

Overley Hall School

Wellington, Telford, TF6 5HE

Inspection dates

2–4 December

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Pupils make outstanding progress because of the outstanding quality of teaching, learning and personal care.
- Senior leaders have transformed the school since its last inspection. They check rigorously on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and on every pupil's progress in all subjects. They constantly strive to improve these even more.
- All staff are highly ambitious for pupils. Not a moment of learning time is wasted. The appointment of subject specialists has accelerated learning and improved assessment in subjects such as mathematics and science.
- The curriculum is rich, highly relevant to pupils' needs and really motivates pupils to learn. It is highly personalised and so promotes each pupil's personal and academic progress extremely well.
- The proprietor and directors are highly supportive of the school. They have introduced many improvements to the buildings, grounds and provision. They check effectively on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' progress, and hold staff to account for this well.
- Pictures, symbols and signs, alongside excellent use of speech, ensure pupils are kept in touch extremely well with what is happening and what they will learn. Consequently, pupils' vocabulary, English and mathematics skills are systematically supported so that each improves considerably.
- Sixth form learners make outstanding progress because staff have very high expectations of their behaviour and what each can achieve. Leaders find just the right course, work experience and qualifications for each learner, so that when it is time for them to leave, they are extremely well prepared for their next steps.
- Staff are highly skilled at helping pupils to manage their anxieties and behaviour. As a result, pupils' attendance and behaviour have improved remarkably and are outstanding.
- Pupils are kept very safe because of the high staff to pupil ratios and the meticulous and creative ways in which the school helps pupils to understand about e-safety, extremism and how to keep safe.
- Therapists, the clinical psychologist and teaching staff work exceptionally well together. As a result, pupils' communication skills, behaviour and social interaction skills improve considerably.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well. Themed days and the many opportunities to be part of the local community help pupils to understand British values and the school's vision of friendship, kindness and respect for all.
- Parents, and the local authorities who place pupils at the school, are hugely positive about the ways the school helps pupils to learn and keeps them safe. Parents say that their children's development has 'exceeded their expectations and hopes'.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 as amended 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the role of subject leaders in analysing standards in their subjects and supporting other teachers who teach their subjects.
- Enable the new and innovative practice in supporting pupils to have a voice about their feelings, work or preferences to be consistently present in other aspects of the school's work, for example, by enabling the views of pupils who have not yet developed speech to be recorded following incidents.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Since coming to the school the outstanding headteacher has established an ethos of the highest expectations to which all staff have responded with determination and enthusiasm. There is an excitement and 'buzz' about the school as staff recognise and celebrate pupils' achievements and adapt targets so that pupils might achieve even more.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's outcomes are outstanding for all groups of pupils. They have checked rigorously on the independent school standards so that they are all consistently met. They check carefully that pupils' behaviour plans are consistently implemented and are effective, and that the legal requirements of pupils' statements and education, health and care plans are met.
- Senior leaders rigorously monitor teaching and pupils' learning and progress. They support teachers extremely well to improve even more through well-targeted training and robust performance management. They have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. There is a constant drive for improvement.
- The school's leadership team has been recently re-organised so that more roles and responsibilities are delegated, including that for subjects. Subject specialists are now in place to lead subjects and to check on standards. Some are very recent appointments and so are not yet fully involved in monitoring and developing their subjects further.
- Staff teams work closely so that pupils' learning is extremely well supported at all times, both in the school and the community. Staff know pupils' individual learning needs and circumstances extremely well. This means pupils are safely challenged to achieve as much as possible and feel secure to do so. Pupils' personal development and academic progress is outstanding as a result.
- Systems for checking on pupils' progress and that each pupil's learning programmes are appropriate are particularly robust. Staff record how well pupils are doing on a daily basis. Weekly and termly reviews ensure that every pupil's progress is checked to make sure that they are on track for the challenging targets set for them. There are many instances of pupils' targets being raised significantly as they settle into school, begin to have the confidence to try out new experiences, and to learn.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and highly relevant to pupils' needs. It has been strengthened considerably since the last inspection, so that it is now outstanding. English, mathematics, science and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education are particularly prioritised. Leaders also check carefully that all the areas of learning are covered in sufficient depth to enable pupils to build their skills effectively in other subjects too.
- A particular strength is the way in which the curriculum is personalised to pupils' needs and interests. Staff are skilled at devising activities that build on pupils' interest but also challenge them to listen, think and problem-solve more effectively. Pupils engage in lessons because they find the activities meaningful and they experience success.
- The range of qualifications and courses that learners can take in the sixth form or at the end of Key Stage 4 has been broadened. This includes the introduction of higher entry level qualifications and Level 1 GCSE courses to provide for the needs of those higher attaining pupils now in the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their understanding of British values, are promoted very effectively through theme days, assemblies, and subjects such as performing arts, food technology, history, geography and English.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet all statutory requirements. All policies and procedures are updated regularly. All staff have training at the required intervals, as well as whole-staff training on issues relating to e-safety and extremism. A recent audit of vulnerability to extremism has ensured staff are keenly aware of pupils' vulnerability. A programme is in place to further explore how to recognise extremist views with all learners, although this is too recent to evaluate impact.
- Parents are highly positive about the school's work, describing it as a 'saviour' and 'wonderful'. Placing authorities too are extremely appreciative of the school's work and the improvement in pupils' achievements, attendance and behaviour. The school works extremely well with parents and authorities to ensure that pupils' well-being is supported effectively.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The proprietor has until recently been solely responsible for the governance of the school. However there are now two additional directors who support the running of the school. The directors have a

detailed understanding of the work of the school. The proprietor attends senior leadership team meetings and checks carefully on how well pupils are doing.

- The proprietor has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, and the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She oversees the performance management of staff rigorously, ensuring that only good performance is rewarded and that it is carefully linked to pupil progress.
- The proprietor and directors are highly ambitious for the school. The proprietor in particular has a good understanding of the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, and ensures that staff knowledge and understanding is also up to date through regular training and conference attendance.
- The proprietor and directors have ensured that the school has access to specialist advice. They have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are rigorously checked on and are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Learning throughout the school is outstanding because of highly effective teaching and assessment. The strengthened curriculum is highly personalised for every pupil. The appointment of subject specialists in some subjects has allowed the school to develop and check on each subject carefully, as well as pupils' progress overall.
- Accurate assessment by therapists and teachers when pupils enter the school means that work is very well matched to each pupil's next steps in learning and personal needs. Staff make excellent use of assessment to plan for, check on and celebrate pupils' learning. There is just the right balance of the familiar and of more challenging work so that pupils feel safe to 'have a go' at new experiences.
- Highly informative pen portraits ensure that everyone is clear how to best help pupils learn and what everyone will praise and reinforce. The emphasis on ensuring pupils can apply their new skills in different situations means that parents can celebrate their child's achievement too, or manage their child's behaviour using similar phrases to those used at school. This all helps pupils to be very clear as to how they are doing and spurs on progress even more.
- Staff are expert at providing for the learning of pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions and other severe challenges or barriers to their learning. They manage any difficult behaviour calmly and safely and always in line with a pupil's behaviour plan. This means that learning is very rarely interrupted and little time is lost. The staff are extremely skilled at refocusing pupils on their work. Work has been carefully devised to 'grab' the child's attention and interest, whilst building systematically towards the next skills and understandings in a subject or life skill.
- Staffing levels for each pupil are high but staff time is well focused on promoting independence. Staff almost always get the balance right between showing a pupil how to do something and allowing them to experiment for themselves, helping them to improve their skills.
- Strengths in teaching lie in the highly effective ways in which all staff support pupils' communication and early literacy skills. Objects, pictures, symbols and signs are used highly effectively to do this. All pupils make outstanding progress in their communication and in their reading and writing skills as a result. A few higher attaining pupils read out loud with confidence and write confidently and with pride as a result.
- The many practical opportunities that pupils have to practise everyday mathematics and literacy skills mean that reading, writing and mathematics are taught extremely well. Phonics programmes have been introduced into sixth form work, with the result that individual learners who have not been able to before, can write and say their name confidently.
- Pupils' work and achievements are celebrated through work displayed about the school and in the community. Where individuals show talent or interest this is capitalised on highly effectively and developed further, whether it be in drama, dance, art, woodwork, horse-riding or writing. Pupils are enabled to achieve as highly as possible in these talents and take such developed skills with them into future placements, leisure activities and courses when they leave.
- Whatever their level of ability the school is very well set up to ensure pupils achieve at the highest level possible. For example, in a science lesson about chemical changes staff enabled higher achieving pupils to re-engage with learning and complete work of a similar quality to others of their age. Others watched intently the changes in ingredients in food technology as they were stirred and dissolved. Excellent use of questioning ensured that both groups of pupils were helped to think about problems and discover solutions for themselves
- Staff teach vocational subjects and clubs, such as those in forest schools, physical education, gardening and hospitality extremely well. They reinforce pupils' targets in these situations, enabling pupils to use

and apply their mathematics, English and communication skills highly effectively.

- Excellent joint planning with therapists and very strong partnership working with parents and carers enable everyone to give consistent messages to pupils about how they are doing. This accelerates progress further and ensures parents, too, are confident in supporting their child's learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- There is an excellent focus on enabling each pupil to be as independent as possible when they leave. This is evident in all lessons. Staff are ever vigilant as to how to help pupils live life to the fullest while also avoiding risk. Consequently pupils feel very safe. They trust their teachers and have excellent relations with them. They move safely and confidently around the school and when outside in the local community.
- There is excellent support for pupils' transition into school through careful working with parents, previous placements, social care, local authority officers and pupils themselves. This ensures that pupils' needs are assessed accurately and quickly on entry and that they quickly establish positive relationships with key staff.
- The school works hard with placing authorities and parents to ensure that each pupil has meaningful options when they leave the school, usually at the end of sixth form. Careers education is very carefully planned and linked to visits from, and to, local businesses, as well as internal and external work placements. Pupils have access to advocates and to local careers officers to ensure that they have the impartial advice required. Sixth form learners have opportunities to volunteer and practise skills in local charity shops and cafes.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The provision is highly effective in developing pupils' awareness of right and wrong, empathy for others, tolerance and flexibility and understanding of diversity and difference. Art, music, physical education, assemblies, themed days, visits and stories are all used extremely well to help each pupil to understand different lifestyles, cultures and moral dilemmas, and to celebrate and explore British values and culture at their own level.
- Staff are ever alert to any safeguarding concerns that might arise. Pupils are taught to handle equipment carefully and safely in forest schools, science, and food and design technology. Safeguarding procedures are rigorously monitored and followed. Detailed risk assessments keep pupils safe both in and out of school. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about potential areas of risk for their pupils and have been well trained to look out for signs that might indicate concern, such as for child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, and exposure to extremist views.
- All the required health and safety regulations are met and checked on meticulously, including those relating to fire risk and water checks. Checks carried out on staff are meticulously recorded and all safer recruitment requirements followed rigorously. This means that pupils are kept very safe and secure in an attractive, welcoming and safe environment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The school is a calm and effective learning environment where poor behaviour rarely interrupts the learning of others. The high staffing levels and careful deployment of staff means that there is no bullying, although leaders check incidents carefully to be sure that this is always the case.
- Despite many pupils being poor- or non-attenders prior to entering the school their attendance is now outstanding, with 100% attendance being the norm. This is because the school transforms pupils' attitudes to, and enjoyment of, learning. Pupils make great strides in their self-confidence and willingness to work alongside and with others. The very high quality of personal support and care offered to each pupil reflects every member of staff's commitment to securing pupils' emotional and physical well-being.
- Pupils' behaviour improves so well because staff have high expectations of them. Staff use individual behaviour plans and pupil profiles consistently and highly effectively. This means pupils know what is expected of them. Staff use simple clear instructions or signs which pupils recognise. This helps pupils to increasingly manage their own behaviour in different situations which would previously have caused them huge stress.
- The school employs a range of therapy and clinical psychology specialists who help them to devise

specific programmes for individuals. This has particularly strengthened the ways in which the school works in partnership with families and with pupils themselves to gain pupils' views. A commercial package is enabling the ways in which the school samples pupils' views to be even more effective.

- When incidents do occur these are recorded carefully by staff and analysed by leaders to identify any trends. Almost all pupils' behaviour improves significantly as they settle into the school's routines and understand the school's expectations.
- All incidents of physical restraint are monitored carefully and assessed for the appropriateness of the intervention. A debrief takes place with pupils and staff. However, occasionally when incidents occur, pupils' views are not recorded as fully for pupils who do not have speech, or it is not recorded that the pupil did not wish to contribute. The school is already addressing this issue through training and sharing of best practice.
- Pupils are proud to receive their reward certificates at assemblies and the school takes great care to ensure that pupils understand exactly why they have gained these. They 'glow' as they receive praise in lessons for their behaviour as well as their academic work. This means they are prone to repeat the behaviour and are clear as to what is good behaviour and why.
- During the inspection the school's Christmas lights were turned on in a public celebration which parents, carers and local volunteers attended. Pupils' behaviour was exceptional throughout and was testament to the ways in which the school helps them to become more flexible and cope with change.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment that are typically well below others of their age, because of their complex learning needs. Many have social and emotional barriers to learning and histories of poor attendance, which have further restricted their progress. Staff quickly form highly effective relationships with pupils that enable them to identify pupils' strengths and learning needs very accurately, and to gain their trust. This all helps turn around pupils' attitudes to learning so that they are keen to attend school and strongly motivated to complete their work.
- Pupils leave the school with skills and qualifications that fit them very well for their next placements. These include entry level qualifications and unit awards that are testament to their improved communication, literacy and numeracy skills and the ways in which they can now use these skills in everyday life. Learners in the sixth form are in line to achieve BTEC units and certificates in a range of subjects and practical skills, including art, performing arts and hospitality. They are also well on the way to achieving pupil progress awards linked to their courses in gardening, life skills, money management and personal independence.
- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is outstanding. All pupils made at least the expected progress in these subjects last year. More than two thirds exceeded this, often significantly so. Current pupils are on track for similar achievements this year, whatever their starting points. This means many are making up lost ground from before they arrived at the school.
- Younger pupils too make at least good and usually outstanding progress by the end of Year 6. They benefit from the many opportunities they have to practise their reading and mathematics skills in their themed work, and from the ways in which staff are skilled in gaining their attention and interest.
- Pupils throughout the school make accelerated progress because teachers are so skilled at matching the work to pupils' needs and interests and setting the right level of challenge for each. Higher attainers are challenged to read their work out-loud to visitors or to research a topic on the internet and write about it using key vocabulary. Lower and average attainers are very well supported through the use of pictures, symbols and signs to recognise or read words and simple sentences, such as the ingredients they need for their recipes.
- Excellent teamwork between therapists and teaching staff ensures that pupils make small but highly significant gains in their communication, language and social interaction skills. Outings and work-related courses all support pupils' confidence to use these skills in the community. All this enables pupils to express their likes, dislikes and opinions, and to be more independent.
- Pupils are encouraged to express views and make simple choices, whatever their level of functioning, through the use of a range of communicative devices and technology. Lower achieving pupils or those who are most anxious make simple choices between two objects, pictures or symbols. More settled pupils and higher attainers discuss the advantages or disadvantages of particular courses of action with their teachers or support staff.

- In mathematics pupils make similarly strong progress in their sorting, number and counting skills, and learn to apply these in their work experience placements, vocational courses or voluntary work. Sixth form learners show that they can identify coins and understand how to price their mini-enterprise work as they make and sell Christmas decorations or wreaths. Individual pupils who achieve closer to others of their age make similarly outstanding progress from their starting points on entry.
- Progress is not always continuous. Occasionally progress slows because pupils experience emotional and social upheaval. Staff are ever alert to this and to pupils' emotional well-being. This means programmes are quickly adapted and support put into place so that pupils are enabled to move forward as quickly as possible.
- The school makes excellent use of its specialist subject teachers to ensure pupils with specific learning issues have work in all subjects that challenges them. This means they are increasingly well set up for taking higher level qualifications in the future, either at the school or in other placements.
- The small amount of money received to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils is put to good use, for example, to provide additional support to these pupils so that their concentration and progress is at least as good as, and often better than, their classmates.
- Key Stage 4 pupils and sixth form learners make excellent progress on their vocational courses and in their community and work-related experiences. They are excited to be setting up their own farm shop and café, but also to sell their plants and vegetables.

Sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The leadership and management of the sixth form is outstanding. Leaders have extended the range of courses and qualifications that learners can take. They are ambitious for every learner and carefully help them to build up important skills for leisure and for life.
- Sixth form learners follow a rich and inviting curriculum that includes many opportunities for them to become more at ease in less familiar situations and with different people. Internal and external work experience contributes significantly to this. The sixth form staff have built highly effective links with local businesses that mean pupils have access to work experience in local cafes and garden centres.
- Careful risk assessments and work with the placement staff before the learner attends mean that learners are kept very safe on these placements. Overley Hall staff always attend with learners but are careful to find a balance that enables learners to feel supported but also trusted to do their best.
- Learners continue to build their English and mathematics skills well in the sixth form. They continue to make small but significant gains and sometimes exceptional progress. Individual learners who until recently have not used speech, for example, use single words and, occasionally, longer phrases to share their ideas with their teacher and the headteacher.
- Learners' behaviour and attitudes to learning in the sixth form are outstanding. They enjoy their learning and the increasingly mature relationships they have with their teachers. Learners' independence and attitudes mature because staff treat them with such respect and have such high expectations of their behaviour.
- Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many opportunities to visit places of interest or to learn from visitors. They have a wealth of whole school opportunities to celebrate achievements or a particular cultural event. These, alongside forest schools and other outdoor activities challenge learners to push themselves to achieve as much as possible, but also enable them to gain a good understanding of British values and diversity.
- Staff support learners well so that they have a good understanding about personal safety, including e-safety. This is achieved through many practical examples and through the ways in which they are helped to understand how to keep safe at home and at school.

School details

Unique reference number	123621
Inspection number	10006120
DfE registration number	894/6003

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
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8-19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Anita Brown
Chair	Anita Brown
Headteacher	Bev Doran
Annual fees (day pupils)	£86,232.00
Telephone number	01952740217
Website	www.overleyhall.com
Email address	info@overleyhall.com
Date of previous inspection	20–21 June 2012

Information about this school

- Overley Hall is an independent special school located on the edge of Wellington in Shropshire. It is situated in large woodland grounds. It specialises in meeting the needs of pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions, often with social, emotional and behavioural barriers to learning and cognitive difficulties.
- It is registered for 22 pupils aged eight to 19 years. There are currently 18 pupils aged nine to 19 years on roll, organised into six mixed-age classes. Pupils are also taught individually and often have support from two and occasionally three adults because of the severity of their needs.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan and are funded by their local authorities. Ten are looked after children. The school receives the pupil premium payment for one of these pupils. The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school opened in 1981. It is located in a purpose-built classroom block that opened in 2009. The school's offices, dining hall and therapy blocks are located in the original school building, a large Victorian house. The school has large wooded grounds and a number of other facilities such as a hydrotherapy pool, a forest schools site and a large garden and horticulture area which is also used by adults with learning disabilities, when not in use by pupils.
- A new farm shop and café facility was about to open at the time of this inspection.
- The school does not use alternative providers but does use local cafés, businesses and gardening centres

for work placements for sixth form learners. Learners are accompanied at all times on these placements.

- The school's aim is to: 'provide a happy, safe and secure learning environment where each pupil has equality of opportunity to access a curriculum designed to meet individual needs, and where every member of the school is treated with respect and valued as an individual.'

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at one day's notice.
- The inspector visited lessons throughout the school, to observe pupils' learning. In addition she made a number of short visits to classes during a learning walk. The headteacher accompanied the inspector on almost all of these visits.
- The inspector held discussions with the proprietor, senior leaders and the school improvement adviser. She had meetings with the designated officer for child protection.
- School policies and other documentation were examined. These included the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and its policies and practices regarding keeping children safe. The school's health and safety procedures, including its fire risk assessments, first aid procedures and records of checks made on the premises were also scrutinised.
- The inspector considered the evidence about pupils' achievement and progress and the ways in which leaders checked on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and managed the performance of staff.
- Not enough responses were received to Ofsted's online Parent questionnaire for these to be analysed. However, four parents did leave comments which the lead inspector had access to. In addition the inspector talked with seven parents when they attended an early evening event at the school.
- The views expressed through 19 questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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