

The Grange Learning Centre

Inspection dates	22–24 October 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

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Starting from very low levels on entry, pupils make very rapid progress to achieve nationally recognised qualifications at levels comparable to mainstream schools, enabling them to go on to further education and employment.
- The school develops highly individualised timetables for each pupil, tailored to their abilities and interests, to give them the maximum chance for success.
- Teachers, therapists and residential staff work very well together to keep pupils very safe and support their excellent personal and social development.
- The school integrates therapy and counselling into individual timetables to enable pupils with significant behavioural and emotional difficulties to function well in a school environment.
- Leaders and managers make excellent use of data to identify rates of pupil progress and guide lesson planning, resulting in outstanding teaching and achievement.
- The proprietor provides outstanding staff development opportunities and has effective arrangements in place for managing staff performance.

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

- This inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 11 lessons taught by eight teachers and also an assembly. He held discussions with staff, pupils and a representative of the proprietors.
- He analysed the views of staff expressed in 14 survey responses. No responses were received from local authorities and there were insufficient responses to the online Parent View survey to be evaluated.
- The inspector examined samples of pupils' work and scrutinised a range of relevant documentation including curriculum planning, registers and school policies and records.

Inspection team

Michael Glickman, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Grange Learning Centre is a special school for pupils with significant behavioural, emotional, social and complex learning difficulties.
- It is registered for up to 14 pupils and currently has 13 boys and girls aged between 10 and 17 years on roll.
- The school is owned by the Witherslack Group and all pupils come from the group's children's homes. All have a statement of special educational needs and are looked after by their local authorities.
- The school aims 'to provide a safe and caring environment within which personal growth and development is promoted.'
- The school was last inspected in April 2010, when it was judged to provide an outstanding quality of education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school should ensure that all teachers implement the school's marking policy consistently so there is a fully uniform approach to the marking of pupils' work.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Pupils' achievement is outstanding as a result of outstanding teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment, often having missed considerable portions of their previous education. By providing highly individualised timetables tailored to pupils' interests and through the provision of individual or small-group teaching, the school ensures that pupils make very rapid progress in English and mathematics. The school analyses data extremely thoroughly and uses it to set challenging targets for pupils. All pupils who have been in the school for more than a year have made at least good and often outstanding progress in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT).

Pupils are supported very well to achieve an impressive range of academic and vocational qualifications. The school is justifiably proud that all school leavers have proceeded to further education or employment, with a small number achieving five GCSEs at grade C or above as well as a range of vocational awards. The current cohort of senior pupils are following GCSE or functional skills courses in a full range of subjects and some have already gained vocational awards. Displays throughout the school celebrate pupil successes. Pupils take considerable pride in their work and are keen to talk about it.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development is outstanding. Although the school caters for pupils with the most severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, a calm and purposeful atmosphere prevails throughout the building at all times. Pupils are extremely well supervised and the high staff- to-pupil ratio ensures that any inappropriate behaviour is quickly contained. Expected standards of behaviour are made very clear to pupils and a contrast with the residences is deliberately created; in school pupils must wear a uniform and staff are addressed formally. As a result, pupils feel exceptionally well supported and comment that the boundaries set by the school make them feel very safe. There is very close liaison with care staff; information is exchanged electronically at the beginning and end of each day and there are weekly team meetings. This has helped the school to achieve a very high level of attendance, although most pupils had very poor attendance records previously.

The school undertakes a detailed psychological assessment of all pupils on entry and provides tailored therapy and counselling as part of the school timetable. The therapists work as members of the staff team, which ensures a consistent approach to managing behaviour across the school. Although all staff have been trained in physical intervention techniques, these are rarely used and the school's monitoring allows the identification of potential triggers which are then used as the basis for improving behaviour. Pupil tracking and ongoing assessment demonstrates an impressive improvement in behaviour by all pupils.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Because of their previous experiences, the school places great stress on encouraging pupils to empathise with others. At an assembly about current events, pupils were repeatedly invited to think about how they would feel in various situations and how other people might feel. Pupils contribute to the local community through visits to a local senior citizens' home and have made hanging baskets to decorate it. They sent parcels to troops in Afghanistan along with personal messages and were excited to receive letters and videos in reply. They have learned about other cultures and faiths and were keen to talk about their visits to a synagogue and a mosque. The school has been visited by local and national politicians and a pupil went to London to address the Parliamentary Select Committee on special educational needs. Staff monitor all guest speakers very carefully and ensure that no extremist views are promoted. They are quick to challenge any inappropriate language or

extremist ideas expressed by pupils and ensure political and sensitive issues are dealt with in a balanced way.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding and enables pupils to make outstanding progress. Lessons are very well planned. Teachers have an excellent understanding of the ability of each pupil and the small class sizes enable them to tailor lessons to their individual interests and requirements, regardless of age or year group. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively, either supporting individuals within a small group or working with them in a separate classroom. Literacy is seen as the responsibility of all staff and literacy objectives for each pupil are displayed in all classrooms.

Lessons are fast paced and dynamic and succeed in maintaining the interest of all pupils, including those who have very short attention spans. Teachers react calmly and with good humour to some very challenging behaviour and continue to try to engage pupils and keep them working. Because of their very good understanding of all their pupils, teachers' lesson planning includes the need to address any behavioural issues. For example, one lesson was planned to require two pupils who had previously had a dispute to work together. Pupils appreciate the individualised teaching and say that they feel that they have far better opportunities for success than in their previous schools.

Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and to take on responsibilities. For example, having practised booking an outside visit, one pupil then made an actual telephone call from the school office while the teacher watched but did not intervene. Another pupil, who is following a business studies course, carries out real financial operations when working in the school office.

Pupils' work is marked regularly and staff give verbal as well as written feedback as to how it can be improved. However, not all members of staff follow the school's marking policy consistently when recording comments in pupils' books, which means that pupils do not always have a clear written record of what they need to do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and enables pupils to learn and achieve exceptionally well. The school takes into account the individual interests and abilities of pupils to provide a highly effective, personalised timetable based on very high-quality planning. Pupils are taught individually or in very small groups which are based on ability rather than age. Where pupils have a particular interest, the school will attempt to facilitate their pursuing it and gaining appropriate qualifications. For example, one pupil who expressed an interest in horses has been supported to gain recognised certification in riding and stable management while another who shows musical talent accesses training at a professional venue. In addition to academic and vocational qualifications, emphasis is placed on providing pupils with the skills they need to live independently.

The school takes advantage of staff interests and skills to broaden the curriculum. Thus, the school business manager, who is an NVQ assessor and verifier, has developed and delivers a business studies course based in the school office. Similarly, a teaching assistant with sports skills is leading on developing sports leadership courses. Outside agencies are brought in to supplement regular teaching. For example, a ceramic artist visited the school to work with Key Stage 2 pupils to decorate pottery.

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

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and all regulations have been met. All policies and procedures, including those to eliminate any bullying, are fully implemented. The Witherslack Group has a robust recruitment procedure and all the required checks have been carried out on staff and are recorded in a single central register that complies with requirements. All staff have received training in child protection, which is renewed annually, as well as in first aid, fire awareness and health and safety. Three members of staff have been trained as designated safeguarding officers. School and residential staff work closely together to ensure that very vulnerable pupils are supervised well at all times.

The premises have been inspected by the local fire officer, fire equipment is tested regularly and fire drills are carried out. Discussions with pupils confirm that they feel very safe and secure in school at all times. There are suitable facilities for pupils who feel unwell. The school maintains an electronic attendance register which is shared with the placing local authorities.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles through lessons, extra-curricular activities such as mountain biking and hill walking and through staff example. Pupils are served freshly-cooked meals with a variety of healthy ingredients. The school encourages participation in sports and aims to ensure that every pupil leaves school with an interest in at least one sport or outdoor pursuit. Much stress is placed on internet safety and avoiding substance misuse, with visits from relevant agencies such as the police and health teams. Smoking is not permitted and pupils who smoke are offered support in quitting the habit.

Leadership and management**Outstanding**

Leadership and management are outstanding and ensure that pupils learn and achieve extremely well. The Witherslack Group has ensured that all independent school regulations have been met. The Group monitors school data closely and has set up a board to scrutinise and challenge school leaders. Staff development to ensure very high standards of teaching, is a priority and staff are encouraged to achieve further qualifications, including research degrees and the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL). Teachers across the Group's schools meet regularly to share ideas and good practice and a detailed performance management framework for all staff has recently been introduced.

The school premises are light and airy, with a high standard of decoration throughout. Classrooms are appropriately furnished and all have interactive whiteboards or flat screen panels to facilitate the use of ICT. There is a well-equipped science and design and technology laboratory and the food technology room includes a range of appliances to prepare pupils for independent living. The school is set in extensive grounds, some of which are being developed as part of the land-based studies curriculum. There are also hard-covered and grassed playing areas as well as a multi-use games area. A changing room and showers are provided for pupils receiving physical education on the premises.

The school provides all the required information to parents, carers and others. The school's complaints policy complies with requirements.

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	135834
Inspection number	422797
DfE registration number	840/6010

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	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Howard Tennant
Headteacher	Simon Adams
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,752 - £55,057
Telephone number	08442 571282
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