

Cedar House School

Lower Bentham, Lancaster, Lancashire, LA2 7DD

Inspection dates	18–20 November 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
Sixth form provision	Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Good teaching ensures that pupils make good progress from often low levels of attainment on entry.
- Both teaching and residential staff are committed to improving the achievement of their pupils and enjoy good relationships with them.
- Pupils in the residential accommodation feel that staff care for them.
- Teachers and teaching assistants understand their pupils' individual requirements and are able to engage them effectively in learning.
- The school has an educational psychologist and therapists as part of the staff team, which enables pupils to receive professional interventions as part of the school day, ensuring maximum participation in lessons.
- Staff are offered good training opportunities which lead to improved teaching.
- The school has successfully reduced the number of physical interventions required to manage pupil behaviour. As a result, behaviour and safety are good.
- Students aged over 16 years have personalised learning programmes which enable them to gain confidence and prepare them for later life.
- Leaders and managers analyse assessment data thoroughly and use it effectively to track pupil progress and identify where interventions are required.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The safety of pupils in the residential accommodation is slightly weakened by a lack of clarity among staff and pupils regarding behaviour management techniques.
- There are weaknesses in record keeping regarding the use of certain areas in school as a sanction for misbehaviour and around physical interventions.
- Leaders and managers have not identified these weaknesses as part of their self-assessment. Although the leadership and management of education are good, this is not the case in relation to the residential setting where the leadership and management are adequate.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- 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.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out without notice.
- Inspectors observed a school assembly and six lessons, most jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team. They spoke with pupils in the school and the residential accommodation, and observed the evening routine. Discussions were held with school leaders, teachers, care staff and other professionals as well as a senior member of the Witherslack Group management.
- Inspectors examined school policies and documentation from the education and residential provisions. They scrutinised a sample of pupils’ work across the school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of staff expressed in 35 returned questionnaires. There were insufficient responses on the Parent View website to take into consideration, but inspectors spoke with a small number of parents by telephone.

Inspection team

Michael Glickman, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Anne Bannister

Social Care Inspector

Elaine Claire

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Cedar House School is a residential special school for boys and girls with a range of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It is owned by the Witherslack Group, a national provider of specialist education and care for children and young people with a disability or special educational needs.
- The school is registered for 88 pupils, aged between seven and 18 years, on a day or residential basis. There are currently 62 pupils on the roll, of whom 60 have statements of special educational needs. Thirty two pupils are looked after by local authorities from across the country.
- Twenty three pupils live in the residential accommodation. This accommodation consists of four self-contained units for senior and junior boys and girls respectively.
- Cedar House School aspires to being 'an exemplar of best practice for children locally, regionally and nationally' and aims 'to respect the value of all individual pupils and staff, to provide the highest standards of care and education and to ensure safety, security and opportunities for success.'
- The school was last inspected in March 2013 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good. The residential facilities were last inspected in November 2013. Their overall effectiveness was judged as good with outcomes for residential pupils being outstanding.
- Since the last inspection, the school has had its registration changed to allow it to take pupils aged 16 to 18 years.
- A small number of pupils attend a local college of further education on a part-time basis.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities within the residential setting for older pupils to develop their independence.
- Improve the safety of pupils in the residential setting through leaders and managers:
 - providing clarity in policies and guidance regarding behaviour management to ensure consistency in approach across the whole school, for example in relation to the use of the learning centre quiet room
 - requiring that detailed records are kept of all behaviour management interventions, including those currently deemed to be below the recording threshold, to enable their safety and efficacy to be monitored
 - ensuring that all staff promptly complete records of physical interventions.
- Ensure that the self-evaluation undertaken by leaders and managers in the residential setting is sufficiently rigorous to accurately identify all areas where improvement is required.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership and management of education are good. A good number of strengths are evident.
- Leaders and managers carry out regular lesson observations to monitor the quality of teaching and this ensures that teaching is good. They have arranged meetings concerning different subjects to enable staff to share ideas. Leaders have also introduced moderation between staff within the school and with other schools in the Witherslack Group in order to standardise marking.
- The school collects much data on pupil achievement and behaviour. Leaders analyse this in order to monitor progress and identify where improvements are necessary. They have produced a detailed self-evaluation and school improvement plan. However, self-evaluation is not sufficiently rigorous to enable them to identify all the areas which require improvement.
- The school has detailed policies for learning activities and schemes of work covering all subjects. This ensures continuity of teaching and enables teachers to plan lessons which contribute well to pupil progress.
- Staff in both the educational and residential settings are dedicated and committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for the often challenging young people that they work with. Although the school has a formal atmosphere where pupils wear uniform and teachers are addressed as 'sir' or 'miss', staff clearly enjoy a good relationship with pupils and are proud of their successes. This is exemplified by the fact that the staff conference room is strikingly decorated with photographs of current and recent pupils.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that all regulations and national minimum standards for residential special schools, including those related to the safeguarding of pupils, have been met. They have ensured that no extremist ideas are promoted within the school by staff or by visiting speakers.
- The school and residential premises comply with requirements. They are well-maintained and are attractively decorated with examples of pupils' creative work. Specialist classrooms include a food technology room and a science laboratory. The school kitchen provides freshly cooked meals with healthy eating options highlighted on the menu. There is a large sports field adjacent to the premises as well as a sizeable gymnasium. Showers are available for pupils after physical education.
- Although there was an insufficient response on the Parent View website to be analysed, a small number of parents were spoken to by telephone and were fulsome in their praise for the way in which the school has enabled their children to develop their potential.
- There are a few weaknesses in leadership and management for the residential setting. In that regard, senior leaders recognise that there is a lack of clarity in behaviour management policies and record keeping relating to pupils' safety. The school has clear plans to remedy these matters.
- Senior leaders were quick to act on issues raised in the course of the inspection, making amendments to policies and record keeping where weaknesses were identified. However, a few issues remain. Although the group has policies for its schools which comply with requirements, there is a lack of clarity in the behaviour management policy which means that certain sanctions within the residential accommodation need not be recorded. As a result, the school does not know when they have been employed or whether they are effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Witherslack Group monitors the school closely. It has recently identified the need for a dedicated tier of senior management with responsibility for its schools and has appointed a number of deputy directors to this role.
 - The group offers a good range of training and development opportunities to staff, including access to further professional qualifications, and encourages cooperation between its schools in order to improve the quality of teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils develop good attitudes towards learning, cooperate well with others and often display good manners towards everyone. They develop high levels of respect for adults and were always courteous towards inspectors.
- Because of the nature of the pupil body, the school has put considerable effort into behaviour management. A very high ratio of staff to pupils ensures that pupils are well supervised at all times.
- Behaviour support includes extensive use of praise and incentive systems such as certificates and small

prizes for good behaviour and attendance. This has successfully reduced absences from lessons and promoted positive behaviour.

- It is sometimes necessary to physically restrain pupils and staff have received recognised training in the necessary techniques. Physical interventions are documented and their use is monitored. School data show that the number of restraints used has greatly reduced over the last year. Most pupils never require physical intervention and, even when it is used, records show a clear reduction in frequency for most pupils as they progress through the school.
- There has also been a significant reduction in the use of physical interventions and ground holds within the residential accommodation. This is attributed to the strong, positive relationships the residential staff team have established with residential pupils which support them to take responsibility for managing their own behaviours. Young people speak very positively of their relationships with residential staff, for example saying: 'They treat us like we were their own kids. They want the best for us.' Staff are highly skilled at defusing situations.
- The Witherslack Group's own quality monitoring has identified some weaknesses in the recording of some physical intervention records. The school took immediate action to address these issues. Inspectors also found that there was sometimes a delay in staff completing these records which may impact on staff members' ability to fully and accurately reflect on the incidents.
- When pupils become disruptive in class, teachers will sometimes send them out of the room briefly. Members of staff supervise them in the corridor until they are able to return to the class. However, the school does not record these minor incidents and therefore does not know whether they demonstrate any pattern or whether there has been an improvement over time.
- The education staff use an area known as the learning centre where pupils are either given work to do under supervision or can sit in a quiet room. Learning centre staff aim to calm them and return them to their class as soon as possible.
- The residential staff use the learning centre at night. However, there is insufficient detail in documentation to show whether pupils ask to be taken there or whether they are taken as a sanction for misbehaviour. In discussion, both staff and pupils were unclear whether use of the learning centre is a sanction or an opportunity to calm down.
- Residential staff will sometimes tell a pupil to remain in their bedroom for a certain time when they exhibit disruptive behaviour. Again, there was a lack of clarity among staff and pupils as to whether this is a sanction. As Witherslack Group policy only requires the recording of sanctions which involve removal from residential quarters, there is no clear record of how often or for how long this occurs and therefore the school cannot determine whether it is an effective technique.
- The provision for the safety of pupils is good overall. All safeguarding requirements are met. The required checks have been carried out on all members of staff and they have received appropriate child protection training. Fire and safety checks are up-to-date and risk assessments have been carried out for off-site activities as well as those within the school and the residential facilities. The school has an effective first aid policy and there is a nurse on the premises.
- Healthcare arrangements are very effective in promoting residential pupils' physical and emotional health. Detailed health plans are well supported by the Witherslack Group's own therapy team and a qualified nurse. Residential staff liaise closely with healthcare professionals to ensure residential pupils' healthcare needs are effectively supported.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and in the residential facilities. The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and posters about preventing bullying are displayed throughout the premises. Pupils are confident that staff will take immediate action to resolve any instances which may arise. Staff are aware that cyber-bullying has occurred at weekends and have taken effective action to counter it. Pupils learn about cyber-safety as part of their work in information and communication technology (ICT).
- The school exceeds the requirements of the regulations by notifying Ofsted of all safeguarding referrals. Practice implemented aims to promote partnership working and demonstrate the school's commitment to residential pupils' safety and wellbeing.
- Pupils learn to respect the rule of law and to take responsibility for their actions. They learn to respect other cultures and have visited a local mosque. Pupils have participated in local events, such as those around the Tour de France cycle race, and contribute to the community by tending the garden at the village hall.
- The two recommendations from the previous social care inspection have been addressed. Positive steps have been taken to reduce the number of residential pupils who smoke. All staff involved are offered a debriefing following an incident of challenging behaviour which has resulted in a physical intervention.
- There is a lack of clarity in the record keeping regarding the use of some behaviour management strategies by residential staff. Pupils' perceptions are that they have to remain in the learning centre or

their bedrooms until staff allow them to leave.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because staff use a range of techniques to accommodate the often challenging behaviour of pupils. As a result, all groups of pupils generally make good progress in their learning from their starting points, including the most able pupils and those with a statement of special educational needs.
- Basic skills in literacy, reading and mathematics are taught well. This enables pupils to make good progress in these areas of learning.
- Small class sizes allow for lessons to be highly individualised and teaching assistants are well deployed to provide support for individual pupils.
- Because many pupils have missed considerable periods of schooling, they are often well below the expected level for their age and classes are organised according to ability rather than simply by age. This enables teaching at a level appropriate to all pupils.
- Teachers make extensive use of praise and incentive systems to successfully build pupils' confidence and encourage them to remain focused on their work. As a result, many pupils work steadily and with concentration, resulting in good progress.
- Most pupils clearly take pride in their work. Their work is generally neat and well presented, and they are happy to show it off and talk about it to visitors.
- Marking of books usually includes specific praise, highlighting what points have been learned and indicating when verbal feedback has been given. However, it does not always indicate what pupils must do in order to improve and a small number of books have not been regularly marked.
- Although most lessons proceed in a quiet and orderly fashion, there are times when teaching is less focused or lessons are less well planned and pupils begin to become disruptive. These instances are always quickly dealt with, sometimes by temporarily removing a pupil from the class or by rearranging the seating.
- The school has an educational psychologist and a number of therapists on the premises who function as part of the staff team. This enables them to ensure that teachers are aware of the best techniques for engaging pupils and for pupils to receive specialised treatments as part of the school day, enabling them to remain on the school premises and participate in lessons.
- Pupils who have statements of special educational needs receive education which complies with the requirements of their statements.
- The school places the wellbeing of residential pupils at the centre of its practice. The good quality of care residential pupils receive ensures that they make significant progress in all aspects of their lives. Their self-confidence and self-esteem increases as they move through the school and they realise their potential to make decisions which impact positively on their future life choices. Staff are proactive and imaginative in finding ways to support residential pupils who are making good progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most pupils enter the school with levels of attainment lower than expected because they have missed considerable parts of their school education. However, achievement is good because teaching is strong. All groups of pupils make equally good progress from their starting points, including those looked after by local authorities. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' individual abilities and requirements, and ensure that they make good progress in lessons.
- All pupils are assessed on entry to the school using a range of standardised tests and results are used to set individualised learning targets. The school collates this data and monitors how pupils are progressing. As a result, difficulties are quickly identified and appropriate support put in place. Most pupils are making expected progress in all subjects, with a number exceeding expectations over their time in school.
- The school offers a range of recognised academic and vocational qualifications appropriate to the needs and abilities of pupils. Most pupils leave school with some qualifications and the school has supported pupils who have left early who wish to complete qualifications.
- Pupils have produced creative artwork, both as part of therapy and in conjunction with visiting artists. This is displayed throughout the school and pupils are rightly very proud of it.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2, some of whom have started from very low levels of attainment, are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. Most pupils enjoy reading widely and are keen to talk about books

they have read. Progress in literacy and numeracy is generally good.

- Residential pupils are exceptionally well supported and supervised. They are helped to develop their social skills, independent living skills and problem-solving abilities, and to develop their emotional wellbeing and ability to think independently.
- There are very limited opportunities for residential pupils to have time which is independent of staff supervision. Residential pupils feel this limits opportunities for them to demonstrate their growing maturity and ability to take responsibility for their behaviours.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The school has an effective sixth form and the quality of teaching is good. There are a number of opportunities to help pupils to achieve well.
- The school has recently introduced facilities for pupils over the age of 16 years who have previously been pupils in the school. The class is currently small and the intention is to expand it slowly.
- Pupils follow individualised learning programmes. They are supported to attend a local further education college on a part-time basis. They are making good progress and were keen to talk about a drama production in which they are participating. The school liaises closely with college staff to ensure that pupils are provided with an appropriate learning environment for their particular needs.
- The school has identified that personal safety is a particular issue for the pupils and within school are concentrating on developing the skills that pupils need to live safely and independently.
- Pupils have access to a range of appropriate qualifications and are being well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Outcomes for residential pupils

are good

Quality of residential provision and care

is good

Residential pupils' safety

is adequate

Leadership and management of the residential provision

are adequate

What inspection judgements mean

School and residential provision

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.

Grade characteristics for the judgements made on the school's residential provision can be viewed in the *Evaluation schedule for the inspection of boarding and residential provision in schools* which is also available on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110096.

School details

Unique reference number	112456
Social care unique reference number	SC040058
Inspection number	454529
DfE registration number	815/6041

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.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential and day special school for boys and girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	7–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	23
Proprietor	The Witherslack Group
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Miss Kathryn Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2013
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,860–£79,167
Annual fees (boarders)	£47,743–£106,366
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