

The Grange Learning Centre

Low Willington, Durham, County Durham DL15 0TY

Inspection dates

13–15 March 2019

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and managers have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher is inspirational in his dedication to the pupils, staff and the school. He has continued to develop and improve the school since the last inspection. The leadership team promotes the well-being of staff and pupils. They ensure that many levels of support are in place.
- Staff are highly skilled, motivated and determined to provide pupils with the best school experience possible. Staff are a very close-knit team and they support each other in their daily practice very well.
- Governors support the school extremely well. They provide high levels of challenge and hold leaders to account for the progress they make in improving the school.
- Safeguarding practice, led by the designated safeguarding lead, is exceptional. Leaders and staff work hard to ensure that pupils are kept safe and feel safe.
- Pupils value the staff and the opportunities that the school gives them. For many, it is the first positive experience of school they have had. Pupils enjoy learning; they feel understood and well cared for by all members of staff.
- The personal development of pupils is exceptional. Pupils make significant progress in their own behaviour management due to the support from staff and therapists. Behaviour is typically outstanding.
- Pupils make strong and sustained progress in all year groups and across all subjects. This is because of the high-quality teaching they receive and the support of the school's therapists and specialist practitioners.
- Pupils access a wide range of qualifications. Together with the support of the excellent careers guidance they receive, pupils are enabled to achieve their future aspirations.

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?

- Leaders should continue to identify and improve areas to reflect the changing needs of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are inspirational leaders. They ensure that the school has an extremely ambitious learning culture where pupils can receive the support and nurture that they require in order to make strong and sustained progress towards their aspirational goals.
- Leaders have a deep understanding of their school. They have not rested on their laurels since their last inspection and have forged ahead to make further improvements. As a result, pupils are very well supported in all aspects of their personal development and academic progress. Leaders correctly identify the strengths of the school. They plan further developments which consider the changing needs of the cohort of pupils, for example developing the teaching of phonics and the planning of a primary curriculum.
- A strong and positive philosophy of open communication between all of those involved in school life exists. Leaders and staff share important information readily with each other. Pupils understand that communication with others is a vital part of ensuring that their mental health and well-being needs are met. Dedicated daily meetings with home ensure that all staff are aware of any important events that may affect a pupil's day. Measures are quickly put in place to provide additional support when necessary. This enables pupils to self-regulate and be ready to learn.
- School leaders are highly supportive of staff. They understand the pressures that working with pupils who have complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties can present. Leaders ensure that they provide for staff well-being, and staff are appreciative of this. Staff are highly satisfied in their positions at the school. Staff comment: 'I have never been happier or more inspired than I am working for the people I do, with the colleagues I have or teaching the students in our care' and: 'I have worked in many challenging environments and feel happy in knowing we have a caring and nurturing environment here. I would not want to work anywhere else.' These are typical of the attitudes and thoughts of the staff team.
- Leaders provide high-quality and relevant professional development training to staff. They encourage staff to have high aspirations and provide a wide range of development opportunities for them. Recruitment processes are in place that ensure that only the highest-quality staff, with relevant experience, work at the school. New staff receive a thorough induction programme run by the proprietor and they settle quickly into their roles.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum provided for pupils is broad, balanced and rich with opportunities for personal development. Each pupil has an individual timetable which reflects their needs and interests. Enrichment opportunities that support and enhance the curriculum are plentiful. Pupils take part in a range of activities, including horse riding, swimming, ice-skating, professional singing lessons and bush-craft skills. Staff run a wide range of after-school activities for pupils, including retro arcade, computer club, art and photography, craft and fitness. Additionally, staff offer after-school support for those pupils preparing for GCSE examinations.

- The leader for social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education is very knowledgeable. He understands the importance that SMSC plays in the social and in the personal development of the pupils. SMSC is apparent throughout the school and is very naturally woven into all aspects of the school curriculum and other aspects of the school day.

Governance

- Governors and the proprietor's regional team use their individual skills, knowledge and experience to provide significant levels of challenge to leaders.
- Governors and the regional team recognise the skills and expertise of leaders. They actively encourage leaders to make decisions that will improve the school for pupils.
- Members of the regional team and governors regularly visit the school; this enables them to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of many aspects of school life. They understand the needs of the pupils well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a very strong, deep-seated culture of safeguarding that permeates the school. It is at the heart of the work that leaders and staff do. This is due to the considerable safeguarding and child-protection risks facing the pupils.
- All appropriate safeguarding checks are completed on staff working at the school to ensure that they are fit to do so. Safeguarding records are exemplary and detailed. Safeguarding leaders have completed up-to-date training and are aware of how to respond to any concerns that they may have about a pupil's well-being. The designated safeguarding lead is thorough and uses her experience very well to ensure that all protocols for protecting children are met.
- Policies pertaining to safeguarding and child protection are detailed and meet the current government's guidance for schools. Leaders ensure that all staff have regular training and know where to refer any concerns that they may have. Staff are extremely vigilant and very well informed.
- Pupils learn the importance of keeping personal details safe when they use digital technology.
- Pupils who made their views known say they feel safe at the school. They trust the staff and build exceptionally strong relationships with them. Pupils know that staff will always listen to them and support them to make the right decisions for their personal development.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching and learning are consistently outstanding across the school. Teachers understand the different needs of their pupils very well. They plan, resource and teach highly personalised lessons that meet the needs of each pupil.
- All staff have tremendously strong relationships with their pupils. Staff provide high levels

of nurture and support. They skilfully interact with pupils, often using humour, to ensure that pupils are calm and ready to learn.

- Lessons are well planned and account for the differences in ability and learning styles of pupils. Teachers incorporate additional time for knowledge and skills to be embedded. This enables pupils to gain a deeper understanding of the work being covered.
- Teachers provide challenge for pupils, including the most able. They use questioning skilfully to ensure that pupils understand their work. Pupils are confident enough to ask for help when they feel they need it. This can be from teachers, support staff or their peers.
- Pupils have opportunities to take part in debates and discussions. This is followed up by opportunities for writing at length.
- Pupils receive a range of homework activities each week. Pupils studying for their GCSEs are provided with targeted work to improve their knowledge and examination skills. Many pupils stay at the school at the end of the day to complete additional work where there is support available.
- Staff encourage all pupils to read as often as possible. Pupils make significant progress in their reading and, when reading aloud, take notice of punctuation well. Incentives are in place to encourage more reluctant readers, for example 'dip in the box'.
- Communication skills are widely developed. Teachers model their expectations and communicate with pupils through a range of ways, including verbal and physical.
- Pupils receive high-quality professional therapy, including speech and language therapy and occupational health therapy. All pupils have regular sessions with the school's dedicated professional mental health practitioner. These therapies have significant impact on pupils' well-being and mental health. The therapies enable pupils to access their education.
- Teachers and support staff have an absolute determination and commitment to ensure that all pupils make strong progress and achieve well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Education and therapeutic staff support pupils exceptionally well to overcome their social, emotional and mental health difficulties. This support enables pupils to triumph over their previous barriers to learning to become confident learners.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and welcome visitors to their school. Pupils support each other well, showing empathy and understanding, particularly if someone else is struggling with their emotions.
- The clinical team works closely with the teaching staff and home to ensure an all-round consistent approach. This has a substantially positive effect on each individual pupil.
- The school has very strong and detailed policies to ensure pupils' health and safety and welfare. Policies are strictly adhered to by staff. For example, in science lessons pupils

wear safety goggles and protective clothing and staff continuously monitor safe practice.

- Regular, thorough checking of fire alarms, lighting and other equipment ensures that all fire safety requirements are met.
- Pupils trust the staff to keep them safe. Pupils know that they have someone to talk to if they have any concerns or worries.
- All pupils access high-quality careers guidance. The careers guidance adviser assesses all pupils and pupils are made aware of some of the choices that are open to them, based on their interests, talents and ability. Pupils understand the work they must do to improve or increase their choices.
- Pupils understand how their behaviour can affect their learning. With the support they receive, all pupils can address this and become positive learners. They look forward to the future and what it will bring.
- Pupils say there is little or no bullying at the school. They are confident that, if it did happen, staff would deal with it effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are very well supported by experienced and dedicated staff to understand and improve their behaviour. Pupils' behaviour improves dramatically during their time at The Grange.
- Very little learning time is lost due to inappropriate behaviour. This is because staff are highly skilled in behaviour management. They act rapidly and proactively to prevent escalation in unacceptable behaviour.
- Pupils follow staff instructions correctly and quickly. Staff encourage them to be independent thinkers and most manage this well. Pupils are well supervised at all times and in all areas of the school.
- Attendance at the school is high. Pupils enjoy school and appreciate the activities they can take part in when they attend.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make substantial and sustained progress throughout the school in all year groups and subjects. This is due to high-quality teaching and the therapeutic interventions that are in place for all pupils.
- Therapeutic interventions support the outstanding progress that pupils make in their personal development and behaviour.
- Pupils achieve a wide range of external accreditations, including at GCSE level, functional skills and entry level certification. Pupils understand the importance of their accreditations, which enable them to achieve further success in their next stage of education or training.
- Pupils leave the school with a detailed plan for their next stage of education or training in place. The move to the next stage of education or training is thoroughly planned and well

thought out. Staff consider pupils' aspirations and interests and ensure that they have continued success.

School details

Unique reference number	135834
DfE registration number	840/6010
Inspection number	10061269

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
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Julie Taylor
Headteacher	Mark Boyle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,435 to £79,167
Telephone number	08442 571282
Website	www.wcei.co.uk
Email address	office@wcei.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–6 October 2016

Information about this school

- The Grange Learning Centre is an independent special school and is part of the Witherslack Group. The school is registered for 18 pupils in the age range 8 to 19. Currently there are 17 pupils at the school and no learners in the sixth form.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities involving complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. A small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in October 2016.
- Pupils often presented challenging behaviour in their previous schools. Many of the pupils

have experienced significant disruption in their previous education or substantial periods of time missing education.

- Currently pupils are placed at the school from 10 different local authorities.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector took a tour of the school site. The facilities were checked against Part 5 of the independent school standards.
- The inspector observed learning taking place in a variety of lessons. The observations were carried out jointly with the deputy headteacher. Lessons observed included English, Mathematics, science and a nurture group.
- The inspector held meetings with senior leaders, the designated lead for safeguarding, the lead for behaviour and attendance, the middle leader for SMSC, governors, the occupational therapist, the speech therapist and the mental health practitioner.
- An extensive range of documentation was scrutinised, including policies, curriculum plans, information provided to governors, documents relating to staff training, and information about pupil progress, behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching, safeguarding and complaints against the school. The inspector looked at the school's single central record of employment checks.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour at social times, in classrooms and when they moved around school.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work as a separate activity.

Inspection team

Sara Roe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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