

Cornerstones

Willow Tree Park, Beech House, Booths Lane, Lymm, Cheshire, WA13 0GH

Inspection dates	4–6 March 2014	
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

- Pupils achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress as a result of the outstanding teaching and curriculum.
- Teachers are very successful in helping pupils engage in learning even when they present very challenging behaviour. This results in a calm, purposeful learning environment where pupils make great strides in their learning.
- Provision for pupils' personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional.
- Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. Robust policies and procedures are implemented very effectively ensuring that pupils are exceptionally well supported and cared for at all times.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The proprietor and senior leaders share a consistent drive for excellence; as a result, the provision, teaching and achievement are constantly developing and improving.

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 a full day's notice.
- The inspector observed ten lessons taught by six different teachers. The inspector looked at pupils' work and held meetings with the proprietor, headteacher, senior managers, teachers, pupils, parents, carers and service providers.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of pupils' progress, assessment records and records pertaining to the training of staff. He checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed in 11 questionnaires returned by staff, two addressed to the inspector from parents, and 19 parent and carer responses to questionnaires distributed by the school in December 2013.

Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Cornerstones is an independent day special school for boys and girls located in a rural area in Warrington.
- The school opened in August 2000 and is registered for up to 30 pupils aged from seven to 19 years. There are currently 16 pupils on roll aged from nine to 18 years. All of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs related to autism, severe learning difficulties (SLD), and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).
- 15 pupils are placed at Cornerstones by local authorities and live in children's homes run by the proprietor; there is one additional day pupil on roll.
- Before attending this school some pupils have been out of formal education for lengthy periods.
- The school aims to 'provide a positive, calm, structured and nurturing environment in which the pupils can fulfil their academic and social potential.'
- The school was last inspected in March 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of all teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that lesson observations by senior leaders consistently challenge teachers to further improve the quality of pupils' learning
 - giving teachers more opportunities to share outstanding teaching practice.
- Improve the curriculum further by strengthening provision for information and communication technology (ICT).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Achievement is outstanding as a result of outstanding teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Pupils join the school with a wide range of starting points depending on the complexity of their needs and often as a result of disruptions to their previous learning. Most pupils start with levels well below national standards. Almost all pupils, including those that are disabled, make rapid and sustained progress over time; they engage in education and quickly make great gains in their learning.

Data about pupils' performance is collated as soon as they start school. The school's system is based on national standards in mainstream schools as well as national guidance for working with pupils with special educational needs. Data from the tracking of progress for English, mathematics and science show that all pupils make at least expected progress and a significant number make outstanding progress. Results for ICT are slightly lower but pupils exceed expected progress in this subject as well. Records of achievement for all other subjects indicate that pupils achieve exceptionally well and make excellent progress. Pupils acquire knowledge quickly and develop their understanding in a wide range of different subjects. This is particularly evident in art where pupils realise their high levels of potential through producing high quality creative and imaginative work.

Pupils play a dynamic role in their learning; they offer ideas and respond to challenges with great enthusiasm. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their lives. In reading, more able pupils exceed the national averages for other pupils in similar schools; they apply a wide range of skills competently, including reading, writing, communication and mathematics. All pupils, including those in Key Stage Two, attain externally accredited qualifications including AQA Functional Skills, ASDAN and sports awards, and accreditations related to work experience. Pupils recently won an art competition and their work was displayed in a London gallery; others had their stories published in a young writer's anthology. Evidence from pupils' high-quality work, together with 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. Some pupils join the school having not succeeded in previous placements; and can display distrust for teachers and educational establishments. After joining the school, pupils make great strides in the ways that they communicate and interact with each other and the staff. They develop excellent attitudes towards learning, and behaviour in lessons and around the school improves steadily. Pupils are consistently encouraged to be thoughtful about the ways that they behave and they respond positively; this is an outstanding factor in their successful learning. Pupils enjoy learning and usually engage fully in activities; they learn successfully how to maintain concentration and engagement during lessons as a result of the expertise and patience of staff. Most learning proceeds without disruption; on the rare occasions when pupils present challenging behaviour, they are quickly calmed down and helped to refocus on their learning.

Pupils have a very good knowledge of the different forms of bullying and the damage that it can cause. As a result, bullying is very rare. All pupils say that they feel safe in school. Attendance is excellent and lessons always start punctually; this has a strong impact on pupils' learning and achievement.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. All pupils are encouraged to take initiative and make decisions carefully. As a result, they grow in self-esteem and self-confidence and are proud of themselves and their achievements. Pupils interact in the community through fundraising for charity. For example, they planted flower pots and sold them in

aid of a national charity for cancer research. Pupils become aware of spirituality and learn about morality through religious education (RE), art, assemblies, discussions with teachers and trips outdoors where they contemplate the wonders and beauty of nature. Assemblies on topics such as, 'Making choices and resolving conflicts' and 'Celebrating what we are good at', help pupils appreciate their own potential and develop respect for others. As a result, pupils develop excellent social skills. They learn about their own and other cultures and public services in a number of subjects. Staff encourage pupils to explore their own religious beliefs and customs and to share their experiences with each other. For example, pupils were keen to compare their own religious beliefs and practices with each other during an RE lesson on Sikhism. A Chinese pupil helped to organise the school's Chinese New Year Celebrations and a pupil with an African background proudly showed native costumes to his classmates. Consequently, pupils are interested in different cultures and faiths; they develop respect for all people and challenge racism. They learn about political issues in a balanced way and, as a result, they learn to make suitable decisions preparing them well for life in British society.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

Teaching is outstanding and, as a result, all pupils achieve exceptionally well and make rapid and sustained progress. Teachers convey consistently high expectations to pupils. They check pupils' understanding throughout lessons systematically and effectively, usually revising the topic from different angles to ensure that pupils fully understand what they are learning. Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught highly effectively; these aspects of learning are planned cohesively and implemented in all subjects for all pupils according to their ability. Teachers possess a thorough understanding of pupils' needs and abilities and plan lessons capably to ensure that all pupils are able to make continuous progress.

Teachers successfully generate high levels of participation and commitment to learning among more able pupils and this has a highly positive impact on their achievement and progress. For example, during art, older pupils created high quality three-dimensional sculptures on their own and explained their planning and rationale to the inspector with great enthusiasm. Other pupils are always purposefully engaged, for example in a modern foreign language lesson where they learned about the names of colours in Spanish through sewing, matching cards and different activities.

Marking is of a high quality and always highlights achievement and areas that need to improve. Pupils take great pride in their achievement files, containing photographs and samples of their work, and this has a very positive impact on their commitment to continue to achieve high standards. Teachers have established excellent systems to monitor and track achievement and progress; as a result, pupils are routinely challenged to progress in their learning and achieve high standards. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and to offer their own ideas. They often work together and this helps them appreciate the benefits of sharing knowledge with each other. For example, during an assembly on the prevention of bullying, pupils shared their ideas about bullying by creating an 'anti-bullying wall' together. Teachers use an excellent range of strategies and resources to support learning. Pupils, parents, carers and external agencies agree that the school works hard to ensure that pupils engage and succeed. One parent said that for a long time before joining the school, her son was becoming increasingly isolated and was totally disengaged from learning. In the short time since joining the school 'he has gradually changed and is learning to understand and accept his autism – he is more positive and much happier!'

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The curriculum is outstanding. It provides highly memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning. It meets the needs of all pupils enabling them to achieve exceedingly well and make excellent progress in all subjects. The curriculum is especially well designed to help pupils develop their reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills according to their

abilities. It is supported with excellent schemes of work that contain carefully detailed plans to challenge all across the ability range of the school. The school has fewer resources for ICT than for other subjects. Although pupils achieve well above expected progress in ICT, results are marginally lower than other subjects. Pupils are split into four learning groups according to ability; activities for all year groups in all subjects are planned to ensure rapid progression from one competency to another. Pupils receive excellent guidance from their teachers about future education, training or employment and staff help them make important decisions with regard to their future. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their lives.

Extra-curricular activities take place during 'After School Clubs' where pupils catch up on their work and receive support with homework. In addition they attend 'Holiday Clubs' where they take part in an 'Art Day' and visit zoos, parks, the beach and places of historical interest. Although the school and residences are separately registered, school and care staff work very well together to ensure that extra-curricular activities are rich and varied and meet the needs and interests of pupils. The curriculum is enriched through visitors to the school such as a 'Zoo Lab' where pupils learned about animals in connection with their studies about Chinese New Year, and educational trips within the community and further afield. PSHCE is excellent; this subject helps pupils understand issues related to their personal well-being effectively and provides them with a keen understanding of the community that they live in and the world around them. PSHE and the wider curriculum help pupils become well-rounded individuals that are knowledgeable about a wide range of issues, are keen to expand their experiences and pursue new interests.

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. The school has established robust policies and procedures that comply fully with current legislation and guidance; the policy to tackle bullying is rigorously and consistently implemented and monitored regularly to secure improvement. The school is proactive in its approach to safeguarding and enables pupils to understand how they can keep themselves and others safe. The school implements its child protection policy very effectively. All staff and the proprietor have enhanced clearances to work with children through the Disclosure and Barring Service; these and all other required checks are included in a comprehensive single central register. Two designated persons for child protection and all staff have attended training at the required levels.

Pupils are exceptionally well cared for and excellent supervision ensures pupils are always safe. Staff are highly committed to providing the best levels of care and support. They have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and commonly undertake a broad range of training related to health and safety to keep up to date. All staff members are trained in first-aid. The school has a very good level of fire safety; it has prepared a detailed risk assessment and all equipment is checked and serviced regularly. Fire drills are conducted regularly and are duly recorded. Risk assessments for individual pupils, the premises and trips are very comprehensive. Pupils routinely enjoy healthy lifestyles and adopt practices that ensure their own safety. The school is an inclusive community where pupils develop strong relationships with each other. Parents, carers and other agencies have full confidence in the school's procedures for welfare, health and safety.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders have secured improvements to the provision since the last inspection. They are highly successful in their drive to maintain exceptionally high levels of achievement for pupils of all abilities over a sustained period of time; they convey this to them constantly. This contributes to an outstanding learning environment where pupils achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need to improve. They have produced a detailed self-assessment and a realistic development plan which is used very effectively to guide

actions and improve the provision. An external advisor visits the school every term to carry out quality assurance checks and advise senior leaders appropriately on all aspects of the provision. Senior leaders and teachers uphold high professional standards and frequently introduce initiatives to benefit pupils.

Senior leaders have produced a curriculum that provides pupils with memorable experiences and excellent opportunities for high-quality learning; this has a highly positive impact on their behaviour, personal development and academic achievement. They have ensured that provision and outcomes for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Much of the teaching observed during the inspection contributed to outstanding learning; a number of excellent features were observed. Senior leaders place great emphasis on improving teaching and learning through advising teachers on strategies for effective learning and the successful use of the school's resources.

The premises and accommodation are well-suited to support the curriculum. All areas of the school are very well maintained and decorated to a high standard. The school meets all of the requirements for the provision of information to parents and carers and the complaints procedure fully meets requirements. Senior leaders work extremely well with parents, carers and external agencies to help pupils succeed in all areas of their learning. During the inspection, one parent said that she really appreciates the photographs of her son that the school sends home weekly and that 'there are excellent links between the school and herself'. Senior leaders have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are robust and fully meet statutory requirements. Resources are used very well to benefit all pupils.

School leaders 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 the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	134186
Inspection number	442990
DfE registration number	877/6001

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 for pupils with autism, severe learning difficulties (SLD), and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	7–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Paul O'Leary
Chair	Paul O'Leary
Headteacher	Ruth Clifford
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£46,436
Telephone number	01925 750249
Fax number	N/A
Email address	admin@cstones.co.uk

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