

Overley Hall School

Wellington, Telford, Shropshire TF6 5HE

Inspection dates

18–20 September 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- No systems are in place to enable the proprietor and directors to hold leaders to account. There is too much emphasis on trust and an over-reliance on the headteacher.
- The headteacher's capacity to provide strategic oversight and leadership has been adversely affected by recent issues in the organisation.
- The director-led senior management team has little impact on the work of the school. Meetings focus on day-to-day administrative issues rather than school improvement.
- Middle leaders' roles are at an early stage of development. They have not begun to work strategically to improve the school.
- The school's self-evaluation does not accurately identify the school's strengths and weaknesses to inform planning for school improvement.
- Learning objectives do not always clearly relate to learning activities. As a result, there is not enough clarity about pupils' intended learning. The revised assessment system is not yet embedded.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The proprietor, leaders and staff ensure that pupils are at the heart of the work of the school. The sense of 'family' is palpable.
- Staff support pupils well to manage their behaviour. Incidents are reducing over time.
- Provision for post-16 students is effective in promoting skills for lifelong learning.
- The recently revised personalised curriculum provides meaningful learning experiences for pupils, enabling them to make good progress.
- The therapy team and outside agencies work closely with staff to provide effective support for pupils' personal development and welfare.
- Pupils are supported well to develop their communication skills, through signing, symbols and the use of communication devices.

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 the leadership and management of the school by:
 - clearly stating and more evenly distributing roles and responsibilities, from the proprietor through to senior and middle leaders
 - ensuring that systems are in place to enable the proprietor and directors to hold senior leaders to account for all aspects of school performance
 - providing the headteacher with suitable external support, including the opportunity for performance management
 - making sure that the school's self-evaluation accurately reflects the school's current strengths and areas for development
 - adopting a systematic approach to monitoring all areas of the school's performance and using this to inform the management board
 - refining school improvement and associated action plans, ensuring that they are specific and measurable, so that the senior management board can check on the progress being made towards the desired outcomes and hold leaders to account for their actions
 - developing the role of middle leaders, including the leadership of the post-16 provision, so that they can make an effective contribution to improving the school
 - consolidating the newly revised assessment system, ensuring that it is used to track pupils' learning in a meaningful way.
- Further improve teaching, learning and assessment by providing staff with appropriate professional development so that the intended learning for pupils is clearly reflected in their lesson objectives.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The proprietor has placed far too much emphasis on trust as a means of school accountability. Her deep commitment to the school and the vulnerable pupils it supports is unquestionable; however, there are no systems in place to check leaders' actions beyond informal face-to-face conversations.
- The headteacher has been the sole driving force for the school until the recent appointment of a deputy headteacher. The headteacher puts the pupils at the heart of her work. She has ensured that the independent school standards are met. In the last year, she has had to deal with wider issues within the organisation. As a result, this has had a negative impact on her capacity to ensure strategic leadership and direction of the school.
- The school's self-evaluation does not accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There is no evaluation of the 16 to 19 study programmes. Leaders do not use the information well enough to inform school improvement planning.
- Leaders' action planning is not specific or measurable enough. The headteacher is solely responsible for the vast majority of actions identified in the school improvement plan. The plan shows that she will not only carry out the actions, but she will also monitor their impact. As a result, there is no wider scrutiny or accountability for the actions undertaken.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff understand and contribute to school improvement planning. Staff's understanding of school improvement is limited to changes to the fabric of the building.
- The headteacher attends the school management board meetings, but does not provide any performance information to members. As a result, members cannot challenge school leaders or hold them to account for their actions. The headteacher now recognises the importance of sharing information with the board so that they can provide a level of scrutiny. She has developed a proforma so that she can report to the board, but this has not yet been put into practice.
- Middle leaders' work is not yet having an impact on school improvement and strategic leadership because their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability have not been clearly defined.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment has improved recently. They are identifying strengths and weaknesses in teachers' practice. However, they do not use this information well enough to inform their monitoring of teachers' performance. Feedback to teachers is usually reliant on a face-to-face conversation. The deputy headteacher is in the process of reviewing arrangements for feedback to teachers.
- Leaders assert that they carry out learning walks, but they do not record their findings. As a result, they are not able to use this information to inform school improvement planning.
- Leaders have reviewed and updated their assessment system to enable them to better assess pupils' learning. Assessments will be based not only on subject content, but in relation to the amount of support pupils may require to develop their engagement and understanding of learning. Staff have recently received training in the implementation of

the system. It is too early to see the impact or effectiveness of this new approach.

- In the short time since his appointment, the deputy headteacher has had a positive impact on recent changes within the school. He has worked collaboratively with the school's clinical psychologist to review systems for the management of pupils' behaviour and has led changes to the way pupils' behavioural needs are identified and supported.
- Leaders have recently reviewed their curriculum to ensure that it meets the individual needs of the pupils, all of whom have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Curriculum content has regard for protected characteristics. Leaders have thoughtfully incorporated meaningful learning experiences within a thematic approach. Learning activities provide a breadth of opportunities in a wide range of learning environments.
- Opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are fully incorporated into planned activities. Staff make maximum use of the extensive, well-maintained outdoor facilities at the school, through activities such as forest school and horticulture.
- British values are promoted well at a level of understanding appropriate to individual pupils. Pupils' understanding of democracy and liberty is developed through making choices. For example, members of the student council have worked together to make decisions about what food should be sold on international theme days, or what rewards they should receive in school.
- Parents and carers speak highly of the school and the support their children receive. For some parents, Overley Hall School has been a turning point for their child. Some parents spoke of how their children, who had been school refusers in the past, now love to come to school. Comments, such as, 'my child is learning and thriving', and 'I never dreamt he could be like this', illustrate parents' heartfelt appreciation of the school and the work of the staff.
- School staff speak highly of the school and the support they receive from leaders. The responses to the staff survey showed that they were unanimous in their agreement that they were proud to be members of Overley Hall School.

Governance

- The school's management board, chaired by the proprietor, has had little impact on the strategic direction of the school. Members do not challenge leaders to provide them with information about the performance of the school, so cannot hold leaders to account for their actions.
- Meetings of the senior management board do not focus solely on the school but on other areas of the wider organisation. Discussions about the school focus on the day-to-day operations, with no strategic focus. Any actions that are identified are not followed up in subsequent meetings. As a result, there is no drive and direction to improve the school beyond building developments.
- The proprietor is over-reliant on the headteacher for all aspects of school improvement. At the same time, she has not ensured that the headteacher has been provided with any external advice or scrutiny. The headteacher has not been subject to performance management for two years.
- Some members of the management board do not have enough understanding about

education or the independent school standards to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the board.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has an up-to-date safeguarding policy that has regard to the current guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The policy is published on the school's website.
- Leaders ensure that appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out and recorded accurately before staff are appointed to the school.
- Staff receive up-to-date training about safeguarding, and training is tailored to take into account the needs of the pupils. Leaders have ensured that online filtering systems are in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe when using the internet.
- A strong culture of safeguarding exists within the school and staff know to whom they should report their concerns. However, there was some confusion during the inspection between staff about whether a concern should be reported verbally or via a concern form. Also, inspectors found that one member of staff, who was not a designated safeguarding leader, held the key to the store for pupils' confidential safeguarding files. When this concern was brought to the headteacher's attention, it was addressed swiftly.
- Leaders adopt a rigorous approach to all aspects of health and safety in the school. Pupils are kept safe in school and when engaging in activities in the outdoor environment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers ensure that the range of learning activities provided for pupils is appealing and accessible. Pupils are motivated to engage in their learning through sensory activities and themes matched to their interests.
- The therapy team works collaboratively with staff to plan activities that recognise and address pupils' therapeutic needs. Staff value the support of the team, as well as the professional development opportunities they are given to develop their skills and understanding.
- There is a consistent emphasis on promoting and developing pupils' communication skills, not only during lessons, but throughout the school day. Staff ensure that pupils can access learning activities by using Makaton, symbols or their electronic communication devices. Inspectors saw pupils confident in the use of their communication aids, enabling them to demonstrate their understanding of a task or express their views. During leisure time, inspectors saw pupils continuing to use their communication skills to make choices of activities.
- The introduction of a thematic curriculum has enabled staff to adopt a creative approach to learning activities, while developing key skills in literacy, numeracy and communication. For example, inspectors observed a group of pupils engaging in a forest school activity in the school grounds, well supported by adults. Staff encouraged pupils to think about health and safety risks in the outdoor environment. Pupils had extensive opportunities to talk about and compare the leaves they were collecting. They were then enabled to

collect leaves with a minimum of adult support and worked as independently as possible.

- Learning environments have been designed to be responsive to pupils' individual needs. For example, separate quiet areas are available within the classroom for pupils who have the most complex needs. Pupils can use these areas to regulate their own behaviour, before returning to learning activities.
- Staff achieve the right balance of sensory stimulation in pupils' work areas. Classroom displays celebrate pupils' learning, but staff are also mindful that pupils should not experience 'sensory overload'. As a result, pupils' sensory needs are well supported.
- Pupils are well supported in their learning because of high staff-to-pupil ratios. Teaching assistants support pupils effectively in a task if required, modelling activities or ways of communication. In some lessons, teaching assistants provide a more discreet way of supporting pupils. Inspectors saw a pupil being supported to regulate his behaviour while sitting with a small group of pupils, through hand-pressure massage.
- Leaders have organised pupils into classes that best reflect their approaches to learning. The 'nurture me' group has a specific focus on preparing pupils to learn and engage with others, developing their attention and engagement through well-rehearsed routines. As a result, pupils are attending to and participating in activities for increasing lengths of time.
- In the best examples of work, learning objectives and outcomes for pupils are clear, as well as information about the support pupils receive in their learning and when the learning took place. However, this is not consistent for all pupils. Objectives are sometimes too vague, such as 'to gain knowledge', or not well matched to pupils' abilities. Leaders have identified that this is an area for development as a result of regular moderation activities with staff. In lessons where learning objectives lack focus, teaching assistants are less clear about their role in supporting pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff know the pupils very well and provide the right level of support for them as they move around the school building. Pupil information sheets in every classroom are written from the pupils' perspective, giving an insight into the pupils' likes and dislikes and preferred ways of communicating. Staff use this information well to personalise their support for pupils.
- Staff are sensitive to pupils' individual needs. Effective daily home-school communication ensures that staff are attuned to any changes to pupils' behaviour or mood before they arrive at school. As a result, staff can refine a learning activity, or build in additional breaks for pupils as required.
- Therapy professionals work together effectively to identify and plan any additional support pupils may need. Pupils can receive direct support in lessons from the therapy team. Alternatively, the team trains class staff to put into practice support plans for pupils. The team ensures that the needs of the pupils, identified in their education, health and care plans, are being addressed through annual review meetings.
- Where pupils are identified as needing additional support, helpful child-centred meetings

take place involving professionals and parents, to ensure that pupils are getting the support they need.

- The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum provides a breadth of opportunity to promote all aspects of pupils' personal development and welfare. Pupils learn how to stay safe, both in the school environment and online.
- The strong emphasis on SMSC development contributes to pupils' wider personal development. Staff tailor trips, visits and celebration days to consider pupils' personal interests. Staff recounted how pupils enjoyed a trip to the Buddhist temple, which provided a calm and reflective environment.
- Pupils' achievements are celebrated during the school day, as well as during other events such as school assemblies. Photographs on display around the school show the fun that pupils have in the activities in which they take part.
- Staff ensure that the voice of the pupil is paramount. Following an incident, pupils are supported in a 'debrief' of an activity, through a 'talking mat'. Four different levels of talking mats have been designed to enable pupils to participate in an incident debrief in a meaningful way.
- A wide range of risk assessments are in place that inform the additional steps staff need to take to keep pupils safe. Risks are assessed relating to individual pupils, activities and the environment.
- The use of talking mats has been further developed to enable pupils to express any safeguarding concerns they may have. In every class, there is a clearly displayed 'help' sign, which pupils can use if they need to seek support from a member of staff.
- Staff manage lunchtimes well. Inspectors saw pupils washing their hands independently before lunch, as well as helping with lunchtime routines such as returning the meal trolley to the kitchen. Pupils were clearly enjoying the activity and were keen to help.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have recently improved their systems for monitoring incidents of challenging behaviour, including restrictive physical interventions. As a result, they now have a much clearer picture of emerging trends in behaviour.
- The deputy headteacher has worked collaboratively with the school's clinical psychologist to review the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour. As a result, changes have been made and leaders, in collaboration with staff, are refining pupils' support plans. These plans better reflect reasons for pupils' behaviour, enabling class staff to modify their practice and support. Leaders recognise that there is still work to do in refining some plans to best reflect pupils' needs.
- Leaders' analysis of behaviour shows that behaviour incidents, including restrictive physical interventions, are reducing over time. In the last year, there have been seven floor holds and leaders recognise that they need to reduce this number as a matter of urgency. Leaders have identified alternative strategies to use to mitigate the risk of further floor holds.
- Pupils are supported well to regulate their behaviour in lessons. Staff can recognise signs

that indicate when a pupil is becoming anxious, and intervene accordingly, through distraction, a change of activity or moving to another part of the classroom. The school is a calm environment and staff support pupils to move around the building without disruption.

- Pupils rarely miss a day of school. Attendance is high and there are no pupil exclusions.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- From their low starting points, pupils are making progress in all aspects of their learning and development. Staff use a range of assessments to identify pupils' starting points on entry to school, enabling them to track their progress.
- Staff check and record pupils' progress on an individual basis. Information about each pupil reflects improvements not only in curriculum subjects, but in pupils' social and independence skills, and reductions in anxiety levels. Parents told inspectors of the progress their children were making, particularly in personal and social development. Evidence seen in pupils' work folders supported this assertion.
- Leaders have carried out a detailed analysis of individual pupils' performance. Performance information on the school's website indicates that there is some variation in the rates of progress that pupils make in different subjects in different key stages. Leaders were not able to demonstrate that they used this information to follow up where pupils have made less progress.
- Staff support pupils effectively when making transitions from class to class, or to a new key stage. Staff ensure that the pace of transition is led by the pupil, ensuring their readiness for the next stage of their learning.
- Pupils are able to take part in a range of work experience activities, helping them to develop the required skills to contribute to society. For pupils who have the most complex needs, work experience may be school based; for example, working in the garden or delivering post. Other pupils have the opportunity to work in the local community. For some pupils, successful work experience has laid the foundation for future placements, and in a few cases has led to gainful employment.
- Where appropriate, pupils gain externally accredited qualifications in relevant areas such as employability and life and living skills.
- The mini-enterprises of the farm shop and the tuck shop enable pupils to put their learned skills into practice in a real-life context. Inspectors observed pupils taking their role as shop assistant seriously when serving pupils, counting out sweets carefully and exchanging them for money.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The small number of students in key stage 5 are not taught in a separate provision. However, their individualised work programmes show that they take part in a range of activities and subjects appropriate to their needs, preparing them for transition. The key stage 5 curriculum focuses on developing life and vocational skills, and skills for independence, including self-care.

- Inspectors observed a range of learning activities for the key stage 5 students that were well matched to their needs. Some students were going out to purchase food for their enrichment activity. They were supported with a shopping list with symbols of items they needed to buy. Others participated in a game of snakes and ladders, developing their counting skills. Staff supported students effectively in their learning, ensuring that they remained engaged in tasks.
- All key stage 5 students participate in work experience. The careers adviser has supported 'sensory' careers lessons for students and has worked with staff to develop job descriptions for work in the farm shop. Risk assessments are completed prior to work experience to ensure that students are safe.
- Work in students' folders reflects the broad curriculum offer. There is additional emphasis on developing independence skills further, keeping safe and understanding the world of work. As is the case for other pupils, some learning objectives are not sharply focused.
- Leaders' information shows that students move successfully on to other destinations after they leave school. They are well prepared for their next steps in learning and benefit from impartial careers advice and guidance. Parents value this support highly and say that it helps them to find the most appropriate placements for their children.
- The headteacher identifies herself as the leader of the provision for key stage 5 students, but there is no separate evaluation of this area. As a result, leaders are not able to identify strengths and weaknesses to inform future developments in this key stage. Key stage 5 staff to whom the inspectors spoke were unclear about the leadership of this provision.

School details

Unique reference number	123621
DfE registration number	894/6003
Inspection number	10052717

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 residential special school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	7
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Anita Brown
Headteacher	Bev Doran
Annual fees (day pupils)	£92,232
Telephone number	01952 740262
Website	www.overleyhall.com
Email address	info@overleyhall.com
Date of previous inspection	2–4 December 2015

Information about this school

- Overley Hall is an independent residential special school, situated in extensive woodland grounds on the outskirts of Wellington in Telford, Shropshire. The school opened in 1981 and consists of the original school building, a large Victorian house, and a newer, purpose-built classroom block. Pupils benefit from additional facilities on site, including a large garden and horticulture area, a hydrotherapy pool, a cinema and a farm shop, used as a business enterprise activity.

- The school caters for up to 22 pupils aged eight to 19 years. All the pupils have SEN and/or disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. Some pupils have additional barriers to learning.
- There are currently 19 pupils on roll, aged between 10 and 19. Seven of these pupils are aged 16 to 19 years. As a result of the high staff-to-pupil ratio, pupils receive individualised support.
- All the pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils are children looked after.
- Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage.
- Pupils are placed at the school by local authorities. The school currently caters for pupils from seven different local authorities.
- The school does not use any alternative providers, but works with local community providers to provide supervised work experience placements.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in December 2015, when it was judged to be outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the proprietor and one of the directors. Inspectors met with groups of staff, including the therapy team and spoke informally to staff during the inspection. The lead inspector met with a doctor from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, policies, behaviour analysis, planning, progress information and minutes of senior management board meetings. Inspectors looked at documents relating to pupils' safeguarding and welfare, including checks on the suitability of staff. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leader, who is also the headteacher.
- Inspectors visited lessons, accompanied by either the headteacher or the deputy headteacher. They observed teaching and learning activities during the school day, including lunchtimes. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised individual pupil files, including education, health and care plans, annual reviews and progress files.
- The lead inspector spoke to the school's recently appointed external adviser on the telephone.
- Inspectors spoke to representatives on the telephone from the local authority's safeguarding team, Family Connect, and a representative of Telford and Wrekin's virtual school head for children looked after.
- Inspectors used the range of information gathered, along with an accompanied tour of the premises, to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered the 29 responses received to the Ofsted staff survey.
- There were too few responses to consider on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. The small number of free-text responses were considered. The lead inspector met with a small number of parents and considered the results of the school's own parent survey.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Bev Petch

Ofsted Inspector

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