

Oracle School

Unit 54, Wrest Park, Silsoe, MK45 4HS

Inspection dates

9–11 October 2013

Overall effectiveness

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Students' achievement is outstanding. The majority of students exceed the nationally expected rates of progress, often from low starting points on entry to the school.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. Despite difficulties at earlier stages in their education, they settle in quickly to the school and their concentration is excellent.
- The quality of teaching overall is outstanding and never less than good. This results in rapid improvements in students' literacy, numeracy and basic skills.
- Attendance at school is excellent and there is virtually no unauthorised absence.
- The teaching, care and therapeutic staff have high expectations and a shared understanding of how to engage students and encourage them to think positively about the future.
- The school has developed and improved significantly since the last inspection. The quality of leadership from the headteacher, proprietors and senior staff is exemplary. The school plans, monitors and evaluates its work effectively.

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 conducted with one day's notice.
- Ten lessons were observed, taught by four teachers. The majority of these were observed jointly with the headteacher. Discussions were held with all members of the teaching staff, with the headteacher and with a representative of the proprietors.
- A meeting was held with a group of students and nine responses to a recently completed questionnaire were considered. There were insufficient responses to the online 'Parent View' questionnaire for the results to be made available.
- A number of school policy and curriculum documents, teachers' planning, samples of students' work, data summarising their progress, and records of premises and fire safety were scrutinised.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oracle School is a co-educational day special school located in Silsoe, Central Bedfordshire.
- The school provides education for students who reside in the company's children's homes, and, in addition, has a limited number of places for other students.
- The company's children's homes are registered and inspected separately by Ofsted.
- The school is registered to accommodate a total of 20 students between the ages of eight and 18 years; there are currently nine students on roll, aged 13 to 16 years.
- Most students are looked after by their local authority and all have learning needs associated with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All have statements of special educational needs.
- The school makes use of additional off-site locations for physical education and adventurous activities, together with placements at colleges or on work experience for older students.
- The aim of Oracle School is to provide an integrated approach to addressing the needs of the young people. This is in order to stabilise their behaviour, enable them to access education, deal with issues from the past, and develop skills that will help them to function successfully in a variety of social environments.
- The school's last full inspection was in May 2010, and a progress monitoring inspection took place in September 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to extend the range of accreditation in subjects suited to students' individual needs and abilities.
- Provide more systematic opportunities for students to develop their awareness of cultural diversity and citizenship.
- Continue to review curriculum structure and lesson timings to ensure sufficient opportunity for all students to maximise their achievement across a range of subjects.
- Ensure all aspects of premises and site safety are monitored and recorded in a systematic way.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students make outstanding progress with their learning as a result of excellent teaching and a curriculum which is well suited to their needs. Almost all students make rapid progress from low or very low starting points on entry to the school. Those who remain at the school sustain a strong rate of progress over time which meets, and in many cases exceeds, national expectations. This outstanding progress results from high expectations of what students can learn, together with excellent strategies for managing behaviour and ensuring that students give of their best. The majority of students are exceeding the expected rate of progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Similarly, students are demonstrating increasing levels of success in science and information technology.

Students enter classrooms prepared to learn, and their engagement and application result in effective learning. Students who enter the school with limited aspirations and lacking confidence in their own abilities achieve success in a variety of external examinations, including increasing numbers of GCSE subjects. Although their attainment mostly remains below the national average, they are successfully closing the gap with expected standards for their ages. Students with identified learning difficulties, including statements of special educational needs, take part and persist with learning. Overall, the school achieves an excellent standard of re-engagement by students who have previously been disaffected or who have experienced unsettled earlier educational experiences.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' behaviour and personal development are outstanding; this enables them to settle quickly into the routines of the school and to engage effectively in learning. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Excellent relationships with adults and between students support a focus on learning tasks and a willingness to follow instructions. Staff present excellent role models, displaying enthusiasm and enjoyment in the subjects they teach. Students are taught to be courteous, to listen to others, and to follow the well-established routines of the classroom. Students state that they feel safe in school and respect the adult care which they receive. They report that bullying is rare and that any concerns are managed appropriately and swiftly, and resolved to their satisfaction. Students believe that they are understood and treated as individuals. Attendance is excellent, with virtually no unauthorised absence, and this has a very positive impact on the pace and continuity of students' learning. Students who enter the school with previous negative experiences make exceptional progress with managing their anger and disruptive behaviour.

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with a number of themes explored across a range of subjects. The school successfully integrates its focus on education, personal care and therapy to provide a wide-ranging approach to meeting students' individual needs. Students achieve a good understanding of social and moral issues, and of the services and facilities in the local and wider communities. They demonstrate respect for adults and for each other, but there is scope for further opportunities to develop their appreciation of cultural diversity, and respect for alternative beliefs and lifestyles. Good elements of citizenship are taught within various subjects and consideration is being given to how this might be coordinated in a more systematic manner. The school provides excellent opportunities for students to develop confidence and self-esteem and their individual contributions to the life of the school are celebrated.

Quality of teaching**Outstanding**

The quality of teaching is outstanding and has a strong positive impact on students' achievement. Many of the lessons taught are of excellent quality and never less than good. As a result, students are able to make exceptional rates of progress from low starting points. Teachers communicate consistently high expectations of the extent to which students will engage in lessons and the standards which they will achieve. Students enter classrooms with positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. Lessons combine a suitable combination of direct teaching, excellent support and assistance for individual students, and successful opportunities for students to work on their own or in groups. In most lessons, the learning tasks are provided individually to ensure that each student receives an appropriate level of challenge and makes progress from the level achieved in previous lessons.

Students demonstrate excellent success, for example learning about angles and bearings in mathematics, managing their own tasks and seeking help where it is required. In English an excellent level of discussion and analysis is achieved, for example when evaluating the impact of the language and vocabulary used in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Teachers provide excellent, positive but realistic feedback verbally and through marking. Excellent questioning strategies and checking of students' understanding are evident throughout lessons. Literacy and numeracy are given a high profile and taught well, including a systematic approach to the use of phonics (letters and sounds) in the teaching of reading. Excellent success is also achieved through the systematic approach to the teaching of science and information and communication technology (ICT). Students, for example, enjoyed the opportunity to introduce animation into their production of video sequences. These academic successes are balanced by excellent opportunities to take part in aesthetic and creative activities, such as music and drama. Thorough lesson planning is based on suitable schemes of work and knowledge of students' capabilities. Good use is made of resources, including computers and interactive whiteboards, to engage previously disaffected students.

The assessment of students' work is thorough and systematic. Teachers have made good progress in applying the national criteria for assessment of students' work in National Curriculum subjects. They have an increasingly secure understanding of how to assess the levels at which students are working and of the requirements of the various examinations for which students are preparing, including an expanding range of GCSE subjects. Students demonstrate confidence and success as a result of the high quality of their preparation for assessed tasks and examinations.

Quality of curriculum**Good**

The quality of the curriculum is good and allows all students to develop their basic skills and to study subjects to examination level in Key Stage 4. The range of subjects available covers all the required areas of experience, and enables all students to enjoy their learning and be successful. Full account is taken of the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs and regular review meetings ensure that these remain suited to the changing needs of individuals. As the number of specialist staff has increased the school has broadened the range of external accreditation available for students, including entry level certificates, together with Functional Skills awards and GCSE. These courses are used skilfully to build students' motivation and to reward appropriate success. Current consideration is being given to the timetable and curriculum structure to ensure that the range of opportunities continues to expand to meet individual interests and capabilities. The current programme provides limited opportunities for the study of human and social subjects in a systematic way to examination level. Classrooms throughout the school provide a welcoming and stimulating learning environment.

Good provision for English, mathematics, science and ICT is supplemented appropriately with imaginative opportunities to study drama, art and music, together with food studies. Students also enjoy the range of physical education and outdoor activities provided. There is a clear and

systematic development of students' learning evident in schemes of work, with tasks and activities building well on previous learning. The school pays good attention to the preparation of students for the future through flexibility in the curriculum offered to post-16 students for whom additional opportunities to study GCSE subjects are often appropriate. The school, through its therapeutic and care provision, ensures that full consideration is given to the needs of students during the transition to further education, employment and independent living.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The school's arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are good. All the regulations are met. Provision is implemented and strengthened through the good quality of care and exceptional commitment and contribution of all staff. Good working arrangements between teachers and support staff ensure that all students are known as individuals and provided with a consistently safe environment. All aspects of safeguarding arrangements are robust and secure, including up-to-date staff training and rigorous checks on the suitability of all adults to work with young people. There is good supervision in school and during off-site activities, appropriately assessed to minimise risks. Students' medical needs and first aid arrangements are appropriate and monitored well.

School leaders and staff ensure there is swift intervention and appropriate resolution of any potential incidents. Students have a sound understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoy cooking healthy food and taking part in physical activities. The planned integration of education, care and therapy is effective and identified as such by students. There is an excellent exchange of information between education and care staff, including daily review of behaviour and personal needs. Comprehensive policies and procedures underpin all aspects of school life, including appropriate policies for child protection, the management of behaviour and the prevention of bullying. The safety of the premises and fire safety are secure but require more systematic monitoring and recording of routine checks and risk assessments.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding and the proprietors and headteacher have ensured that all the statutory regulations for independent schools are met. Leaders and managers convey high expectations of what the school can achieve and there is a strong drive for excellence. Constant monitoring and review of educational provision involving staff, education leaders and the proprietors, results in a comprehensive self-review document and plans for further development. School leaders have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. There is real strength in the tripartite integration of education, care and therapy which serves the best interests of students. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and comprehensive. The school is conducted in suitable premises which are maintained to a good standard. The provision of all the required information for parents and carers ensures that all have a good understanding of the school's purposes and expectations. Policies and procedures are thorough and practical, including procedures for the resolution of any complaints. School leaders ensure a relentless focus on improving teaching, learning and the curriculum. Robust management of the performance of staff is enhanced by clear communication of planned intentions for improvement. These features result in outstanding achievement and development for students. The proprietors hold senior managers to account in a constructive manner through dialogue and support. Staff model high professional standards and actively seek personal development and improvement. The school demonstrates the capacity for continued improvement.

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	135987
Inspection number	422814
DfE registration number	822/6013

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	Day special school for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	8–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Ravi Maheswaran
Chair	Carmine Bianco
Headteacher	Kevin Monahan
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,900
Telephone number	01525 860319
Email address	Kevinmonahan@oraclecare.com

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