School report

Cambian Whinfell School

110/112 Windermere Road, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5EZ

Inspection dates 15–17 May 2018

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**
16 to 19 study programmes	**Outstanding**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. Leaders do not rest on their laurels and are constantly seeking ways to make the school even better.
- Pupils' attitudes are excellent. They are confident and welcome visitors warmly. Pupils attend regularly and enjoy their lessons.
- Parents and carers are extremely pleased with the school. They state that their children are safe and happy and make exceptionally good progress.
- The assessment, advice and support provided by psychologists and other members of the multi-disciplinary team play a major part in ensuring that progress is outstanding.
- Safeguarding procedures are appropriate and adhered to by all staff.
- Therapeutic outdoor activity makes a significant contribution to the school's outstanding curriculum.
- Post-16 provision is outstanding. Students benefit from a flexible and personalised range of courses and receive impartial careers advice.
- Teachers have an excellent understanding of how pupils' behaviour can affect their learning. Teachers ensure that barriers to progress are removed.
- Excellent procedures are in place to assess and monitor teachers' performance and expectations of teachers and pupils are very high.
- Pupils make exceptional academic progress, often from very low baselines. They gain useful GCSE qualifications and improve their literacy and numeracy. Above all, they improve the way they communicate their ideas and feelings.
- Pupils' progress in handwriting is not quite as strong as it is in other areas of learning. On occasion, opportunities for pupils to develop their written communication skills are not fully exploited via the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and in art lessons.

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' progress in handwriting is as rapid as it is in other areas of their work by:
  - giving pupils more time to practise their handwriting
  - ensuring that teachers focus on the presentation of work as well as on the content
  - providing more opportunities in subjects such as art to develop pupils' fine motor skills
  - improving access to ICT for pupils, especially those that struggle with handwriting.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding

- The principal is very well respected by pupils, parents and staff for his commitment to ensuring that the school meets the complex educational, personal, emotional and social needs of pupils. He is very well supported by a highly capable senior leadership team, and has ensured that all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been fully addressed. In addition, he and senior leaders have raised the bar and set even higher expectations for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, all of which are outstanding.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of the requirements of the independent school standards. The proprietor, as well as other schools and services within the Cambian Group, frequently review educational provision, premises and safeguarding procedures. This ensures that all the independent school standards are met.
- The deputy headteacher reviews the quality of teaching frequently. She scrutinises work in pupils' books, observes teachers and other adults in the classroom and talks to pupils about their learning. Teachers and other staff are set very ambitious targets as part of their performance management. Targets are clearly linked to raising standards. The school's self-evaluation report and the development plan are focused on improving key issues.
- Staff morale is very high. All staff completed the inspection questionnaire. They were all highly positive about all aspects of the school. They say that they work extremely well as a team and are supported and challenged by leaders.
- Pupils benefit from a high-quality broad and personalised curriculum including English, mathematics, science, art, geography, food technology, physical education and French. The curriculum is enhanced by the use of therapeutic outdoor activities. Pupils particularly enjoyed a recent skiing trip. Older pupils, including those in post-16 provision, study a variety of subjects and some attend the local further education college.
- Mathematics, reading and verbal communication skills are exceptionally well promoted across the curriculum. The promotion of handwriting is not quite as good.
- The school's work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as their appreciation of British values, is excellent. Pupils respect and understand each other's cultures and traditions. Pupils know their rights and are not scared about expressing them. They recently met with the local Member of Parliament and contribute their views to the school's management committee via their own school council.
- Parents are very positive about the school and say that their children make great progress. Parental comments included the statement: 'The difference between Whinfell and the previous school is amazing. Everything is as it should be. The staff, from the top down, are capable, honest, and professional, while also being very personable and friendly.' Similarly, representatives from local authorities who work in partnership with the school say that pupils make excellent progress and communication with leaders is first-rate.
- All pupils receive additional funding as they have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Many are in the care of different local authorities and, as such, attract

financial support. Such funding is used exceptionally well, enabling staff to offer an array of enrichment opportunities which support pupils' academic development and enhance their life skills. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and development in post-16 provision.

Governance

- Highly effective arrangements for governance are in place. The principal and school improvement partner provide accurate reports to the management board and the proprietor. They report on pupils' progress, the work with local authorities and families, and pupils' behaviour and personal development.
- Minutes of management board meetings show that senior leaders are held to account rigorously. The board sets ambitious targets for the principal.
- Members of the board are trained to a high standard in areas such as safeguarding, safer recruitment and child development. They have a good understanding of the independent school standards and help to ensure that all are met.
- Members are keen to listen to the voice of the child and every meeting begins with some input from pupils. Outstanding practice is shared with schools in the Cambian Group.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a suitable and comprehensive safeguarding policy which takes into account current government guidelines.
- Safeguarding procedures are stringent and consistently applied by all members of staff. They have benefited from extensive training in relation to safety and all are familiar with the latest government guidelines on how to keep children safe.
- Staff have a particular awareness of the potential dangers that older pupils face. There are detailed risk assessments drawn up for each individual pupil, the school premises, educational visits and work placements.
- Checks to ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified and suitable to work with children are comprehensive and up to date. Records of these checks are maintained meticulously. Staff know exactly what to do should they have a concern about the safety of a pupil.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Outstanding

- Pupils benefit from outstanding teaching which enables them to make excellent academic progress. Teachers work exceptionally well with a multi-disciplinary team of psychologists, therapists and support workers to meet the specific learning needs of each pupil. Pupils learn in very small groups, often of only three pupils, in classrooms that are small and well organised to support their learning needs.
- All pupils have complex learning needs, including autism spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication difficulties. Staff are very adept at using a variety of

methods to help pupils to express themselves and to feel safe and secure in the classroom.

- Teachers respond with flexibility and good humour to pupils' various needs and interests. Behaviour is excellent and pupils' interest and motivation levels are very high.
- Most pupils follow the national curriculum in various subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Most have proficient reading skills and high reading ages. Good one-to-one intervention is offered to those who struggle.
- Staff assess pupils' progress frequently and effectively. Pupils are made aware of how well they are doing in achieving their individual targets. They are given hints and tips to improve their work in preparation for examinations.
- Teachers monitor pupils' learning continuously through effective questioning. They intervene appropriately to make sure that, if pupils go off on the wrong track, they are brought back to concentrate on the key issues.
- Individual learning plans are used by teachers to ensure that pupils' learning needs are recognised and understood. In their previous learning experiences, pupils have often struggled to demonstrate the ability to concentrate for sustained periods of time and have received critical feedback. The contrast in their experience at Cambian Whinfell School could not be greater. The positive reinforcement and praise pupils receive in this school enable them to overcome these barriers and achieve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils face difficulties in becoming resilient and independent young people. This is especially the case for those pupils high on the autistic spectrum. At this school, they make remarkable progress and acquire skills, knowledge and understanding across many subjects that enable them to progress to further or higher education.
- Pupils learn coping strategies which help them to make the right decisions and understand the consequences of their actions.
- Older pupils develop confidence and success to the point where they are prepared to participate in mainstream programmes at the local further education college.
- The school is based in a national park and this enables pupils to engage in a range of therapeutic outdoor activities. These activities help to develop their teamwork and problem-solving skills and their understanding of science and nature.
- Teachers provide opportunities for learning activities which require pupils to use computers and access the internet. Staff and pupils fully understand what cyber bullying is. During the inspection, pupils demonstrated a strong knowledge of internet safety. However, they also expressed some frustration at the unreliability of some of the school's information technology systems.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe and well looked after in school. They enjoy the school's nurturing, family atmosphere. Pupils learn about racism and homophobic bullying. They know not to judge others simply because of how they look.

- Parents and staff who communicated with the inspector stated that the school is exceptionally safe. There were no concerns raised by parents or staff regarding pupils' safety.
- Pupils learn about dangers and risks through their lessons. They know how smoking, taking illegal drugs and drinking alcohol can be detrimental to their health. They understand the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils mostly enter the school with negative attitudes and complex emotional barriers to learning. Most have failed to engage in education successfully for a number of years. The school enables them to make a fresh start.
- Once they have adjusted to the expectations of the school, pupils typically respond very positively to the opportunities provided. They make strong progress in small steps. Most pupils take part enthusiastically in a range of outdoor activities which further build their confidence and self-esteem. The improvement in pupils' attitudes and behaviour from their starting points on joining the school is exceptional. Pupils' positive behaviour contributes strongly to their achievement.
- There is a relaxed and responsible atmosphere around the school, including at breaks and lunchtimes. Levels of staff supervision are high and class sizes are very small.
- Pupils attend school very regularly and are punctual to lessons. This is because they enjoy school. In 2017, nearly two thirds of pupils had 100% attendance. Most absence was due to planned medical appointments or took place during the periods when pupils were being inducted into school life.
- Case studies and school records show that, over time, the behaviour of pupils with complex needs dramatically improves. Staff are expert at managing pupils' behaviour. The pre-emptive action of staff makes a strong contribution to the usually calm and purposeful nature of the school.
- Pupils are very welcoming towards visitors. They are curious, well mannered and respectful. They enjoy talking about their school and are exceptionally proud of their achievements.
- The school's behaviour logs confirm that behaviour over time is of a high standard. There have been almost no incidents of bullying in recent years.
- All parents, local authority representatives and pupils and the vast majority of staff are of the view that behaviour is excellent.

Outcomes for pupils — Outstanding

- Most pupils enter the school with levels of attainment which are well below those expected for their age. In the main, this has been due to their lack of ability to engage in learning rather than their cognitive ability. Due to the high levels of social and emotional progress they make at the school, their academic progress also improves rapidly and is outstanding. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and

development in post-16 provision.

- The school's own baseline assessment data, progress files, clinical assessments and work in pupils' books all indicate that pupils make outstanding progress in developing skills, knowledge and understanding from their different starting points.
- Excellent use of the additional funding received by the school for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities allows staff to provide an impressive array of enrichment opportunities. These support pupils' academic development and, at the same time, enhance their life skills.
- Very high-quality psychological, speech and language therapy supports pupils' accelerated progress in communication and interaction in lessons.
- The school is successful in turning around pupils' personal expectations and greatly improves their future life chances.
- The majority of pupils achieve external accreditation across a wide range of subjects. Several pupils who left the school in the last three years achieved success in GCSE examinations, including some significant achievements at or above grade C or equivalent.
- Pupils make excellent progress in mathematics and English. Older pupils know the importance of good qualifications and go on to further or higher education. Work experience is carefully built into the curriculum and promotes employability skills.
- All recent leavers from the school have been successful in taking up places in colleges of further education and making a successful transition to independent or semi-independent living.

16 to 19 study programmes — Outstanding

- The excellent leadership of the lower school and commitment to meeting students' very specific needs are extended to the sixth form. The school's stated aim, 'to support all of our young people to be the best they possibly can be', applies just as much to students in the sixth form as to younger pupils.
- Only a small proportion of students decide to stay on in the sixth form each year. They continue to make excellent progress from their starting points, both academically and socially, because teaching is highly effective and very well matched to their needs.
- Those students who move on to the local further education college are closely monitored by the school to ensure that they achieve and gain a variety of vocational qualifications. All students receive impartial careers advice.
- The students who stay on at the school are well supported to make the transition to adulthood.

School details

Unique reference number	134781
DfE registration number	909/6054
Inspection number	10043377

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	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Group
Chair	Anne Marie Carrie
Headteacher	Christopher Constance
Annual fees (day pupils)	£76,000
Telephone number	01539 723 322
Website	www.cambiangroup.com
Email address	education@cambiangroup.com
Date of previous inspection	30 June–2 July 2015

Information about this school

- Cambian Whinfell School is located in a large house on the outskirts of Kendal in Cumbria. The proprietorship of the school was taken over by Cambian Education Services in 2013.
- The school is registered to admit up to 16 boys aged 11 to 19 years with autism spectrum disorder and associated complex barriers to learning. There are currently 17 pupils on roll, most of whom live in accommodation provided by the company. A small number of pupils are aged over 16 years.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Half of those currently placed at the school are in the care of local authorities.

- The school's mission statement includes 'the aspiration for all of our young people to be equipped with the skills to fulfil their potential and be able to live happy independent or semi-independent lives in the community'.
- The school uses the services of Kendal College to deliver some part-time vocational qualifications and advanced-level courses. The school also places some pupils with local employers on work placements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning across all key stages and in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. All observations were made jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Pupils' work was scrutinised during observations and also separately.
- One-to-one teaching sessions and small-group activities were observed. The inspector listened to pupils read in lessons.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the chair of the management board and the deputy headteachers. Meetings were also held with the educational psychologist.
- The inspector met various staff to discuss safeguarding.
- Questionnaires submitted by 25 members of staff were scrutinised, as well as the school's own surveys. A free-text response sent in by a parent during the inspection was read and one parent was interviewed in a short meeting. Responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered. The inspector had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative.
- The inspector held informal discussions with pupils throughout the course of the inspection and held a meeting with five of them.
- The inspector examined a range of documentary evidence. This included development plans, checks on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments, various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. In addition, the inspector scrutinised the school's reviews of its own performance.

Inspection team

Andrew Johnson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector

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