; they are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are always free from danger. The required checks are made on staff, including boarding staff, and all details are recorded on a suitable single central register. Policies are in place to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils and to tackle bullying; these are implemented very effectively. All policies and procedures comply fully with current legislation and guidance and are reviewed on a regular basis. The school has a high level of fire safety; fire risk assessments are thorough and fire drills are held regularly and are duly recorded, and electrical equipment is checked. Many members of staff are trained in first-aid. Parents and carers have full confidence in all of the school's procedures related to welfare, health and safety and in the care and support provided by staff. One parent commented, 'I know that my son is safe and supported and that he will be able to cope in the world'.

Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles through science and personal, social and health education (PSHE). They enjoy healthy meals and purchase snacks during break time from a tuck shop that sells only healthy foods. They adopt safe practices in school that have a positive effect on the way that they act at home and on trips. Assemblies focus on weekly themes that often involve issues of safety and physical and emotional health. As a result, pupils feel that they are members of an inclusive community that has their welfare at its heart. Pupils are happy and well-adjusted; this is evident in their calm interactions with peers and staff during break times and between lessons. Pupils care for each other; especially for pupils that are more vulnerable. An example of this is when during free time at the end of a food technology lesson, two pupils were keen to make a less communicative pupil comfortable while they listened to music together.

Pupils in the residential setting say they are very happy and feel safe. They have extremely strong, trusting relationships with staff which are built upon honesty and respect. They have a strong sense of ownership; they genuinely enjoy each others company. Pupils feel valued because they know that staff listen to them and help them deal with any issues. They are empowered because they are consulted on all aspects of their lives and are fully involved in decision making. Partnerships with parents and carers are excellent. The welfare of pupils is actively promoted and safeguarded. This is because staff are suitably trained and have an excellent understanding of the safeguarding policies. The systems for staff recruitment and induction are robust.

The headteacher and head of care promote a culture that ensures that pupils are always listened to and respected as individuals. They are exceptionally committed to providing high-quality care. This is evident from the excellent progress pupils are making in their social and communication skills and in their ability to be independent and work by themselves. The school is committed to the sustained improvement of the provision. This is evident from the action taken to address the issues from the previous inspection. Consequently, the residential provision has improved in ensuring pupils are safe. Any potential risks to pupils around the premises and off site are identified and effectively minimised, although not all written risk assessments follow a consistent format.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Leadership and management of both the school and the residential provision are outstanding. Senior managers share a drive for excellence. They consistently identify areas that can be further improved and communicate these points to staff effectively. As a result, the curriculum and provision are constantly developing and all pupils, regardless of ability, achieve very well over time. Leaders and managers have great confidence in the potential of their pupils; they convey this consistently. As a result, pupils are proud of their accomplishments and strive to achieve even more. Self-evaluation is accurate, including for the residential provision, and based on a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement and on the abilities of pupils. Rigorous planning and monitoring ensure that resources and staff are deployed in ways that secure the maximum benefits for pupils. The premises and accommodation are very well suited to support the curriculum and plans to build an exciting new education block are underway to further enhance the provision.

Leaders and managers have produced excellent policies that ensure that pupils make outstanding progress in literacy notwithstanding their difficulties. They have secured an excellent system for the professional development of staff including regular lesson observations and assessments that challenge teachers constructively. This has contributed to teaching and learning in all areas that is usually outstanding and an environment that is exceptionally conducive to learning. Residential staff provide exceptionally high standards of support and care. Governors take a very active role in the education provided; they challenge senior managers regularly to build on the school's strengths and to secure improvements when weaknesses are identified.

Leaders, managers and teachers have produced an outstanding curriculum that provides pupils with a rich variety of experiences in all of the areas of learning and is a firm basis for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This has an exceptionally positive effect on pupils' behaviour, attitudes and personal development. Leaders and managers respect pupils, maintain very good working relationships with staff and are respected in turn. They are highly successful in engaging parents and carers and go to great lengths to secure the engagement of pupils. For example, pupils that find it difficult to attend school are collected from home by staff. The school's premises and accommodation are well-maintained and are a good base to support implementation of the curriculum. The school meets all of the requirements related to the provision of information for parents and carers and the complaints procedure includes all of the necessary details. The residential provision is generally well maintained although some bathrooms lack the homeliness of

other areas. School managers have ensured that all of the independent school regulations and national minimum standards for residential schools are met and that arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust.

Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	Outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Outstanding

What inspection judgements mean

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

School details

Unique reference number	133540
Social care unique reference number	SC061727
Inspection number	397749
DfE registration number	888/6050

This inspection was carried out 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. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special day and residential school for pupils with social communication difficulties
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	83
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	9
Proprietor	Mr Michael Barrow
Chair	Mr Michael Barrow
Headteacher	Mr Iain Sim
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,752 - £68,651
Annual fees (boarders)	£56,831 - £68,202
Telephone number	01695 578734
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