

Owlswick School

Newhaven Road, Kingston, Lewes BN7 3NF

Inspection dates 26–28 January 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are highly ambitious for the pupils and have brought about significant improvement since the last inspection.
- Achievement is good. From their different starting points pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and consequently they are able to achieve accreditation in a range of subjects.
- Learners aged 16 and over benefit from a range of courses that are highly personalised to meet their needs, including work-related and academic qualification routes. The support they receive to ensure these pathways are successful is extensive.
- Teachers plan interesting and engaging activities that motivate pupils well. As a result, they make good progress in a range of subjects and skills that prepare them well for their future lives.
- The school's therapeutic approach is integral to pupils' education and makes a strong contribution to their excellent behaviour and personal development.
- Arrangements to help keep pupils safe and secure are excellent. This is because pupils' welfare is understood as a priority for all staff. Leaders are diligent in securing every avenue of support to help pupils in their care.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' ability on entry to the school is not checked in enough detail to ensure that work is set at the right level.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to use what they know to solve more complex problems in mathematics.
- There are currently limited opportunities for staff to work collaboratively with local schools to share good practice.
- Pupils do not always have access to work experience placements, which limits their ability to make well-informed choices about their futures.
- Leaders do not analyse information about pupils' progress enough to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management towards outstanding by ensuring that:
 - information about pupils' progress is collated for each subject
 - leaders use this information to set clear targets for improving the quality of teaching and learning in each subject.

- Improve teaching and pupils' outcomes, by:
 - systematically checking each pupil's ability on entry to the school to ensure that work is set at the right level
 - ensuring that pupils are provided with opportunities to apply what they know in mathematics in order to solve increasingly complex problems
 - seeking opportunities to work collaboratively with other schools in the local area to share good practice and enhance the training and development of staff.

- Improve the sixth form provision, by:
 - providing learners with access to work experience placements that precisely reflect their interests so that they can make informed choices about their own futures
 - increasing the number of visitors to the school who can talk to the learners about a range of jobs and careers so that they can gain a real flavour of what it might be like to be employed in that area.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- School leaders have created a culture where the development of the holistic young person is at the centre of the school's ethos. This is exemplified by the school's positive atmosphere and focus on a therapeutic approach to support both pupils and staff. This has enabled pupils to access education when previously they were not able to do so.
- Adults set the tone for the school by leading by example in their attitudes and behaviour. They are resilient and persevere and act as excellent role models to the pupils in their care.
- Positive relationships between adults and pupils help to create a constructive climate where pupils feel safe to take risks and develop new ideas. This has resulted in everyone being able to confidently express their feelings without fear of repercussions.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are reflective about what the school needs to do further to ensure that pupils have the best possible experience of education. They are receptive to feedback provided to them from a range of sources, such as visiting local authority representatives, and quickly action improvements. Due to this tireless focus on improvement leaders have effected significant change and improvement since the last inspection.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly, and provide teachers and additional staff with useful feedback that helps them to improve. Staff value the frequent verbal feedback provided to them by the headteacher.
- Access to supervision and regular discussions have enabled staff to feel supported and valued. Their well-being is important to leaders. Staff enjoy working at the school and particularly appreciate the impact that having access to therapeutic support has had on their own welfare. Teachers feel that leaders provide access to well-considered training that supports and challenges them.
- Individual pupils who initially make slow progress are quickly identified and additional support is provided, because teachers use assessment information well to help them plan exciting and interesting lessons. Consequently, pupils make at least expected progress and often more, in a range of subjects. However, leaders do not analyse assessment information precisely enough in all subjects across the school. As a result, leaders have not made sure that pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning are consistently high across all subjects.
- The range of subjects taught is broad for all pupils. Regular trips, visits and extra-curricular activities help pupils to make connections in their learning with the world outside of school. The curriculum is supported by visitors who teach the pupils important life skills and how to keep themselves safe in areas such as sexual health and online safety.
- School leaders ensure that behaviour strategies and policies are consistently applied so that boundaries are clear. As a result, pupils are able to begin to manage their own behaviour and take responsibility for their actions.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is carefully woven into every subject. Topics discussed in assemblies, such as how weather impacts on different cultures around the world, help pupils to develop cultural awareness, empathy and moral responsibility towards other people.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils can verbalise what is right and wrong. They make choices and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. British values are promoted strongly through weekly debating lessons that promote such values as tolerance and respect. Difficult issues such as alcoholism, migration, internment and killing animals for food help pupils to discuss their opinions and develop balanced views on social issues.
- Pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority) is used to provide bespoke interventions for each eligible student at the school and includes access to additional tuition and activities outside of school. School leaders are held to account for how this funding is spent by local authorities, who ensure that it is making a difference.
- Social workers and local authorities are positive about the work of the school in supporting the academic and emotional needs of the pupils. They verify that leaders communicate well and always attend important meetings that discuss the care and education that the pupils receive. They hold leaders to account for the progress pupils make. External partners give valuable feedback to leaders about their work, who respond proactively to improve the standard of education in the school.
- Leaders recognise the usefulness of building partnerships and forging relationships with local schools to

ensure that the school is outward-looking. Despite this intent, leaders have not managed to secure successful collaboration with any other school in the local area. Teachers express the value that this would add to their own professional development.

■ **The governance of the school**

- Governors contribute significantly to the education and care of pupils at the school because they are highly skilled and effective. They take their duty to ensure that all pupils are safe very seriously by keeping up to date with all legislation relating to safeguarding, and by ensuring that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Governors are realistic about the strengths of the school and where more needs to be done to ensure that standards continue to rise. They hold leaders to account by collecting information for themselves and through regular discussions about the school's work.
- Governors share clarity of purpose about the direction the school is going in. They have aspirations to provide outstanding education and care, and are determined to build towards this aim.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders doggedly pursue high-quality support and advice, especially when pupils are transitioning to life beyond the school and are preparing to live independently. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and can express many aspects of this learning eloquently and confidently. Policies and procedures are robust and all staff are in no doubt of how to deal with disclosures and child protection concerns. Practices to recruit staff safely are robust. Staff are trained well to ensure that they are confident to identify and deal with any safeguarding concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers are focused on pupils doing well and make sure that learning in lessons challenges them and that work is well matched to helping pupils reach the criteria within accredited schemes of work. This enables pupils to make links between what they are learning and their own achievement.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils. They believe that pupils can make progress in all areas of learning, despite previous barriers, and use their time at the school as the basis on which to build higher levels of attainment in the future.
- There is a culture of risk taking because relationships are strong and pupils are inspired to have a go.
- Strong subject knowledge ensures that teachers plan lessons that make learning fun. They provide exciting, well-resourced activities that engage and motivate pupils to learn. In a chemistry lesson, focused on the reactivity of metals, pupils experimented how different types of metal reacted with hydrochloric acid. Pupils were absorbed when a lit splint evidenced that a reaction had taken place and the gas that was given off 'popped' when ignited.
- Teachers use assessment information gathered from previous education establishments, including the virtual school, as a starting point on which to build pupils' learning. However, pupils' ability on entry to the school is not systematically assessed to ensure that work is pitched at the right level for all learners from the onset.
- Teachers know the needs of the pupils well and tasks are accurately targeted to meet pupils varying abilities and challenge them. They assess pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in all subject areas and use this information to plan lessons that will help them to further develop these skills. Pupils are given detailed targets so that they need to know and understand to achieve more highly.
- Pupils who fall behind are supported well to quickly make progress and catch up with their peers. Additional staff help pupils to learn in a variety of ways and do it well. They often provide pupils with the emotional support they need to be able to access learning and focus on their work.
- Class teachers provide pupils with continual verbal feedback about how well they are doing during lesson. This immediately has an impact on the ability of each student to make progress within a short space of time. Pupils value this information and say that they like to know how well they are doing. They enjoy being praised for the good work that they do.
- Leaders have introduced weekly opportunities for staff to meet together and discuss the effectiveness of their teaching and to share strategies that have been successful. They discuss vital information about how well pupils are performing and what needs to be done to help them learn more.
- Highly effective questioning by all adults enables them to check what pupils know and understand. Adults give pupils sufficient time to think about their responses and draw on what they know from a range of subjects. This is particularly evident in weekly English lessons based on the skills of debating. During this

inspection, a small group of pupils discussed the social issue of migration, and in particular refugees. Dialogue was carefully structured and supported to allow pupils to express their opinions freely. Pupils were able to support their arguments because of learning in other subjects, such as religious education, and because they are taught about current affairs in daily assemblies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils talk with honesty and clarity about the difference being at the school has made to their lives. They recognise that they are growing in maturity and that their behaviour is improving because they are taught to be more responsible and considerate towards others.
- Pupils are reflective about their own personal journey and have a growing sense of self-worth. They aspire to be employed when they leave school and are excited by the prospect of being employed in jobs that interest them. This is because staff have taken account of their interests and provide them with important information about the qualifications and pathways they will need to achieve their goals.
- Pupils have many ways to express how they are feeling and to influence what happens in their school. Regular meetings with staff, including the proprietor, provide pupils with the chance to improve their educational experience. Pupils talk about their learning daily to evaluate how well they are doing and what they could improve.
- Pupils know that they have rights. They know how to complain if they are worried. Pupils say that their concerns are taken seriously and always investigated by staff. This means that problems are resolved swiftly. Pupils are provided with contact information for independent organisations such as Ofsted and ChildLine so that they can seek further advice if they need to.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils facilitate respect. Pupils say that they trust staff to help them and to make good decisions for them. This enables them to access learning and enjoy school when, before, they did not.
- The school endeavours to prepare pupils for life outside of school and to enable them to manage when they leave. Leaders go to great lengths to secure the best onward journey for pupils and often continue to support individuals long after they have left the school. Leaders are resolute in their pursuit of good-quality care for pupils because they care deeply for the young people in their care.
- The majority of parents are very positive about the care the school provides, one parent stating: 'After five years of trying to find fault with the school, I can't. I couldn't wish for him to be in a better place.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The school has effective behaviour strategies in place to provide pupils with the consistent boundaries for their behaviour so that they are able to understand what is expected of them.
- Behaviour targets for each student are used well to remind them of the necessary skills required to be ready to learn. Persistent reinforcement of these targets by staff ensures that pupils make strides in managing their own behaviour and are able to make progress in their learning as a result.
- On occasions, when pupils find it difficult to manage their emotions, they are ably supported by highly trained and dedicated staff who quickly re-engage pupils in lessons. Due to this tireless and diligent approach by staff, pupils' behaviour rapidly improves over a short period of time and they respond increasingly well to the activities provided for them.
- Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that staff deal effectively with incidents if they do occur. Pupils talk confidently and openly about their knowledge of how to keep themselves safe. They have an in-depth knowledge of how to protect themselves when they are using the internet.
- There is a strong emphasis on tolerance, respect and responsible citizenship throughout the school, which has meant that pupils have healthier feelings about themselves, are more resilient and can persevere. Consequently they are better equipped to deal with any challenges they might face in the future.
- Attendance is good because of the strong partnership between the care home staff and school staff, who work together to ensure that pupils arrive at school on time and ready to learn. School leaders work closely with social care colleagues to find solutions to any issues that may arise. Overall, pupils want to come to school and are reluctant to leave at the end of the school day.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils join the school at various ages after considerable disruption to their education. Some pupils have missed years of schooling before they arrive at Owlswick School. Despite these challenges, pupils make strong progress from variable starting points in most subjects.
- Pupils typically reach Edexcel entry level three certificate in reading, writing, speech and language, and mathematics. They achieve the Information Communication Technology Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) bronze award, ASDAN science accreditation and Discovery Art as a minimum. Pupils are given the opportunity to work towards higher accreditation. School leaders arrange for extra tuition in areas where a pupil excels, such as learning to play a musical instrument, or in areas such as carpentry and catering.
- There is a very clear focus in helping pupils to be ready to learn when they arrive at the school. All staff help pupils to engage with learning and to dispel the negative feelings they hold towards school and the belief that education adds no purpose and value to their lives.
- School leaders have introduced a new system for tracking pupils' progress and for measuring how well their attitudes to learning are helping them to engage in lessons. The information this provides is used well by staff to plan lessons that meet the needs of learners and to set appropriate targets that help pupils to understand how to improve their work. However, performance information is not used precisely to evaluate variability in progress and achievement across the range of subjects to ensure that progress is equal in all areas of learning.
- Pupils often enter the school with typically low levels of achievement in reading. Pupils make rapid gains in their reading skills because they are heard daily and because staff ensure that they are interested in the books that are available to them. The school is working hard to instil an enjoyment in reading and to help pupils understand that it is the foundation on which to build other skills, such as writing.
- Pupils are able to apply functional skills in writing and use simple sentence structure to convey meanings. They take pride in their work, demonstrating perseverance and improving ability to write at length. They make a good effort to spell words correctly and use grammatical features such as prefixes and clauses to improve their writing.
- Pupils debate social issues exceptionally well. They communicate their opinions eloquently, and support them with well-reasoned arguments. They have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the world around them to draw upon and recall information from a range of lessons to provide evidence for the opinions they hold. Because of this all pupils have strong speaking and listening skills.
- Overall pupils quickly gain basic functional skills in mathematics especially in using and handling data and in calculations. There is less evidence that pupils are given enough opportunities to use what they know to solve more complex problems and to try to apply their knowledge in a range of ways to make sure that they really understand mathematical concepts.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils making good or better progress compares favourably to the progress of all pupils in the school.
- Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of education and to continue to build on accreditations offered by the school. All pupils go to further education college placements when they leave the school, or return to the care of the local authorities who placed them at the school.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Good leadership is driving improving outcomes and school leaders continually seek ways to improve sixth form provision which reflects the ambitious ethos of the school.
- Leaders ensure that English and mathematics skills continue to be developed consistently, including for learners who also attend placements at local further education colleges. This ensures that they continue to make good progress in these areas of learning.
- Learners benefit from a wide range of subjects that are taught well. They are able to make informed choices to study in more depth lessons that interest them and also to receive further support in areas that they find more difficult.
- School leavers achieve a range of accredited outcomes because they are highly personalised to the needs of the learners. They historically secure appropriate college places or, with the support of the school, are returned to the care of the local authority that placed them at the school.
- Learners are exceptionally well supported to develop maximum independence and the range of subjects

have been carefully chosen to meet individual pupils' needs and strengths. With guidance, learners select from a range of work-related and academic courses available to them. Staff ensure that learners are able to visit local colleges to decide for themselves where they would like to attend and what courses they would like to do. However, access to work-related courses is limited. Leaders recognise the need to extend the range of courses available by liaising with more local providers and through developing work-related opportunities in school.

- External college provision is quality assured by school staff to make sure learners are taught and learn well. They act upon feedback given to them by learners to ensure that learning in core areas such as mathematics and English are continuously developing.
- Learners are supported to become more independent travellers and to engage in activities outside of school. For example, pupils travel independently to college by bus and train, and after a period of induction are able to access courses without a member of staff. This helps learners to prepare for the next stage in their lives when they leave the school.
- Learners are given effective careers advice, which is provided by the school. Staff ensure that advice is impartial and reflects the interests of the young people. Staff and learners research the required qualifications and pathways needed to make their goals a reality. However, there are few opportunities for learners to meet adults employed in different careers to give them a real flavour of what it might be like to be employed in that area. Learners say that they would like more visits from people employed in jobs that interest them.
- Learners value work experience placements. Leaders provide learners with an appropriate range of opportunities to understand the world of work. However, currently learners do not always have access to a placement that precisely reflects their interests and as a result they cannot always make informed choices about their own futures.
- Learners cope well with this period of change in their lives as they face new challenges. They learn to manage their own emotions with less support from adults and demonstrate increasing awareness of social expectations and what it means to be part of a community outside of school.

School details

Unique reference number	114660
Inspection number	10008896
DfE registration number	845/6007

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	Special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social development needs
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	10–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	1
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	7
Proprietor	Sarah Hawke & Michael Mayne
Chair	Sarah Hawke
Headteacher	Margaret Peacock
Annual fees (boarders)	£85,458–£157,000
Telephone number	01273 473078
Website	www.owlswickschool.co.uk
Email address	sarah@owlswick.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 June 2012

Information about this school

- Owlswick School was established as a residential special school in 1981, and is situated near Lewes, East Sussex.
- It is registered for up to 15 boys and girls, between the ages of 10 to 19, with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, or associated developmental disorders such as autistic spectrum disorders or attention hyperactivity disorder. Some also have moderate learning difficulties.
- Most pupils have experienced a great deal of disruption to their schooling before arriving at Owlswick and many have large gaps in their educational experience.
- The school provides education for post-16 learners and liaises with local further education colleges to provide additional courses.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health, and care plan; all are boys and all have been placed by their local authority. Five are in the care of the local authority.

- The school is housed in a separate building on the same site as the residential provision. In addition, the school uses the extensive grounds to provide learning and recreational opportunities to enhance classroom-based activities.
- The school's aim is to enable pupils who have experienced difficulties and disruption to feel valued, secure and successful through a therapeutic approach to learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed in 10 lessons. The headteacher chose not to join the inspector because of the potential impact that high ratios of adults to each pupil might have on their ability to learn.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading to an adult during their reading lessons.
- The inspector spoke to pupils in lessons and met with a small group of pupils more formally to gather their views about the school.
- The inspector looked at a range of pupils' work and records of achievement.
- The inspector spoke to some parents on the telephone and contacted social workers to obtain their views about the school. There were insufficient responses to the online parents' questionnaire, Parent View.
- Meetings were held with: the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead; the proprietors, who are also governors; the responsible person and director of the school; class teachers and teaching assistants.
- Responses to the staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documents. Inspectors reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Abigail Birch, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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