

Oliver House School

Hallgate, Astley Village, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 1XA

Inspection dates	11–13 June 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Teaching is good. Lessons are well-paced and teachers use a good range of teaching methods and resources to engage pupils. As a result, pupils achieve well and make good progress.
- The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development; provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is good as a result of robust systems that are implemented effectively.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced; it provides pupils with valuable experiences and skills that will help them in the future.
- Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. Robust policies and procedures and exceptionally high levels of care and support ensure that pupils thrive in a safe, happy environment.
- Leadership and management are good. Senior managers share a drive for excellence with staff. As a result, teaching is good, pupils are exceptionally well cared for, achieve well and make good progress. The school has improved very significantly since the last inspection.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Systems to further improve teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice are not fully embedded. As a result, pupils make only good progress.
- Pupils are not always given opportunities to assess their own work and identify areas to improve. They miss out on some valuable learning experiences and opportunities to become more independent.
- Although there is a students' council, opportunities for pupils to take an active part in the running of the school are limited.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- 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.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed nine lessons taught by seven different teachers. The inspector looked at pupils' work and held meetings with the Principal, head of education, administrators, heads of departments, teachers and therapists; he held informal discussions with pupils.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed in 18 questionnaires returned by staff, eight questionnaires completed by parents and carers, a letter from a pupil and a letter from a parent/carer.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, assessment records and records pertaining 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

Full report

Information about this school

- Oliver House School is an independent special, mixed, day school which is registered for up to 40 pupils aged from six to 19 years who have complex needs including autism and moderate or severe special educational needs. The school opened in 2006 and is located in a two-storey building in the centre of Astley Village, near Chorley.
- There are 20 pupils on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Nearly half are looked after by their local authorities. Nearly half of the pupils live in nearby residential accommodation owned by the same proprietor.
- The school's aim is 'to provide the highest level of education and care, according to individual need, in a safe, positive environment where every young person can achieve the best possible outcomes'.
- The school was last inspected in October 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by providing pupils with opportunities to assess their own work whenever possible so that they can identify for themselves areas to improve.
- Enhance opportunities for promoting pupils' personal development by providing more opportunities for pupils to take an active part in the running of the school.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management through strengthening systems for the professional development of staff by giving teachers more opportunities to share good practice.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Achievement is good. Considering their starting points and wide-ranging needs, pupils achieve well and make good progress as a result of good teaching. Pupils with severe special educational needs acquire and sustain knowledge in a consistent way. They gain an understanding of a wide range of subjects including developing their skills in mathematics and English. Pupils make consistent progress in developing their communication and listening skills. They acclimatise to the school environment quickly and, as a result, gain an understanding of the importance of learning and of controlling their behaviour. They achieve certificates awarded by the school and externally awarded accreditations through the AQA Unit Award Scheme.

More able pupils attain good standards in all subjects and areas of learning. They develop and apply their reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills well. Many achieve external accreditations including functional skills and GCSEs. All pupils are well-prepared for their futures; these range from supported living arrangements to further education or employment.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and personal development is good. Although pupils often display very challenging behaviour the school has developed good behaviour management systems that are implemented effectively by staff. As a result, pupils are aware of what is expected of them and try hard to control and manage their own behaviour. Disruptions are rare; any incidents are dealt with swiftly and unobtrusively. In lessons, pupils behave well and this helps create a relaxed, purposeful learning environment where pupils are interested and engaged, achieve well and make good progress. Pupils feel safe in school; they get along well together and instances of bullying are rare. Pupils enjoy learning, attendance is good and lessons start punctually. One parent/carer asserted that with regard to her child 'for the first time ever, she has a well-balanced and positive attitude towards school life!' Pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence through celebrating their successes in learning. Some pupils are involved in a student council. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to voice their opinions and make suggestions about the running of the school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They experience spirituality through art, music, opportunities for reflection and visits to various places of worship. They learn about morality through personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and discussions with teachers. Lessons are centred around group sessions where pupils engage with their peers and learn how to interact socially. Whenever possible, pupils are encouraged to work and play together, for instance during meals in the dining room and activities outdoors. Pupils learn about other cultures through history, geography, religious education and food technology. They take part in projects devoted to multicultural themes that promote an understanding and appreciation of both their own and other cultures. These include Islam Week, Black History Month, Scotland Week, Irish Week and the Holocaust. Pupils contribute to the local community through fundraising events for charity such as a 'jumbake sale' where they sell baked goods made during food technology lessons, a Spring Fayre and gifts that are brought to a church for distribution at Christmas to those who are less fortunate. Pupils respect each other and treat all members of staff and visitors to the school as equals. They learn about the legal system and public services through citizenship, visits and visitors to the school; there is no evidence that any political views are presented to pupils in an unbalanced way.

Quality of teaching

Good

Teaching is good. Teachers have a good understanding of the needs and aptitudes of the pupils and expect them to achieve well. They plan lessons well and ensure that they are paced in ways

that secure optimum engagement and interest in order to enable pupils to grow in an understanding of the subjects that they are taught. Lessons usually start with group sessions and pupils continue their studies with individual support. As a result of well-considered lessons combined with group work and individual attention, pupils achieve well and make good progress over time. Reading, writing and mathematics are taught effectively and help pupils develop their knowledge and skills according to their abilities. Teachers place great emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills; pupils learn how to communicate in a variety of ways and are encouraged to think and contribute as much as they can on their own. An example of this is when a teacher asked a pupil to fetch his work on his own despite his physical limitations.

Teachers carefully observe pupils during lessons to assess their progress and when necessary reshape tasks in order to facilitate learning. They use a good range of resources and teaching methods to enhance learning. For example, during an English lesson on poetry, pupils shook pieces of material to resemble waves and listened to music in between poems. Teachers use a range of tools to assess and track progress effectively; this information is used to inform planning and the development of the curriculum. However, opportunities for pupils to assess their own work whenever possible are limited. Teachers develop good relationships with pupils and create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Pupils respond well; they work hard and participate in activities eagerly. Behaviour in lessons is managed well and teachers employ effective strategies that ensure that disruptive behaviour is kept to a minimum.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good. It meets the needs of all pupils and provides opportunities for pupils to make good progress in all of the areas of learning according to their abilities; this includes well-considered opportunities for pupils to develop reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills. The curriculum is well-organised and is supported with detailed planning and schemes of work in line with the individual learning plans created for each pupil. It provides suitable challenge for pupils with wide-ranging difficulties and is designed to ensure that pupils make consistent progress from one competency or skill to the next one.

Pupils are well-prepared for their futures as they develop their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. The curriculum places a strong emphasis on life skills, vocational and work-related experiences; for example, more able pupils work at local retailers and those with more severe needs help in the school office. These experiences equip them for their futures when they leave school for further education, employment or assisted living arrangements. PSHE is good. Pupils are encouraged to personalise their individual classrooms according to their interests; one pupil decorated his classroom with displays of cars, another with pictures of her favourite celebrities. Often, pupils' interests are used as a springboard for cross-curricular work and discussions. Pupils socialise in school as much as possible. They are taught about health and exercise and are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. An example is a food technology lesson where pupils were encouraged to identify healthier ways of preparing their favourite foods.

The curriculum is enhanced with a good variety of trips, project work and extra-curricular activities that are thoroughly enjoyed by pupils. These include a wide range of activities that take place during 'Business Enterprise and Vocational Day' such as exploring equipment, shopping, car maintenance, animal care, floristry and recycling. The curriculum is integrated well; discreet subjects often contain elements of other subjects. For example, a numeracy lesson on counting by fives included music and dance and an art lesson, when pupils designed posters for an upcoming 'jumbake sale', a school fete, focussed on elements of design and technology.

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

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding and all of the independent school standards are met. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. Staff are committed to providing pupils with very high levels of care and support; they know their pupils well and have a keen understanding of their needs. The school has established a rigorous training schedule for all staff to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities in ensuring that pupils are kept safe at all times. Parents and carers have confidence in the school's procedures for welfare, health and safety. They feel that the levels of support and care provided are extraordinary and have a real impact on the ways that their children function. One parent/carer commented that 'The school and staff have changed the lives of both our daughter and her family!'

Policies and procedures to ensure that pupils are safeguarded are robust; the school has carried out all of the required checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with children which are recorded as required on a single central register. Procedures for the recruitment of new staff are of a very high standard, appropriate child protection training takes place at regular intervals and staff are vigilant in the ways that they detect and deal with any pupils that they consider at risk. The school has established robust policies and procedures to promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils; these are implemented very effectively and reviewed regularly. All policies and procedures, including those for first-aid and anti-bullying, comply fully with government legislation and guidance. Pupils enjoy healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe; all are happy, well-adjusted and comfortable in their surroundings. The school has a good level of fire safety; equipment is checked regularly and fire drills are regular recorded events. The school completes detailed risk assessments for individual pupils, the premises and accommodation and for trips out of school to ensure that risks are identified and pupils are always safe.

Leadership and management**Good**

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers communicate high expectations to staff. As a result, teaching is consistently good; pupils achieve well and make good progress in their learning. The school has a well-developed system to secure sustained improvements in provision through accurate monitoring and effective performance management. Professional development through regular lesson observations and training is well matched to the needs of the school and staff. However, opportunities to further improve teaching and learning through sharing good practice are limited. Staff and resources are deployed well for the benefit of all pupils.

Representatives of the proprietor challenge school leaders regularly and systematically. The school's self-evaluation and development plan are clear and realistic; they reflect the school's strengths and areas that need to be developed and are useful tools that secure improvement. As a result, the school has improved significantly since that last inspection. The curriculum and related policies provide effective opportunities for pupils to make good progress in all areas of learning including literacy. Managers have ensured that the school environment and ethos promotes good behaviour and positive personal development. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is strong. The school works well with parents and carers to secure positive benefits for pupils.

The school's premises and accommodation include a good number of group and individual classrooms, a dining room, gymnasium, food technology suite, sensory rooms, a spa and two outdoor areas for play and physical education. All areas of the school are very well-suited to meet pupils' needs and are well maintained to support the implementation of the curriculum. The school meets all of the requirements related to the provision of information to parents and carers and the complaints procedure includes all of the required details. The proprietor and school managers have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

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

School details

Unique reference number	131575
Inspection number	408721
DfE registration number	888/6094

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.

Type of school	ASD Independent Special School
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	6–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory New Education Services Ltd.
Chair	Not applicable
Headteacher	Ms Wendy Sparling
Date of previous school inspection	28 October 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,875–£82,000
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