

Appletree School

Natland, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7QS

Inspection dates

7–9 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is good.
- Pupils make good progress from their different starting points and their achievement is good.
- Teaching is good and ensures all pupils, including those who are least able and most able, do well.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well taught.
- School records show that the quality of teaching has improved over time because leaders improve staff skills.
- Behaviour is good because pupils are keen to learn, their levels of attendance are high and staff are skilled at meeting their different behavioural needs.
- Pupils, staff, placing authority representatives and parents say the school keeps pupils safe.
- Leaders, including middle leaders, have a good understanding of how well the school is doing.
- The directors have good oversight of the school and they challenge the leaders well. As a result, the school has continued to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, staff miss opportunities to check pupils' work in lessons in order to improve it.
- Marking does not always offer the necessary advice to pupils to enable them to make improvements. Consequently pupils do not derive the greatest benefit from this.
- Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to gain an outstanding understanding of life in multicultural Britain.
- Opportunities for older pupils to achieve qualifications and so boost their achievement further are underdeveloped.

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 inspector observed teaching in seven lessons. One was observed jointly with the headteacher and one with the senior teacher. He also carried out short visits to classrooms. He observed pupils during lunchtime and break and spoke to pupils in separate meetings.
- Separate meetings were held with the headteacher, middle leader and staff. One meeting was held with the chair of directors (the principal) and two meetings were held with members of the advisory board. A meeting was held with the headteacher from the local primary school. The inspector spoke on the telephone to a representative from a placing authority, a social worker and a parent.
- The inspector took account of the results of online surveys of pupils' and placing authorities' views and responses from 10 staff questionnaires. There were not enough responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for the inspector to make a meaningful analysis.
- A number of school documents were examined. These included information about the curriculum planning documents, pupils' progress, the school's own evaluation of its performance, and work in pupils' books. Records relating to the quality of teaching, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The Department for Education (DfE) asked the inspector to consider the school's request for a material change to extend the upper age limit of the pupils registered at the school from 16 to 18 years.

Inspection team

Jonathan Woodyatt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Appletree School is an independent school which is also registered as a children's home for young people who require residential provision for up to 52 weeks a year.
- The school caters for girls and boys aged between six and 16 years. There are 11 pupils on roll. It aims to meet the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Most of those on roll have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has built a partnership with a local school, St Mark's Church of England Primary School.
- The school was previously inspected in November 2011.
- An inspection of the care provision took place at the same time as the education inspection and is reported on separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to outstanding in order to raise achievement by ensuring that:
 - staff check pupils' learning frequently, quickly correct mistakes and make certain that the work provided matches their needs
 - marking provides guidance for pupils on how to improve their work and staff ensure pupils act on it.
- Review the effectiveness of behaviour policies in reducing instances of misbehaviour.
- Improve pupils' awareness and understanding of major world faiths.
- Develop more vocational and academic accreditation opportunities to improve pupils' preparedness for the future.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are good

- All the leaders and directors work as a team and share a common aim to provide the best possible care and education for pupils to ensure they can be successful and independent. Their positive values and attitudes are reflected in all aspects of the school.
- The headteacher has a clear view of the school's performance. He uses the school's systems to gather a wide range of information about the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour and how well the needs of pupils, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, are being met. He uses this well to make the necessary improvements, such as increasing the skills of staff. As a result, the school has continued to improve since the last inspection
- Middle leaders are effective. They have a good knowledge of what the information that they gather is telling them and use this to keep the senior leaders updated. They regularly supervise staff in the day-to-day activities so they can monitor teaching. They intervene effectively when learning needs a boost by working individually with staff on improving their skills.
- Leaders and staff use robust systems for gathering and monitoring the performance of the school. Members of the advisory board regularly check the accuracy of this. The headteacher has built a helpful relationship with the local primary school which provides opportunities for staff to learn from each other.
- The curriculum is increasingly helping pupils to develop their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Individual tuition sessions for pupils help boost these skills. Recently, the most able pupils joined with the primary school which is helping them, to access the highest Level 6 in mathematics. However, there are not enough opportunities for older pupils to access qualifications, such as GCSE, which could boost their achievement further.
- Leaders are acutely aware of the need to ensure pupils gain life experiences that will enable them to move successfully on to the next steps. Consequently, pupils are provided with a broad range of activities that support their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Visits to museums, work with animals, charity fundraising and talks from visitors are just a few of the many opportunities pupils have to do this. However, there are fewer opportunities for them to explore different faiths, in order to prepare them even better for life in modern Britain.
- Parents and placing authority staff are kept well informed about pupils' progress through monthly reports and regular meetings.
- The school leaders would like to utilise their additional school premises, known as 'The Barn', and their qualified staff expertise to support students up to the age of 18 years to gain further qualifications. The inspector recommends that the school's request for a material change to extend the upper age limit from 16 to 18 years be approved.
- **The governance of the school:**

The chair of directors knows how well the school is performing and how well pupils achieve because she keeps in close contact with the headteacher. There are regular meetings with senior staff and records show that key issues, such as the quality of teaching, are closely scrutinised. If standards are not on target, she acts quickly to bring about improvements, such as using the robust system for managing staff performance. The directors effectively seek additional insight into the performance of the school through an advisory board that they have established. Members of the board visit the school and gain a clear understanding of the school's work which enables them to provide good challenge to leaders keep improving.

The school keeps a tight rein on its finances. An outdoor sports area and seating area are good examples of how well it uses its funds. Classrooms are well resourced, especially with books for reading.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to each other and staff whether in classrooms, during breaks and lunchtime or when moving around the school.
- They pay good attention to requests from staff so that lesson disruption is kept to a minimum. This has had a positive effect in enabling them to move successfully to other provision, such as maintained secondary schools.

- Attendance rates are high compared to other schools. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as is confirmed by staff, placing authority representatives and parents. School staff are vigilant and immediately follow up any pupils who are absent, ensuring that they are safe and that any absence has minimum impact on their learning.
- Pupils, parents and staff all consider that any incidents of bullying are rare. This is confirmed by school records. This has had a positive effect on pupils' personal and social development.
- The school has a system of rewards and sanctions which was clearly explained by pupils to the inspector. They said that this helped them to put more effort into their learning and not to misbehave.
- Occasionally pupils' behaviour can slip, although skilled staff do intervene quickly to help bring behaviour back on track. Evidence in records provided by the school shows that pupils make good and sometimes outstanding improvement in their behaviour. However, there is more to be done by the leaders to reduce these incidents further.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Systems are in place to allow pupils to discuss any issues they have with adults. For example, they can use a post box to send messages about any concerns they want to raise with staff. They can also express their thoughts and hear the responses of staff in the weekly school meetings. These approaches demonstrate the school's commitment to promoting respect for individual differences and tackling any discrimination.

The quality of teaching

is good

- School records and inspection evidence demonstrate that teaching has continued to be good since the last inspection.
- Leaders have ensured that teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills continue to improve. Staff particularly benefit from individual support from leaders and the partnership with the local school, enabling them to work alongside staff to check pupils' work in order to be clear about the standards they reach.
- There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to read and they take books away with them every day to read at home. Their records show how much reading they do. The inspector confirmed their good skills by listening to three pupils reading out loud. During a lesson, one pupil could not take his eyes off his book as he reached an exciting part of the story.
- Pupils are increasingly benefitting from opportunities to use their writing skills. For example, a recent visit by a local author gave an additional boost to the letter writing pupils were doing at the time.
- Teachers and classroom assistants use their records well to identify when pupils' progress is slowing too much. They provide the necessary support to help pupils catch up, such as placing pupils in individual tuition sessions with staff who focus on improving their skills in particular areas, such as mathematics.
- This approach ensures that all pupils, including the least able, those that are disabled or have special educational needs, can make good progress in line with others in the school. This demonstrates the schools' commitment to providing equality of opportunity for all pupils.
- Staff plan lessons that take into account the different needs of pupils. They use the wide range of resources available in the classrooms effectively to provide activities which pupils find interesting and which are usually, though not always, matched to their individual needs. However, occasionally they miss opportunities to improve learning even more because they do not always check how well pupils are doing there and then in lessons. Sometimes this means they miss errors in pupil's spelling or do not move pupils on fast enough when they have understood what to do.
- Pupils' work in their books is regularly marked. Staff write comments that praise what pupils have done well and underline aspects of work that have not been done as well. However, pupils are not always given clear guidance on what they could do to improve their work. Consequently they miss opportunities to improve their skills even more.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From starting points that are typically lower than those of others of the same age nationally, pupils make good progress.
- Attainment improves well because the teaching is good and the school sets appropriate targets to drive standards up. Although most pupils leave with standards that are below those of pupils of similar age in other schools, a good proportion make more than the expected progress from their different starting points. Consequently, gaps in attainment between pupils and others in other schools narrow well over

time.

- The most able pupils make good progress and achieve well. For example, pupils in Year 5 recently achieved the high Level 5 in mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in English is good, though achievement in writing lags a little behind reading because. For example, staff miss too many opportunities to improve pupils' spelling skills.
- The least able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have a statement of special educational needs make progress that is similar to that of other pupils in the school and achieve equally well.
- Overall, most pupils successfully move onto education in other schools before they reach the upper age of the school. However, there is not enough provision in the school for pupils who do not move on from the school to access qualifications, such as GCSE's, which could boost their achievement further.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	130367
Social Care unique reference number	SC033268
Inspection number	446264
DfE registration number	909/6048

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted 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	Special
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Appletree Treatment Centre Ltd
Chair	Clair Davies
Headteacher	Rob Davies
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£80,746
Telephone number	01539 560253
Fax number	01539 561301
Email address	admin@appletreeschool.co.uk

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