

Westmorland School

Welbank Lane, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 3NQ

Inspection dates 24–26 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding school

- The school has made a number of important improvements in teaching, learning and pupils' progress since the last inspection due to the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team.
- The management board provides excellent support and challenge to school leaders and staff.
- Senior leaders conduct extensive checks on the quality of teaching. Occasionally, this activity does not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on the learning of individual pupils.
- Exemplary development of their communication skills and self-confidence enables pupils to benefit fully from the learning activities provided.
- From their starting points, pupils make outstanding progress in English, mathematics and science. Progress in information and communication technology (ICT) is good rather than outstanding.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers and classroom assistants work very effectively together to ensure that each pupil takes an active part in lessons.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They make excellent progress in learning to manage their own behaviour.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. They develop the ability to work together effectively and to listen to and value the contributions of others.
- The school provides an outstandingly safe and secure environment for pupils' learning and personal development.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- The inspector visited a number of lessons or parts of lessons in a range of subjects, almost all jointly with the headteacher. The inspector also looked at pupils' work in books, mostly within lessons.
- The inspector held discussions with a number of senior and middle leaders, representatives of the school management board and representatives of placing local authorities. Questionnaires submitted by 28 members of staff were considered.
- Nineteen responses to the Ofsted online Parent View questionnaire were considered, together with discussions with a small number of parents and carers.
- The inspector held discussions with two groups of pupils, together with informal discussions during lessons and around the school.
- A number of school policies, procedures and records were scrutinised to check compliance with the independent school standards, including those related to safeguarding arrangements and the assessment of pupils' achievement.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Westmorland School is a day special school located in Chorley, Lancashire. It operates under the proprietorship of The Witherslack Group.
- The Witherslack Group vision statement is 'promoting resilience; developing independence'.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for up to 52 pupils in the age range five to 11 years. There are currently 51 pupils on the roll of the school; most of these pupils are boys.
- Most pupils admitted to the school have autistic spectrum conditions; many have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of pupils with autism has increased since the time of the last inspection. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs in place, or statements are in the progress of being applied for, at the time of entry to the school.
- The school organises classes based on pupils' barriers to learning, rather than age or ability.
- The school was last inspected in November 2011.
- The school has recently been short-listed for national awards for its provision for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement in ICT to match the standards achieved in the the other core subjects.
- Ensure that arrangements for the evaluation of teaching always place sufficient focus on the impact of teaching on the learning achieved by individual pupils.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The quality of leadership and management is outstanding and has a strong positive impact on the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. Senior leaders work extremely effectively with the staff to ensure continuous and rigorous checks on all aspects of the school's work.
- Staff share high expectations about the extent to which pupils with complex needs can make outstanding progress with their learning. They work tirelessly to secure outstanding outcomes for their pupils, particularly with the development of pupils' confidence and resilience.
- Senior leaders have ensured continuous improvement of the school since the last inspection and have improved the quality of education provided from good to outstanding. Senior managers' records of the assessment of pupils' progress and the analysis of data are accurate and comprehensive. Information from these activities is used effectively to raise aspirations and to ensure that the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement are outstanding.
- The headteacher provides excellent leadership based on a passionate vision of how the school can ensure growth and development, academically, emotionally and socially for the full range of pupils admitted to the school. Members of the senior leadership team fulfil their responsibilities to a consistently high standard. They are strongly supported by middle leaders who have a robust impact, for example, on the teaching of core subjects and the development of pupils' sensory and communication skills.
- Teachers provide effective leadership for the support staff who work with them in the classroom; they implement agreed approaches to learning and the management of behaviour consistently. The school recognises the individual therapeutic needs of pupils. The work of therapists and related support staff is having an increasingly strong impact on the improvement of pupils' communication skills and sensory development. All members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire state that they are proud to be members of staff at the school.
- The headteacher involves all members of staff in the continuous review of the work of the school. Senior leaders know the school's strengths well and involve all staff in working together to build on the outstanding practice that has been established.
- Regular observations of teaching and learning make a strong contribution to senior leaders' awareness of classroom practice and the many strengths in teaching. Occasionally, the criteria against which the quality of teaching is judged do not always provide sufficient focus on the impact of teaching on the learning achieved by individual pupils.
- Senior leaders have given excellent attention to the improvement of arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work. The information gained from effective assessment across the full range of subjects is analysed thoroughly and used extremely well to compare overall pupils' progress with that of other pupils nationally. Senior leaders are extremely well informed about strengths and areas for improvement in pupils' learning. As a result, areas for improvement in the school's development plan are accurate and precise.
- Senior leaders have developed an outstanding specialised curriculum. As a result, pupils are closing the gaps in their learning compared with other pupils nationally. Their results in national tests at the end of Year 6 demonstrate progress which exceeds national expectations.
- The school provides pupils with an innovative and creative range of learning experiences. Pupils' sensory and social communication needs are at the heart of all aspects of learning and organisation. Pupils make excellent progress over time in the development of resilience, independence and confidence to function successfully as learners with positive attitudes. Their progress with the development of skills in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.
- The school ensures equality of access to learning and personal development for a range of pupils with complex emotional and social needs. Relationships between pupils and staff are characterised by honesty and challenge in which each individual pupil is able to thrive.
- Staff help pupils to overcome individual barriers to personal development with increasing potential to live successful lives in the local and wider community of modern Britain. Almost all parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire state that their children are happy, well cared for and taught well; all believe the school is well led and they would recommend the school to others. Placing authorities present similar, positive views of the school.
- Arrangements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils are exemplary. Pupils take part in visits to local places of worship and the celebration of various festivals including, for example a Christian wedding and a Jewish Passover meal. They have excellent opportunities to develop their social

skills, for example through sports activities and drama productions with pupils from other schools.

- Senior leaders ensure that all aspects of the welfare, health and safety of pupils have high priority; safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and training for all staff in child protection and the management of behaviour are exemplary. Oversight of health and safety within the premises, arrangements for fire safety, and the assessment of risk in all school activities are robust.
- The school works effectively with placing authorities and pupils' families to ensure a smooth transition to secondary education. Careful and sensitive consideration is given to individual pupils' needs in identifying appropriate placements which will build on the success achieved at Westmorland.
- Senior leaders have demonstrated excellent capacity in ensuring continued compliance with the independent school standards and for continuously improving the school.
- **The governance of the school:**

The management board provides strong support for the senior leadership team. Board members and senior staff from the Witherslack Group successfully share oversight for key responsibilities such as staff recruitment, the development of the curriculum, pupil safeguarding arrangements, the development of school policies and the training of staff.

Members of the management board have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and the school's data about pupils' progress, attendance and improvements in behaviour. Through rigorous questioning and analysis, they hold school leaders to account for continuous improvement and for the management of staff performance. Effective arrangements for performance-related pay were introduced last year in order to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance.

Meetings between Board members and senior school staff are appropriately informed by regular written reports and assessment visits by members of the Group's quality assurance and development team. External consultants also provide an occasional independent view of the progress of the school. These activities are robust and effective in identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that suitable actions are taken.

Members of the management board, working effectively with senior leaders, have ensured that they meet all the independent school standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils enter the school with negative previous experiences of education, high levels of anxiety and limited skills of communication and independence. Westmorland provides a secure learning environment which successfully promotes resilience and enables pupils to develop significant independence.
- Extensive arrangements for the development of sensory, communication and emotional skills have an outstanding impact on pupils' ability to benefit from learning in a wide range of subjects. Pupils learn to become reflective and to regulate behaviour which has restricted their progress in the past. A clear emphasis on these features in all lessons enables pupils to understand better how to manage their relationships and focus on their learning.
- Pupils quickly develop the ability to cooperate in team games and group activities during breaks and lunchtime. They demonstrate considerable progress in their confidence and independence in moving around the school. There are excellent improvements over time for pupils with particular behaviour needs.
- Parents, carers and staff are unreservedly positive about the impact of the school's sensory curriculum. An agreed focus, for example, on understanding facial expressions was evident throughout the observation of teaching and learning during the inspection. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to understand how to react positively to the feelings of others and to reflect successfully on their own behaviour.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent improvement in their ability to sustain their concentration and to work independently. Pupils worked for a sustained period on an individual or small group activity when learning to be creative. Each pupil made excellent progress in, for example, producing a collage, constructing an environment for robots on a tablet computer, enjoying sensory experiences while working with putty or constructing models based on computer-generated ideas.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to work together with those from other local schools, for example, in football competitions. The school is proud to have achieved recent recognition as the best-behaved school at the local swimming pool.

- Staff are alert to any potential incidents or disruption. Intervention is immediate and consistent with whole-school policies for managing behaviour. The school's records demonstrate a reduction in the number of incidents over time, together with evidence of dramatic improvements in self-regulation of individual pupils' behaviour.
- Pupils take a pride in their work and are keen to show examples of improvements in their handwriting, individual poems or to read aloud from their individual stories.
- There are excellent opportunities for pupils to contribute their ideas through 'pupil voice' groups and the school council. Pupils are proud of the changes they have experienced, for example in the reward system and dining-room routines, as a result of their suggestions.
- The school gives excellent attention to pupils' spiritual, emotional and social development. Improvements in pupils' self-esteem, their confidence to contribute to class activities, and their willingness to listen to the views and ideas of others, illustrate the successful focus on their sensory and communication skills.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. High staff to pupil ratios ensure that the sensory and behavioural needs of individual pupils are given excellent attention; pupils are able to concentrate and communicate effectively in a secure environment.
- School records demonstrate that there is virtually no bullying and pupils are quick to talk about how well they get on together. They demonstrate an increasing awareness of different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and the use of derogatory language. They know how to keep themselves safe and they state that they feel safe in school.
- Appropriate procedures for the assessment of risk take full account of the characteristics of individual pupils and the level of challenge, for example, in off-site activities. Parents and carers who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire state unanimously that their children feel safe in school.
- The consistent management of pupils' behaviour makes an outstanding contribution to the creation of a safe environment for learning.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding and contributes positively to the achievement of pupils with complex learning needs. Disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and the more able are all provided with effective opportunities to learn successfully and to make progress.
- Staff at all levels of responsibility have an excellent understanding of the sensory and emotional needs of the pupils with whom they work. Classroom routines focus consistently on the development of sensory skills and emotional awareness. As a result, suitable conditions are created for effective learning.
- School leaders and teachers have high expectations of how pupils can learn and achieve. Agreed routines for the management of behaviour and focus on learning are implemented consistently across the school.
- The range of subjects and learning activities provided for pupils is outstanding. All staff ensure that sensory and therapeutic experiences are combined appropriately with academic learning. Pupils are continuously supported to develop the emotional resilience and independence required to benefit from the full range of learning experiences provided.
- Teaching assistants are clear about their roles, understand the learning to be achieved in each lesson, and have the skills to support pupils to overcome their individual obstacles to learning.
- The quality of teachers' questioning skills is exemplary. Whether, for example, creating a poem, measuring temperatures, constructing a computer programme or sequencing Roman numerals, pupils are required to reflect on the activity and to explain why they have taken particular actions and what they have learned as a result.
- Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and take great care to build effectively on pupils' previous learning. They carefully plan activities so that every pupil can learn at a challenging and productive pace.
- Teachers identify improvements in pupils' understanding as they mark their completed work and provide excellent guidance on the next steps to follow. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of the purpose of the colour-coded highlighting in the marking of their work.
- Reading, writing, speaking and listening are all given strong emphasis in teaching across the full range of subjects taught. There are excellent examples of the application of number skills illustrated in work in other subjects such as science and ICT, for example measuring and comparing temperatures or turning through a 90 degree angle.

The achievement of pupils**is outstanding**

- Pupils make outstanding progress with their learning from a variety of starting points. The majority of pupils enter the school with standards below those expected for their age because of social, emotional and communication difficulties in their previous placements.
- The proportions of pupils making or exceeding expected rates of progress in English, mathematics and science are high compared with national figures. As a result, pupils close the gaps in their learning compared with other pupils nationally. Pupils' progress in ICT is good but not as strong as in the other core subjects due to previous staffing changes. The school is implementing an action plan to attend to speed up pupils' progress
- Pupils make excellent progress with the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. As their confidence increases, they are able to apply their basic skills effectively to new situations and to make rapid progress in closing the previous gaps in their learning.
- In particular, pupils make outstanding progress with the improvement of their reading skills. A recent emphasis on the development of reading has contributed to pupils' enjoyment of reading and their confidence to read aloud. Successful activities include increased use of the school's library areas, popular termly reading camps, published poems and a reading focus in breakfast club.
- Once they have settled into the expectations of the school, and with continuous support to overcome their anxieties, pupils sustain their rates of progress and achieve well in national assessments at the end of Year 6.
- More-able pupils make outstanding progress; they achieve at or above the levels expected for their age in national tests. This is because teachers' expectations are high and they set pupils work that makes them think hard.
- The school prepares pupils well for a successful transition to secondary schools. Placing local authorities speak highly of the improved confidence and resilience which pupils develop during their time at the school.

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.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	132828
Inspection number	454264
DfE registration number	888/6048

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Phil Jones
Headteacher	Susan Asher
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,330 to £59,622
Telephone number	01257 278899
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