

Chilworth House Upper School

Grooms Farm, Thame Road, Wheatley, Oxfordshire OX33 1JP

Inspection dates

27–29 September 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 school has, over the last year, improved substantially since its decline after the previous inspection. Recently appointed leaders have begun to implement their strong plans to develop the school further.
- Leaders, teachers, and assistants have a deep understanding of each pupil's needs. This informs all aspects of their work and is of great benefit to the pupils.
- Pupils' outcomes have improved and most do well in the broad spectrum of qualifications and courses they undertake. GCSE results have improved dramatically since 2014.
- The vast majority of pupils leave school with the skills and expertise required to embrace their next steps confidently.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers and assistants work closely together to ensure that pupils learn well and make strong progress from their starting points.
- Learners on the new 16 to 19 study programmes are well catered for because support, training, and guidance are individually tailored
- Approaches to assessing pupils' learning and carefully planned changes to the curriculum serve pupils' needs well.
- Pupils with highly challenging behaviours make good progress in managing their conduct and controlling their feelings.
- The school's approach to safeguarding is robust. Leaders deal well with welfare officers from different authorities.
- Leaders and managers, including the proprietor, have ensured that the independent school standards are fully met.
- The new regional director has considerable experience and successfully employs it to help leaders prioritise their next steps.
- Some senior leaders do not all have the same level of insight about how the school should continue on its upward trajectory.

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?

- Make sure that all leaders, including senior leaders, are as strong as the best in the school, by:
 - ensuring that all leaders share the same deep insight into the school's next stages of development
 - providing leaders who are new in post, including those who have changed roles, with the opportunity to monitor the impact of their well-thought-out improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- There was significant turbulence in the school between 2014 and 2015. Since then, many changes have been made, including changes to the curriculum, new approaches to managing behaviour and a successful drive to recruit staff. As a result, the school is now good.
- The school's environment is nurturing and aspirational. Of note, is the impact of the most recently appointed senior leaders. They have enthusiastically and purposefully ensured that the school continues to develop, effectively building upon the initial raft of improvements made by the new headteacher. Due to their operational commitments, these leaders do not always have the opportunity to monitor the impact of the changes they initiate.
- Leaders' work to improve pupils' behaviour has been effective. Although pupils need a lot of support to manage their emotions, new individualised approaches are working well. These are described in detail in up-to-date personal support plans, to which staff rigorously adhere. The staff care for and nurture the pupils, with one commenting that he liked the way 'staff speak to you in soft voices'.
- Changes to the curriculum, provision, and school timetables have made a substantial contribution to improving the school. Transitions between sites have been reduced and there is a wider variety of learning opportunities to meet pupils' emotional needs and develop their key skills. For example, courses in equine management have a therapy element within them.
- Leaders have introduced highly effective methods to ensure that staff on both sites are kept fully up to date. All staff are well briefed on the best approaches to employ when supporting pupils. The high degree of consistency across both sites supports pupils in feeling secure.
- Leaders carefully check how well the plethora of learning opportunities provided enable pupils to acquire new skills. They sensibly use these checks to refine what is offered. The impetus for the new post-16 provision was the desire to meet the needs of some Year 11 pupils who expressed concerns about moving on to post-16 learning elsewhere.
- Careful monitoring of pupils' progress towards challenging end-of-year targets means that pupils are rapidly provided with any additional support needed to meet their targets. For example, pupils who join with gaps in phonics improve their basic reading skills by working in very small groups, using well-chosen resources designed for secondary-age pupils.
- The school's leaders are successfully engaging parents and carers, following some previously strained relationships. They offer parents face-to-face progress meetings at venues that are close to where pupils live. This has significantly increased parents' and carers' attendance at meetings to discuss pupils' progress.
- Leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that carefully planned initiatives to help pupils learn and behave well are effective. An experienced team of leaders train staff each week and their work is closely monitored by those with responsibility for developing teachers' skills. They use their checks to gain a sharp understanding of how to implement the school's next phase of improvement.

- Due to the nature of their additional needs, pupils joining the school present significantly challenging behaviour. The school has robust plans to support the transition of pupils to the school from key stage 2, including spending time at the school when they are in Year 6. There is strong evidence that following a bumpy start, pupils joining the school in Year 7 settle in well.
- Pupils benefit from the opportunity to participate in activities that develop their social and cultural learning, such as trips and team sports. Of note, are the rich opportunities for outdoor learning, including fishing and horse riding, made available through the school's rural location. Pupils' sense of self-worth is developed through quiet moments with the animals they tend. The school council, assemblies, displays and specially designed programmes promote fundamental British values effectively.
- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met. They have worked very well with directors from the Witherslack Group at regional and national level to achieve this. The school's website enables parents and the public to access the required policies.
- Some leaders have a more developed understanding of how best to deliver the next phase of improvements at the school than others. In addition, some leaders who have the acuity needed to move the school forward also have considerable operational responsibilities that sometimes limit opportunities for reflection.

Governance

- The newly appointed regional director from the Witherslack Group oversees the school effectively. He has used his extensive experience in special education to support the school in moving forward.
- National directors from the Witherslack Group keep a watching brief on the school by scrutinising key data that is available to them on a monthly basis online. This includes the time that pupils spend outside of lessons, and the number of restraints used.
- Proprietors and directors know the school well. They rightly have supported the new headteacher in recruiting and retaining staff. Their work in this area has been successful. There are now very few temporary staff and this has had a positive impact on the pupils and the atmosphere around school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safeguarding policy is on the website and is extensive. It helpfully includes research relevant to pupils' needs, refers to recent government guidance and emphasises the best ways to identify if pupils are being sexually exploited.
- Designated leaders are fully trained in safeguarding, as are members of staff. Of note, is the success of the school's collaboration with local agencies to reduce the number of restraints. This includes work with local authority safeguarding officers.
- The school is highly attuned to the safeguarding needs of its youngsters, many of whom are considered to be at high risk. As a consequence, procedures and practices for dealing with referrals to the local authority's welfare services are effective. Leaders vigilantly ensure that referrals are followed-up by keeping close tabs on the responses made by the different local authorities.

- Pupils are kept well informed about the safeguarding risks that are the most relevant to their circumstances. If pupils disclose that they have been involved in risky behaviours, they promptly receive additional support from both in-school and external experts.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning, and assessment are strong and some practice is outstanding. Teachers make good use of their in-depth understanding of each pupil's learning needs to ensure progress. Teachers' thorough assessments enable them to identify the key skills pupils need to move to the next level and fill any gaps in their learning.
- A number of pupils have had extensive periods out of education and need time to re-familiarise themselves with learning. Teachers and assistants ensure that this process is as smooth and rapid as possible, given some pupils' high needs.
- Pupils develop their sensory learning skills well. Some teachers adeptly incorporate opportunities for pupils to hone their sensory skills, while practising and refining their key subject skills. For example, in key stage 3 English, pupils wrote key words in red sand with their fingers, and, as a result, learned the spelling and definition of well-chosen complex words.
- Pupils' learning in science, English, and mathematics is mainly strong. Pupils benefit from the stimulating opportunities that teachers provide to see how abstract concepts play out in real life. Pupils conduct well-planned experiments in mathematics and in science. For example, pupils compared the strength of different types of Bunsen burner flames and were able to collate their findings.
- Teaching assistants make a significant difference to pupils' learning. They take time to collaborate meaningfully with teachers in planning learning. By receiving support from assistants who are well prepared, pupils are able to move onto the next stage of their learning as soon as they are ready. This enhances their progress.
- Most-able pupils are well challenged because they are provided with the chance to delve deeper into the topics they are studying, and where appropriate are given additional work. Teachers' probing and precise questioning provide an effective foundation, upon which sit a raft of other approaches, designed to stretch most-able pupils, including justifying their views.
- Pupils learn well in the practical subjects they access as part of the recently expanded curriculum. They apply making and crafting skills by closely following written and verbal instructions. To ensure that pupils with specific needs are able to do this, teachers make good use of visual cues.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare has improved and is now good.

- Pupils generally work hard on the tasks they are set. Pupils' specific additional needs mean that, on occasion, they require time-out from learning. However, the careful and consistent way in which staff manage this aids pupils in developing the determination and resilience needed to return to their work as quickly as possible.
- Pupils are given well-planned opportunities to learn about how their actions affect others through, for example, the extensive personal development programme that includes training in emotional intelligence. This is reinforced by effective one-to-one follow-up work, with pupils who have had time out from class.
- Leaders ensure that each pupil accesses the therapy that is most suited to their needs. This decision is based on regular assessments of pupils' emotional well-being. Information from these assessments is used to ensure that pupils access the type of therapy that will help them the most. The impact of therapies is monitored effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils has improved and is now good. Of note, is how well pupils are motivated by imaginative rewards for good behaviour; for example, 'the bucket list'. Rewards include trips to the theatre and other cultural experiences, and are wisely planned so they often entail social interaction.
- Incidents when pupils need time out of lessons have reduced, as have the number, frequency, and severity of restraints used. Effective training in techniques to diffuse situations before they escalate means staff are well-equipped to respond well to pupils displaying high levels of anxiety.
- There is a helpfully high degree of consistency in the way staff respond to pupils. Staff use the motto, 'We don't do that here' as a handy shorthand to remind pupils of the agreed code of conduct. This motto has been carefully chosen to raise pupils' expectations of how they behave in the school community. Some pupils now use it to remind each other of the standards of behaviour expected.
- The school's regularly updated, detailed electronic behaviour records indicate that behaviour is improving and exclusions are reducing. Attendance has also improved slightly since last year. In 2015/2016, when the new headteacher first joined, fixed-term exclusion was used strategically to deter pupils from absconding and rose, temporarily, as a result. This approach worked well and reduced the number of pupils absconding.
- New approaches to managing behaviour have significantly decreased the number of restraints. Although restraint is still used, it is done so in a manner that is as supportive as it can be, and agreed procedures are closely followed. Staff with additional training in de-escalation rigorously review the impact of the actions staff take prior to, during, and straight after they employ a restraint.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Effective support for individuals, a carefully chosen suite of qualifications, improved teaching and robust monitoring have led to improved outcomes.
- Some pupils join the school having been out of education. Additional assistance provided means they make strong progress from their low starting points. However, pupils with low starting points do not achieve the very strong progress of pupils with higher starting points. The school has identified this aspect as a priority for improvement.

- Well-planned careers programmes ensure that pupils leave the school with their next steps planned and with the skills they need to pursue them successfully. In 2016, only one person in Year 11 did not go on to participate in education, training, or work.
- A number of pupils find examinations very stressful. Leaders ensure that pupils are provided with the individual arrangements needed to minimise their stress levels so that they can complete as much of the examination as possible. The additional help provided to ease pupils' anxiety has led to improved examination results.
- In 2016, there was a noticeable improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving A* to G in five GCSE qualifications, from 0% to 43%. This was due to a consistent focus on pupils acquiring the skills needed to tackle questions on examination papers.
- Pupils pursue a wide range of vocational qualifications, including qualifications that help them prepare for a career in the services. They do well in these courses because the teaching staff have relevant experience that they pass on to the pupils in a lively manner.
- Last year, the school established an effective approach to monitoring pupils' progress from their starting points towards their end-of-year targets. Information collated from this monitoring indicates that most pupils make strong progress. Progress in mathematics in key stage 3 is not as strong as it is in science and English. Progress rates quicken the longer pupils remain at the school because of the deep trust that is painstakingly built between pupils, teachers, and assistants.
- Improved teaching means that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress that, broadly speaking, is in-line with pupils with similar starting points. Leaders have made good use of assessment information from other schools in the Witherslack Group to ensure that progress targets for this group are challenging enough.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The sixth form leader's very comprehensive understanding of each learner's needs, and of the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes, mean that learners are catered for well and make strong progress from their starting points.
- Learners are provided with effective help and guidance to ensure that they can make the transition to life beyond Chilworth Upper School successfully. Learners access the required mathematics and English support. In addition, each learner has a bespoke programme of training that is tailored to help the individual pursue their next steps. For example, learners interested in careers in sport access courses run by the local football club.
- The sixth form leader carefully monitors the progress that learners make, including when attending courses off-site. He liaises closely with course providers and suggests refinements to ensure courses are well suited to learners' needs.
- Although each learner's study programme is bespoke, there is a sensible emphasis on how best to make a positive contribution to society. For instance, in personal development sessions, learners discussed the impact of anti-social behaviour and researched the legal penalties that can be incurred. Learners carried out this task efficiently, demonstrating good learning skills, including the ability to use dictionaries and discuss their ideas.

- Great consideration is rightly given to the type of work placements that are arranged for each learner. Placements help bridge the gap between the world of school and the world of work. Learners are supported in becoming increasingly self-sufficient in travelling to and from their placements. Leaders rigorously track the skills they develop through work placements.
- Learners indicate that they are pleased with the way their needs are met in the sixth form. They recognise the positive difference the school has made to their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and confidence. They are very determined to build on this further and praise the advice they are given to do so, including in-depth coaching to help them decide on an appropriate career path.
- The sixth form leader works closely with teachers to ensure that learners receive the guidance they need to be successful in the English and mathematics qualifications they are pursuing. Initially, most learners focus on gaining functional skills in mathematics and English. However, robust plans are in place to ensure that once they have completed these courses, learners move onto GCSE qualifications.
- Learners behave well, interact with each other supportively, and are very aware of the skills they need to develop for the future. There is, as yet, no information on learners' destinations or completion rates.

School details

Unique reference number	137334
DfE registration number	931/6000
Inspection number	10008614

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Regional Director	Chris Williams
Headteacher	Dave Stewart
Annual fees	£59,330–£88,400
Telephone number	01844 337720
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/chilworth-house-upper-school
Email address	chilworth-house-upper@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2012

Information about this school

- Chilworth House School is a small school, owned by the Witherslack Group.
- Its previous standard inspection was on 19 and 20 June 2012.
- Chilworth House is a special school for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. It operates on two sites – one focusing on key stages 3 learning, and the other on key stage 4 and post-16 learning.

- Chilworth House currently has 66 pupils on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health, and care plan.
- Provision for 16 to 19 study programmes was planned last year and has been fully operational since the start of September 2016.
- The school does not use alternative provision. As part of the 16 to 19 study programmes, learners access courses at the local football club's training facility.
- The school is registered for pupils aged between ten and eighteen years of age.
- Four of the pupils are eligible for enhanced pupil premium funding because they are in the care of a number of different local authorities. Most of the pupils hail from local authorities other than Oxfordshire.
- Since the previous school inspection in June 2012, a new headteacher has been appointed, taking up the post in September 2015. A new deputy headteacher took up her post in January 2016.
- Since the previous inspection, a regional director has been appointed by Witherslack Group to oversee this school and three other schools in the region.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice. During the inspection, evidence was gathered in relation to the independent school standards.
- Inspectors made four short visits to classes, which incorporated both sites, to observe teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors also visited both sites to observe the breadth of different subjects and activities available.
- Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils and one more structured meeting was held with key stage 3 pupils.
- The inspector spoke to a group of teachers and assistants, and also held meetings with senior leaders, including those responsible for the sixth form, and for assessment. The inspector met separately with the regional director. She also held a meeting with the therapist who works regularly with pupils, accompanied by the special educational needs coordinator, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher.
- The inspector called the local authority's designated officer, and the director of schools from the Witherslack Group.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation and development plans, were checked for compliance with the independent school standards.
- Sixteen responses made on Parent View were taken into account, as were 30 responses to the staff questionnaire and responses given by two parents who were called on the telephone.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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