

Bladon House School

Newton Solney, Burton-on-Trent DE15 0TA

Inspection dates

4–6 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
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

- The recently appointed headteacher leads by example. She is developing a well-respected culture in which the contributions of all staff and pupils are valued.
- The group's chief operations officer provides robust challenge and support to school leaders, based on a thorough understanding of the school's performance.
- Pupils with complex barriers to learning make good progress with their learning from very low starting points. Teaching staff plan and assess effectively to guide pupils through small, successful steps to achievement.
- Teaching staff and therapists work well together to understand and address individual pupils' progress towards their targets.
- Pupils make good progress with the development of their emotional and social well-being. Staff support pupils continuously to help overcome their anxieties.
- Staff are trained regularly in required areas of expertise. They are encouraged to develop appropriate additional qualifications.
- The school ensures that pupils are safe. Arrangements for all aspects of safeguarding are rigorous and effective.
- Staff provide effective support for post-16 students as they develop a range of essential life skills and prepare for greater independence.
- Senior leaders have a keen understanding of the next steps needed to improve the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not make outstanding progress. Not enough pupils exceed nationally expected rates of progress.
- The evaluation of arrangements to improve pupils' behaviour is not precise enough to identify the most successful strategies to share with all staff.
- Therapeutic support is not monitored and evaluated sufficiently to ensure that it achieves its intended outcomes consistently.
- Senior leaders have not reviewed the curriculum recently to ensure that all pupils have access to the most effective learning.

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 strategies for the management of pupils' behaviour, by:
 - sharpening the analysis of the most effective strategies used to de-escalate incidents of challenging behaviour and sharing the best practice with staff and, similarly,
 - evaluating the impact of interventions to help pupils to manage their anxieties and the triggers to misbehaviour, so that the most effective approaches can be used more widely
 - providing further staff training to strengthen understanding of pupils' emotional and social barriers to acceptable behaviour.
- Improve pupils' progress from good to outstanding, by:
 - systematically sharing successful practice in teaching and learning
 - continually reviewing pupils' targets to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging.
- Review whole-school arrangements for therapeutic support to ensure that the intended impact of the support is sufficiently clear and enables robust evaluation of its effectiveness.
- Systematically review the structure of the curriculum to ensure that :
 - its core aims are widely understood and achieved
 - all pupils have access to the most effective classroom practice
 - the intended outcomes for each aspect of provision are agreed and evaluated.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders, working effectively with the proprietor's representatives, have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The recently appointed headteacher provides inspirational and supportive leadership. She is visible around the school and continuously available to support and encourage both staff and pupils.
- Senior leaders have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. They undertake regular and appropriate monitoring of provision to ensure that pupils' needs are being met continuously. The school's self-evaluation identifies suitable areas for improvement and staffing arrangements are organised flexibly to respond to identified priorities.
- There are excellent, positive and productive relationships across the staff, and with pupils. All members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire state that they are proud to work at the school.
- The day-to-day management of pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils present regular challenges because of their anxieties and complex behavioural traits. Teaching and support staff are patient, persistent and resilient in their efforts to manage behaviour effectively.
- Overall, senior leaders, supported by the proprietor, give good attention to the training and further development of staff. They provide opportunities for staff to attain teaching qualifications; several members of staff are currently attending a suitable higher degree course.
- The school provides good opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, and the promotion of British values. Staff organise a diverse range of activities, off-site visits and visitors to the school. Recent examples include a British Parliament project, the election of student council representatives, visits to the law courts, and a 'faith walk' in the city of Derby, including visits to a number of places of worship.
- Pupils contribute to the local and wider communities in various appropriate ways. Some have undertaken work experience placements at a recycling centre or taken part in voluntary work at a forestry centre. They regularly collect for national and international charities; a current project, organised through the student council, is collecting for a children's cancer charity.
- The school demonstrates an excellent commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils. Staff challenge and support pupils to make good progress, taking full account of their diverse and complex individual characteristics. They underpin this commitment with excellent relationships with parents and carers. Staff maintain daily communication with parents and keep them fully informed about their children's progress. Any concerns are resolved speedily.
- The school's leaders demonstrate strong capacity for continuous improvement.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The proprietor's chief operations officer is regularly involved in effective review and development within the school. He provides strong support and robust challenge to the headteacher and staff.
 - The company also employs suitable school improvement partners to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's provision. Their recent work places an appropriate focus on the development of teaching and learning, supporting teaching staff effectively with the improvement of their classroom practice.
 - Arrangements for the review and management of staff performance are rigorous. Outstanding performance is recognised and rewarded appropriately. Senior leaders tackle underperformance robustly.
 - The chief operations officer and headteacher are aware of the need to strengthen their strategic view of whole-school provision and outcomes. To date, there has been insufficient evaluation and analysis of the high-quality information provided by the school's analytical tools. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the curriculum, therapeutic support, and the management of pupils' behaviour as experienced by individual pupils. This does not always identify and disseminate important messages for the practice of all staff.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has published its up-to-date and comprehensive safeguarding policy on the school website. Staff are trained effectively, have a good understanding of the requirements of the policy, and implement it consistently. As a result, they ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils. Senior leaders ensure robust attention to all required aspects of staff recruitment and training, the assessment of risk, health and safety, and premises and fire safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers, tutors and learning support staff are highly committed and resilient in their daily work with pupils. They demonstrate excellent teamwork through effective planning that enables all adults to contribute effectively to pupils' learning.
- Teaching staff have an excellent understanding of pupils' individual characteristics. They provide effective one-to-one, or two-to-one, supervision where this is required to enable pupils to settle and cooperate. Staff understand their responsibilities when working with larger groups; they ensure that all pupils are engaged in learning.
- The quality of staff questioning of pupils is mostly very good. Key stage 4 pupils, for example, working towards entry-level qualifications, demonstrated a good recall of events in a story, which they had read previously. The teacher persisted with sensitive but challenging questioning to encourage pupils to provide a comprehensive account.
- Staff are very aware of the need to allow pupils sufficient time to process new ideas and to organise their thinking, for example, when matching shapes in a mathematics lesson. Pupils respond appropriately when provided with sensitive and patient support.
- The school's team of therapists makes an important contribution to the identification and implementation of appropriate strategies and activities to support and extend pupils' learning. They establish a comprehensive understanding of pupils' needs at the point of admission to the school. They use their expertise and wide experience to support staff and pupils, identifying how to respond flexibly to pupils' changing needs.
- Pupils demonstrate the ability to sustain their concentration when the level of challenge and interest in the activities is appropriate. Three groups of pupils in a key stage 2 and 3 class worked diligently and without distraction in a practical activity measuring and estimating capacity. They made a strong and effective contribution to the practical activity, supported continuously by good questioning that challenged them to extend and explain their answers.
- Teachers assess pupils' current achievements through effective feedback. They identify the level at which pupils are achieving and use this information to build up suitable records of progress over time. They use this information appropriately to talk to pupils about their successes and the next stage of their learning.
- Staff record pupils' progress in a variety of ways, including excellent visual records of completed activities.
- Staff use a creative variety of approaches to aid the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. They are sensitive to the communication difficulties experienced by the majority of pupils. Staff ensure that individualised strategies, including signing and visual instructions, match individual needs.
- Pupils have good, continuous opportunities to develop their communication skills effectively, ranging from sensory development of sound and touch, to reading texts at an appropriate level of challenge.
- Throughout the school, staff understand the need to provide experiences that encourage learning in small steps. Pupils, despite their complex barriers to learning, respond positively and engage effectively. However, there are occasions when pupils work comfortably within their current targets and staff do not challenge them sufficiently to exceed these and make more rapid progress. Senior leaders do not provide sufficient opportunities for staff to share and disseminate examples of outstanding learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. This is a visible key priority throughout the school. Staff work diligently and with great perseverance to enable pupils to make small, significant steps in reducing their anxieties and building their confidence.
- Staff know their pupils well. They have a good understanding of their personal characteristics and they work patiently to help pupils overcome their emotional and social barriers to successful personal development.
- Pupils respond positively to members of staff with whom they have established trusting relationships. This enables them to settle into the routines of daily life in school and to develop increased resilience. Many pupils develop the ability to sustain their concentration and focus well on the activities presented to them.
- Staff provide pupils with excellent opportunities to develop important life skills. Pupils, for example, learn to manage the social relationships required to use local shops and travel on public transport. Elected representatives contribute effectively to the work of the student council, including the organisation of a variety of events to collect funds for local and national charities.

- Pupils make gradual progress in interpreting and understanding visual clues in the behaviour of others. Staff support them continuously to develop appropriate responses to the words and gestures they experience within the classroom and around the school.
- Parents and pupils recognise that the school provides a safe environment and that staff work extremely hard to ensure pupils' well-being.
- Staff intervene appropriately and lead pupils carefully through restorative work related to any perceived bullying. High levels of staff supervision ensure that bullying is not an issue in the school.
- Senior leaders and staff give outstanding attention to pupils' welfare and safety. They teach pupils how to keep safe, for example, through excellent teaching about e-safety. Consequently, pupils learn to recognise risks and react appropriately at their various levels of understanding.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Staff provide continuous support to ensure that pupils' often-unpredictable behaviour does not have a negative impact on the well-being of others. The careful arrangement of teaching groups and high levels of staff supervision ensure that all pupils have access to effective learning.
- Incidents do occur because of the complex emotional, social and mental health issues experienced by pupils. Effective training enables staff to intervene appropriately and ensure the safety of pupils. The fortitude and resilience of staff are outstanding.
- The school's records demonstrate improvements over time in the behaviour of the majority of pupils. Senior staff have introduced a recent project to evaluate the most important factors influencing the behaviour of a sample of pupils, based on the analysis of increasingly reliable information. This has the potential to contribute effectively to the development of a whole-school behaviour strategy.
- Pupils' attendance is close to the national average. There is very little unauthorised absence. Staff maintain a strong focus on improving the attendance of a very small number of persistent absentees.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress over time from diverse starting points. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is mostly well below the standards expected for their age because of their complex emotional and communication difficulties.
- The proportion of pupils making expected progress from these starting points is above the national average. The proportion exceeding national rates of progress is close to the national average.
- Pupils make good progress in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. Progress is in small steps but a number of pupils begin to close the gaps in their previous learning.
- Over time, pupils develop good listening skills. For some, this is evident in their ability to use and understand suitable visual communication tools. The most-able pupils within the context of this school demonstrate the ability to read with good recall of the sequence of events in a story. Staff enable them to explain what they understand from the meaning of the text, through careful questioning and conversation.
- Staff work skilfully to develop pupils' ability to listen and interpret the meaning in the words of others accurately. They focus, across a wide range of subjects and activities, on pupils' ability to express their ideas and feelings through a variety of means of communication. Pupils learn to extend their vocabulary and to express themselves with increasing accuracy.
- Pupils make good progress with their understanding of number. There were excellent examples during the inspection of pupils comparing the lengths of objects or measuring capacity accurately, through activities well matched to their stage of development.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements. They show pleasure in their achievements and those with more established communication skills are keen to show the results of their work.
- Staff ensure that pupils take part in a suitable range of sports and outdoor activities. As a result, pupils achieve an increasing range of external awards for their achievements.
- Pupils work towards suitable individual targets in their learning. Occasionally, they make significant progress beyond these targets. The proportion of pupils exceeding their targets at present is not large enough to represent outstanding progress overall.

Sixth form provision

is good

- The school provides a post-16 curriculum that meets the individual needs of students who progress from the school's key stage 4 provision or who join the school from other provisions. Students are taught in small groups or individually, depending on the extent of their learning needs.
- Staff plan the curriculum meticulously to meet the varied and complex needs of each individual. The school's records demonstrate the effectiveness of staff support and individual timetables, enabling students with the most challenging needs to reduce their anxieties and take an active part in learning.
- Students make good progress over time in practical activities that contribute to the development of important life skills. One group of students, during the inspection, prepared their shopping list, visited the local supermarket, and worked effectively to use a printed recipe to cook their lunch. Staff provided excellent support to enable them to manage the challenging social interactions required to select and pay for their goods. They were proud of the food they were preparing and each had an exceptionally detailed and informative folder recording their recipes and outcomes throughout the food studies course.
- The majority of post-16 students live in the school's residential accommodation. The high quality of communication and joint working with residential staff, therapists, parents and external agencies ensures a common purpose in working towards students' individual targets.
- All students experience activities that contribute to the further development of their skills in communication, literacy and numeracy. Staff continuously focus on developing the independence and community-living skills that students will continue to require on leaving full-time education. Students take part in carefully selected work-related learning and staff help them to identify areas of interest that will contribute effectively to their future lives.
- Students work within an externally accredited personal progress framework. The school maintains an appropriate record, including photographic evidence, of moderated work; for example, in early mathematics, engaging with the world and developing writing skills. Students continue to make good progress in these areas of learning.
- Senior leaders have recently audited the outcomes of previous students' placements on leaving school. As a result, the school's transition coordinator has increased the monitoring of the first year of each student's post-19 placement. The school provides high-quality support for parents as they seek information to make decisions about future pathways for their children.
- All students who left the school in 2015 progressed to suitable college or community placements.

School details

Unique reference number	113019
Inspection number	10012886
DfE registration number	830/6009

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	Residential special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	SENAD Group
Chair	Mark Flynn
Headteacher	Shally Saleri-Palmer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£70,000 to £85,000
Telephone number	01283 563787
Website	senadgroup.com/bladon
Email address	info@bladonhouse.com
Date of previous inspection	24–26 September 2013

Information about this school

- Bladon House is an independent special school for boys and girls with complex needs, including autism, speech and language difficulties, severe or moderate learning difficulties, and mental health issues. The majority of pupils demonstrate challenging behaviour resulting from their complex difficulties.
- The school is registered as a children's home and caters for both residential and day pupils. There are currently 21 day pupils and 24 residents in the associated accommodation.
- The school is registered to admit up to 100 pupils and post-16 students. Pupils join the school at any age, and a number are admitted towards the end of their compulsory school careers.
- There are currently 45 pupils and post-16 students on the school roll; the majority are aged 14 to 19 years. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and are funded by their placing local authorities.
- The school does not have any pupils placed with alternative providers for part of their education.
- The school's previous inspection was in September 2013. The headteacher was appointed to the school in November 2015.
- The school aims to ensure that all pupils and students, 'find a way of life which suits them, achieve the maximum possible sense of physical and emotional well-being, and achieve their maximum potential level of independence and academic progress'. In addition, the school aims to enable pupils to reduce any socially unacceptable behaviour and have maximum opportunities for inclusion.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work, across the full age-range of the school.
- The inspector met with the chief operations officer of the SENAD Group, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff with management responsibilities in the school. He considered responses to 40 questionnaires submitted by members of staff. In addition, he had a number of conversations with members of staff.
- The inspector attended a meeting of the school council and listened to their views about the school, and their plans for future activities. He also considered 21 responses to the pupils' Ofsted point-in-time survey.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be taken into account. The inspector spoke with, or received written information from, a small number of parents and carers.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of school policies, procedures and records in order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Young, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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