

Aidenswood School

48 Parsons Street, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4ED

Inspection dates

20–21 September 2016

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, well supported by other staff, provides ambitious and determined leadership. Pupils make excellent progress in all aspects of their learning because of leaders' work to ensure excellent teaching.
- Staff instil in pupils the understanding that education is a gateway to success, and learning is at the heart of what the school does. The culture of high expectations and good-quality teaching means that pupils make rapid progress from their often low starting points.
- Outcomes for pupils exceed expectations because leaders are relentless in focusing on success. Almost all pupils gain GCSEs, despite having large gaps in their education prior to attending Aidenswood School. The culture of 'no excuses' is firmly established so that pupils are highly motivated to achieve and excel.
- Personal, social and health education is exemplary and pupils blossom in the care of staff at Aidenswood School. Teachers, expertly supported by a team of skilful therapists, develop individual programmes of support for each pupil based on a rigorous analysis of their needs.
- The curriculum supports all aspects of pupils' development. Pupils have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in a wide variety of interesting activities, which promote learning.
- The very strong relationships that staff have with pupils build mutual respect and mean that pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning, when previously their circumstances had left them disengaged.
- Behaviour is outstanding. A therapeutic approach to supporting pupils has shifted the emphasis from the risk they present to the strengths that they have, and this has resulted in positive changes for all pupils. This approach promotes respect, nurture and recognition of success.
- The school provides a safe environment for pupils. Staff give close attention to the reduction of risk-taking behaviour. Pupils are protected and cared for by all staff and they know they are safe.
- Pupils' work is assessed accurately and regularly. Pupils know how well they are doing but the effectiveness of their progress over time is not routinely evaluated against national averages. Thus, staff and parents are not necessarily aware of how well pupils at the school are doing when compared with other pupils of similar ages and starting points.
- The school offers sixth-form provision but invariably students are supported to participate in further education, training or employment when they are no longer of compulsory school age. However, independent careers advice is not always offered to students.

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?

- Ensure that pupils have access to independent careers advice so that they can make informed choices about their future.
- Evaluate the extent of pupils' progress compared with similar pupils nationally from their different starting points, so that leaders can assess precisely the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes in relation to the wider picture.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders have maintained the outstanding quality of education since the last inspection. The headteacher took up her post in 2014 following internal reorganisation. The transition was seamless because she was instrumental in building the school from its inception 12 years ago. She works very closely with the small team of staff and company managers to ensure that leadership is strong at all levels.
- The headteacher is very well respected by pupils, parent representatives and external staff who work closely with the school. This is because the needs of the pupils take priority over everything else. She has established open and regular communication to make sure that all that the boys need for their successful development is provided.
- Leaders have a simple and ambitious vision that all pupils will achieve academic and personal success. The significant challenges that pupils have experienced prior to arriving at the school are not accepted as an excuse for low achievement. This is manifested in the expectation that every pupil will leave as a functioning adult with good English, mathematics and science skills, and a set of GCSEs with good grades.
- Curriculum provision gives a strong platform for future success. Leaders have made a deliberate decision to concentrate on the key skills that pupils need to enable them to come to terms with their situation. For example, all of them study psychology to GCSE level to help them to understand their own past, to cope with setbacks and to build resilience for the future.
- The curriculum is reviewed annually and modified to take account of the needs of pupils. All pupils have access to linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. Those with an aptitude in a particular subject are given the opportunity to study this beyond the school day.
- Pupil premium funding is varied according to local authority providers but when received it is used to promote a love of reading, including purchasing personal equipment for pupils to allow them to listen to talking books and to access homework.
- Leaders are determined that pupils' personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding remain at the heart of their work. Pupils bring unique and real-life experiences to provide a purposeful and relevant curriculum. This includes work on promoting positive relationships and developing understanding to enable pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices in the future.
- Improvements in the teaching of science since the last inspection have ignited the interest of pupils and they talk with enthusiasm about seismic activity and its links to geography. All pupils study science to GCSE level.
- Very positive relationships are fundamental to the school's success. Staff are open, reflective and honest. They work very closely with all agencies that support the pupils and have established a pattern of frequent reviews of each individual. This ensures that their needs are recognised very quickly and plans put in place to meet them. For example, during the inspection one pupil related a past fear of official visitors. The pupil was supported straightaway and a plan put in place to help him deal with this in the future.

- The curriculum and activities of daily life in school promote fundamental British values extremely well. Pupils are helped to appreciate the values of democracy and participation in decision-making. They learn to respect the wisdom and experience of adults while taking increasing responsibility for their own decisions and actions. This is demonstrated through a programme called 'I cope', which supports them to become more independent.
- Pupils develop respect for their own and other lifestyles, appreciating the diversity of beliefs and cultures present in the school and the wider community. They contribute positively to the community, for example volunteering to clear the snow from the pathways of neighbours in the road.
- Behaviour is consistently and effectively well managed so that pupils quickly learn how to take responsibility for their own actions. Learning and leisure times are pleasurable for all.
- Leaders are very focused on individual progress partly because cohorts are always small. The headteacher knows the progress of every pupil for the past several years. This information, however, is not always compared with national expectations so that the impact of the school's good work is not evaluated precisely.
- Outstanding personal commitment, strong teamwork and dedication have ensured that the school has maintained its exemplary standards since the previous inspection.

Governance

- Governance of the school is very effective. The school is well supported by Hexagon Care which provides external reviews of the work of the school. The staff regularly review policies and procedures and the quality of provision for the pupils. They are knowledgeable about the school and committed to providing very strong support.
- The head of education knows the school well, has a very clear view of the day-to-day purpose and practice in the school and provides highly effective challenge. She meets monthly with the headteacher to discuss pupils' progress and all aspects of the school's work.
- Proprietors and senior staff have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met and are reviewed annually.

Safeguarding

- Arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. The school has stringent policies and procedures. All staff are familiar with them and follow them extremely effectively. The designated lead works very closely with care staff to ensure that the safety and welfare of pupils have the highest priority.
- All information relating to safeguarding is shared and the very rigorous routines are implemented by everyone involved with the pupils. The school does not have a website but the safeguarding policy is available to parents on request directly from the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils enter this school with negative experiences of education. Previously, their attendance has been poor and their complex emotional and mental health challenges have prevented them from reaching the standards of which they are capable.

- Thorough assessments of pupils' academic ability and cognitive functioning are made when they start school so that individual programmes of support can be delivered and pupils' progress measured carefully. Teachers monitor pupils' work continuously and this feeds into formal reviews of progress which take place every six weeks.
- Pupils' success is related to their dynamic programmes of work that are responsive to individual needs. Those who need help are identified swiftly and they receive additional support. For example, one pupil who has only recently been admitted to the school needs support to read fluently. A specialised programme is used to support him to catch up quickly.
- Pupils respond very swiftly to the high expectations of what they can achieve because the school communicates this quickly. All pupils at key stage 4 work towards GCSE accreditation in English, mathematics, science, psychology and preparation for working life. These courses are supplemented with additional subjects such as citizenship, personal, social, health, emotional and economic education, and physical education. Other subjects are added if pupils express an interest, for instance art, music or languages.
- Good-quality teaching supports the excellent progress that pupils make in lessons and over time. Teachers demonstrate expert subject knowledge, and challenge all pupils to think deeply about their responses. For example, in a psychology lesson one pupil had memorised answers to quiz questions. The teacher quickly spotted this and stimulated discussion to test out his reasoning and deepen his understanding.
- High expectations across all subject areas of the curriculum mean that pupils' work is always well presented. There is a strong focus on ensuring that English and mathematical skills are taught in other subject areas. It is clear that pupils are able to apply these skills across the breadth of the curriculum.
- Science has been improved significantly since the last inspection, including by the installation of a new laboratory. All pupils now take at least one science GCSE and show great enjoyment in the subject.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and quickly develop the confidence to demonstrate what they know and understand. For example, in a discussion on ethics, one pupil contributed their knowledge of an alternative hypothesis and extraneous variables that had the potential to influence a test.
- The most able pupils make very good progress because they are provided with activities that stretch their thinking and extend their skills. In English books, for example, it is clear that the most able are producing a wide variety of factual and creative writing work of a very high standard. They can explain what they need to do to improve their work because they understand the school's system for providing feedback and how this helps them to improve.
- Teaching is having a very positive impact on pupils' progress, reducing the big gaps in their learning that are apparent when pupils first start school. Standards of pupils' work in books are at least age-appropriate.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Leaders have nurtured an ethos of respect and tolerance throughout the school as well as a deep understanding of the importance of education.

- Most pupils arrive at school with big gaps in their education. Many are described as having no joy in their life. The transformation in their attitudes, both to their learning and their aspirations for the future demonstrates how hard staff work to support each pupil.
- Pupils' expressed love of school is a testament to the very positive relationships which the school promotes. Pupils value the high expectations staff have of them and say they feel valued in a way they have not before. They are proud of their school and confidently share their views with visitors.
- Pupils are helped to overcome significant barriers about trusting and communicating with others and to demonstrate good conversation skills. They are articulate, courteous and polite to each other and to visitors. They hold doors open for others, take turns when talking and politely ask for each other's views in debate.
- Staff throughout the setting work hard to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils show empathy and respect for the beliefs and feelings of others. This was typified by a pupil who eats halal meat gaining the support of all his peers, who agreed to eat halal chicken to avoid confusion at mealtimes.
- Pupils display an excellent awareness of different types of bullying and the impact it can have. This includes homophobia, racism, religious intolerance and sexism. They talk knowledgably about suicide rates among young people affected by bullying. A comment by one pupil, typical of many, evidences the views of pupils at the school: 'Bullying never happens in our school because staff are on it straightaway.'
- Intense therapeutic programmes enable pupils to improve their behavioural, social and emotional skills significantly. A team of well-qualified specialists provides concentrated and extensive support. Pupils make rapid progress as a result of the highly effective collaborative working between care, therapy and education staff.
- There are seamless arrangements in place to ensure that everybody who works with an individual pupil contributes to personalised plans to support them academically, socially and emotionally. Reviews take place every six weeks to make certain that plans are effective.
- The school collects the views of all who work with the pupils and the feedback about the school is extremely positive. A parent representative reported that a pupil has really changed for the better since arriving in the school. He is happy, feels safe and his behaviour is very well managed. The pupil has been given a budget and is being encouraged to plan and cook his own meals in preparation for independence.
- Pupils have the opportunity to take part in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities including climbing, boxing, gymnastics, fishing, horse-riding, sea, fire and army cadets and the Duke of Edinburgh's awards.
- Pupils receive advice from school staff on careers and future opportunities, and they study this as part of their GCSE on preparation for working life. However, the school has not employed external careers advice since the support from the 'Connexions' service was withdrawn.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They display highly positive attitudes towards their learning and value the efforts of their teachers to help them succeed. When asked what they most liked about school, all pupils agreed that their teachers are 'awesome'.
- Adults are strong role models for their pupils. The positive relationships they have developed have cultivated an ethos where pupils feel confident to try new things without fear of failure.

- Pupils are polite and respectful towards each other and staff. When inspectors entered the classroom they were welcomed and one pupil moved boxes so that seating arrangements were comfortable. During class discussions, pupils take turns and comment positively on contributions made by each other.
- Pupils move around the building calmly and follow with ease the rigorous routines that have been established to keep them safe. Lunchtime is an enjoyable and social experience where pupils learn to plan and prepare meals, serve each other and share responsibilities for clearing up afterwards. Visitors are treated with respect.
- The school promotes outstanding learning habits. Pupils are actively encouraged to attend school every day. This results in excellent attendance and punctuality with almost all pupils attending for at least 194 out of 195 days. Pupils live up to the expectation that they will arrive at their lessons promptly and ready to learn because they enjoy school.
- Pupils are able to explain the school rules and think that these are fair and help them prepare for the world beyond school. They understand the need for compromise. For example, a reward for positive behaviour may include a whole-school treat to a restaurant, but pupils recognise the need to be inclusive in the meal choices they might make.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils enter the school with low academic starting points for their age as a result of poor attendance and the variety of barriers to learning which they have experienced previously. From these low starting points, pupils make very rapid progress.
- Pupils make strong and sustained progress across a range of subjects and experiences. Progress from their various starting points meets or exceeds national expectations and almost all leave with 5 GCSEs ranging from grades A to F and approximately half with grades A to C. The single-minded approach to educational and personal success, as the key to a productive future, means that no pupil is allowed to fall behind. Catch-up programmes and homework are rigorous and bring about rapid improvements.
- Pupils demonstrate confidence with their reading, and speaking and listening skills. Their handwriting and presentation of work are excellent.
- The positive ethos and high expectations enable pupils to make outstanding progress with their learning. For the majority, this is a very challenging process and contrasts significantly with their previous recent experience.
- The school, working very closely with the pupils' care staff and therapists, is very successful at enabling pupils to achieve outstanding outcomes at the end of key stage 4. Pupils are helped to develop the self-confidence and determination to overcome their barriers to successful learning and to take important steps on the way towards mature adulthood.
- Pupils usually attend the school for two years. During that time considerable effort is made to ensure that by the age of 16 pupils have acquired comprehensive skills in English, mathematics and science, and have completed the relevant programmes of study to enable them to take their GCSEs. In addition, they are taught personal and social skills to help them to adjust to life beyond the setting. They are quickly encouraged to move to college or work placements once they have reached this goal and are taken off the school roll.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Staff engage and work closely with colleges and other organisations to support students' education after the age of 16. They are supported to participate in further education, training and employment.
- Support is well managed. Leaders ensure that students have the opportunity to study personalised learning programmes that help them progress to their chosen career, employment or apprenticeship. Staff provide careers advice and guidance. Since Connexions' support was withdrawn, the school has been slow to provide independent information, advice and guidance for students.
- Enrichment activities are planned around students' career aspirations. For example, some students complete training placements and develop employability skills in animal management, business studies, catering and art. Leaders ensure that students can access the world of work successfully.
- The most able students secure places at colleges to take advanced academic and vocational courses. Some go directly into employment with training provision. Placements for students can be hard to achieve because their history is perceived as a negative factor.
- Leaders communicate effectively with all providers, ensuring that students are safe and well supported.

School details

Unique reference number	125814
DfE registration number	895 6000
Inspection number	10006079

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	Independent special
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14–17
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Hexagon Care
Chair	Caroline Ashdown
Headteacher	Marion Goodwin
Annual fees	£19,000
Telephone number	01260 281 353
Website	www.hexagoncare.com
Email address	aidenswoodheadteacher@hexagoncare.com
Date of previous inspection	20–21 November 2012

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Hexagon Care group.
- The school transferred from Northern Care to Hexagon Care in 2014 when it also moved from Kidsgove to Congleton.
- The school caters for small groups of boys who have very complex emotional and social needs and who have struggled in previous educational placements.
- The school employs a team of therapists and works very closely with care staff who are on site.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, head of education, social worker and therapists.
- The inspector observed learning across the curriculum.
- The inspector analysed pupils' work in books and file.
- The inspector had lunch with the pupils and spoke to them at length afterwards to gather their views of the school.
- The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised information about achievement, behaviour and attendance, and looked at a wide range of school documents and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning.
- The inspector took account of feedback from parent representatives and records kept by the school (there were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View), and spoke to other staff.

Inspection team

Catherine Parkinson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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