

Cedar House School

Low Bentham, Via Lancaster, North Yorkshire LA2 7DD

Inspection dates

12–14 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Members of the governing board have a good understanding of the work of the school. Together with the headteacher, they ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards and the national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- Pupils' outcomes are good. Most pupils make good progress from their starting points because they enjoy coming to school and they learn effectively.
- Pupils receive good advice on careers options, which prepares them well for their next stage in life. All pupils who left the school last year have gone on to further education placements.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of what pupils are capable of and know how to effectively support pupils to learn.
- There are a good range of options for pupils to choose at key stage 4 which enrich the curriculum and fulfil pupils' future aspirations.
- Personal development, welfare and behaviour are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour quickly improves from the moment they join the school.
- Pupils develop trusting relationships with adults in the school. Staff have a thorough knowledge of pupils' complex needs. This leads to a calm environment with minimal disruption to lessons.
- Leadership and management of the residential provision is good. The accomplished leadership team has ensured sustained improvement. However, some aspects of record-keeping need greater clarity, work on bullying and racism has not been evaluated and there is no 'independent person' for pupils to talk to.
- Leadership overall is good. However, some subject leaders are not having a positive enough effect on improving pupils' progress and the curriculum.
- Although progress for most pupils is good, it is often slower for the most able pupils. This is because the work set by teachers does not challenge these pupils sufficiently.
- The information collected by leaders about how well pupils achieve is not always used effectively to identify priorities for improvement.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers set work that challenges the most able pupils to learn quickly and think deeply so that they can make the best possible progress.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making the best use of the wealth of information available about the progress that pupils make, to contribute to the school's strategic planning and improvement
 - further developing the role of subject leaders in evaluating and planning the curriculum and evaluating the progress pupils make in their subject areas.
- Continue to improve the residential provision by:
 - evaluating the work that the school has done on bullying and racism to understand its effect on pupils
 - ensuring that there is greater clarity in the school's record-keeping, particularly for complaints, missing-from-care records and incidents
 - identifying at least one 'independent person', other than a parent or carer, outside the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who pupils may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected in the residential provision	Good

- The headteacher’s vision for and commitment to preparing pupils for life beyond school is clearly reflected in the improvements that have been made to the curriculum. There is a culture and strong desire among staff to meet the individual needs of every pupil in the school.
- The headteacher has developed a strong senior team of staff who are responsible for leading the school’s work. They work closely together to ensure that the school and residential accommodation are safe and attractive environments. They have instilled consistency of practice and high expectations across the whole school. This results in staff in the school and the residential provision working together as a cohesive team. Staff who made their views known to inspectors say that the school is well led and managed and that they are proud to work in the school.
- Leadership and management arrangements in the residential provision are excellent. The accomplished and tenacious leadership team has ensured its sustained improvement. Partnership work with families is a strength. Parents and carers are unanimous in their praise for the school.
- The therapy team makes a strong contribution to supporting pupils with their social and emotional development. This helps pupils to understand their emotions and regulate their own behaviour.
- The governing board has a good understanding of the independent school standards and the national minimum standards for residential special schools. Board members regularly evaluate and review the findings of leaders’ monitoring of educational standards, buildings and safeguarding. The headteacher is held to account through weekly and monthly reporting against key performance indicators. A regional director monitors and supports leaders through regular visits to the school and this provides an additional level of accountability.
- Senior leaders regularly review the quality of teaching. They look at work in pupils’ books, observe teaching and review curriculum planning. These checks enable leaders to pick up quickly on things to improve in teaching and learning.
- Pupils enjoy a broad and personalised curriculum. Pupils in key stages 2, 3 and 4 study a wide range of curriculum subjects. A recently introduced options programme at key stage 4 offers an improved range of vocational subjects, including sport and fitness, childcare and hair and beauty. A range of qualifications help prepare pupils for their future lives.
- Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is strong. Visits to parliament and the work of the student council give pupils an understanding of democracy. Talks from the local police and fire brigade help pupils to appreciate the law. Making soup for homeless people and raising money for children in need demonstrates

pupils' consideration for others in difficult circumstances. The beliefs and values enshrined in the curriculum teach pupils respect and tolerance of other cultures and traditions. The school has recently been awarded a gold accreditation for the national SMSC quality mark for its excellent work in this area.

- Residential pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in school. Leaders protect pupils through prompt referrals to external professionals for safeguarding and child protection concerns. Residential staff have extensive knowledge, skills and experience. They nurture and care for pupils in a way that enables them to thrive.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has identified future leaders from within the school. Subject leaders are now being nurtured and developed to lead and improve their subjects. However, they are not yet consistently planning the curriculum and evaluating the effect that their subject is having on pupils' learning and progress.
- Leaders collect a vast amount of assessment information across all subjects and key stages and for all groups of pupils. This confirms that most pupils make at least good progress from year to year and over time. However, the use of this information is not always effective in identifying strategic priorities for further improvement.
- The standard of record-keeping in the residential provision is generally good. However, shortfalls identified relate to the lack of clarity around how the school supports pupils with their complaints, and bullying concerns and incidents.
- External monitoring visits take place within the timescales set out in the national minimum standards. A person appointed by the school board spends time talking to the pupils and checking on relevant documents. The school does not have an independent person with whom pupils can confide in with any issues relating to the residential provision.

Governance

- Governance is effective. Members of the governing board, who are also directors of the Witherslack group, have a wide range of expertise with which to support school leaders. They work closely with leaders and, as a result, they have regular updates on the work of the school.
- The governing board has in place a range of checks and measures across education, buildings, health and safety and the residential provision, which have ensured that the independent school standards and the national minimum care standards are met. The governing board is effective in holding leaders in the school and the residential provision to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a comprehensive safeguarding policy on its website which takes into account current government guidance.
- Leaders have completed recent and relevant safer recruitment training. This ensures that all staff recruited to the school have undergone required safeguarding checks.
- All staff are trained to understand a wide range of safeguarding issues that could affect the pupils. Leaders are confident that staff know what to do if they have a concern and

staff spoken with during the inspection confirmed this.

- Pupils learn about many aspects of keeping themselves safe through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, both in school and in the residential provision. Discussions on topics such as the practice of using children to traffic drugs to rural areas and online safety contribute to pupils' understanding of potential risks they may face.
- Safeguarding and child protection issues are referred to external agencies promptly and this contributes to pupils' safety.
- Regular training opportunities keep residential staff up to date in safe caring skills and fire safety. This ensures that pupils are cared for by very well trained and experienced staff.
- Daily meetings ensure that safeguarding information is shared with all relevant staff. This means that all staff are fully aware of any concerns or issues that pupils may face.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have a good understanding of the needs of most pupils and, as a result, they plan work which interests and motivates pupils to work hard.
- Teachers set targets for pupils to achieve which are based on the school's assessment system. These are displayed in each classroom. Pupils say that they know what they are learning and what their next steps are because they track their progress against their targets.
- Pupils approach their work with positive attitudes because of the very strong relationships that they have with adults. They are confident to answer questions and try new tasks because they know that the staff will support them. Pupils say that teachers help them to develop a 'can do' attitude towards learning and that they enjoy learning because of the way in which their lessons are taught.
- The culture in the school is one of nurture and support. There is a bespoke approach to identifying the barriers to learning that pupils experience and reducing them, so that pupils can be successful in lessons.
- Overall, teachers' subject knowledge is good across a wide range of subjects. This results in effective questioning which checks what pupils have remembered from previous lessons.
- Reading is taught well and there are many opportunities for pupils to practise reading, writing and spelling. One pupil, who recently started at the school, says that he has 'learned how to write on lines and how to join up writing'.
- Teachers plan lessons which encourage pupils to be active learners. For example, in a history lesson, pupils were observed researching whether the Mayan civilisation still exists and in mathematics, pupils worked independently on a geometry activity.
- The school's assessment system tracks pupils' progress in all subject areas, which gives leaders a good understanding of what pupils understand and can do. Teachers use this information to plan the next steps in learning. However, the work for most-able pupils is sometimes not matched closely enough to their ability and they are not given the opportunity to learn quickly and think deeply about how they can apply their knowledge. The most able pupils do not always make the progress they are capable of.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders have created a strong culture where the fostering of pupils' personal development is at the heart of the work of the school. Staff in the school and the residence provide a consistent approach which supports pupils and builds their confidence exceptionally well. All staff work together to identify and address issues that have previously prevented pupils from being successful learners.
- Pupils say that the encouragement they receive from staff makes them feel more confident to do their work. One pupil said: 'School helps me to learn and this makes me more confident. I wasn't learning at my other school.' Another pupil said that the school has helped him to increase his 'independence and I am building up more. I can go to the village on my own.'
- The therapy team makes a very strong contribution to increasing pupils' self-esteem and helping them to engage with learning. An art therapist, play therapist, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and educational psychologists work closely with staff and pupils. This holistic approach makes a positive difference to the lives of the pupils, as they begin to understand their own emotions and how to respond appropriately.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and in the residence. The PSHE curriculum teaches them how to be safe through, for example, discussions about the practice of using children to traffic drugs to rural areas and how to use social media safely.
- An anti-bullying pupils' forum meets each half term to raise pupils' awareness about bullying across the school. Pupils achieve awards for their work around preventing bullying and racism.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour improves rapidly from the moment that they join the school.
- The work of leaders in helping pupils to understand and manage their own behaviour is exemplary. 'A team around the child' approach enables a range of professionals to identify why a pupil displays challenging behaviour. This enables appropriate support to be put in place before a crisis occurs. Staff are well trained in distraction techniques and have an in-depth knowledge of the complex needs of each pupil. This leads to pupils' positive behaviour in the classroom. The strong ethos of getting pupils ready to learn is consistently applied across the school.
- The excellent relationships between pupils and staff help pupils to behave appropriately and self-regulate their behaviour. Pupils say that they can joke with teachers but there are clear boundaries about what is acceptable behaviour.
- Positive behaviour support plans, high expectations and the strong and trusting relationships that pupils have with staff contribute to a considerable reduction in the number of physical interventions needed with individual pupils.

- Pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is positive. They are polite and courteous to staff and to each other. Classrooms provide a calm environment where there is very little disruption to learning.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve pupils' attendance, to just below the national average, since the previous Ofsted inspection. The pastoral support team works with families when a pupil's attendance falls below expectations, to quickly support the pupil to get back to school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Many of the school's pupils have missed long periods of education and find it difficult to manage their behaviour and emotions. When pupils arrive at the school they soon settle and make rapid progress. This is because of the expertise of the staff in building pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
- Almost all pupils make good progress in all subjects across the curriculum from low starting points.
- Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and widely. Pupils in key stage 2 demonstrate their love of reading through their enthusiasm in retelling a story. They read fluently and explain how they break down words if they get stuck.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives. The school's new pathways planning identifies pupils' interests and aspirations and helps them to make informed choices about their future. Staff plan vocational courses and accreditation to help pupils to realise their ambitions. A wide range of vocational courses have been recently introduced, for example hair and beauty, construction and land-based studies. Pupils enjoy these options and say that 'there is a whole world of opportunities out there'. All leavers last year went on to further education placements.
- Pupils can study a wide range of qualifications, including GCSE, BTEC level 1 and entry level 1, 2 and 3 in a range of subjects.
- Pupils say that the assessment system, on display in the classroom, informs them of their next steps in learning. They say that they feel proud of their work and want to achieve more because everyone can see how well they are doing. Work in books provides evidence of the good progress that pupils make in English and mathematics.
- Outcomes for the most able pupils are not always good enough. This is because they are not always challenged to think deeply about their work.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

Outstanding

- Relationships between the residential pupils are extremely positive. Parents speak exceedingly favourably about the positive effect the residential provision has on the lives of their children. Comments from parents include, 'I can see that this school will be the making of her' and, 'The difference the school has made to our daughter in such a short space of time is incredible.' Comments from pupils include, 'I am more smiley since being here.'
- Some residential pupils reflect that they are calmer since starting at the school and that

their behaviour has improved. Some pupils say that their confidence has improved since boarding and they have learned how to make new friends. This benefits pupils' personal, social and educational development.

- Residential pupils benefit from exceptionally effective arrangements to support them into adulthood. The residential home offers pupils a safe, structured environment which allows them to take reasonable risks, including independent visits to the village. Some pupils attend local youth groups and the scouts independently. This provides them with good support into adult life.
- Induction and transition processes are sensitively and intricately planned in a child-friendly manner. Pupils, their families, education and care staff and the deputy head (care) plan effective tailor-made transitions. New residential pupils receive personalised booklets to welcome and introduce them to school and to boarding life. This careful and thoughtful process reduces anxiety for new pupils and promotes a notably positive start to school.
- Residential and education staff work effectively together to implement a 24-hour curriculum. Enthusiastic staff engage pupils well in wide ranging activities, such as football, table tennis, growing vegetables, art club and cookery sessions. The grounds offer varied opportunities to explore, play and relax.
- Off-site trips are frequent and include swimming, trampolining, visits to the cinema and shopping. This provides pupils with good opportunities to try new activities and extend their talents.
- Pupils have undertaken charity work, for example collecting socks for the homeless and running a five-kilometre charity race. This enables pupils to have a greater understanding of the world.
- The quality of the catering arrangements is excellent. Pupils speak positively about their choice of food. Themed meals, such as a Mexican evening, provide a creative way of learning about different cultures.
- Health needs are identified and fully met. Systems in place for the administration and recording of medication are safe and effective.
- The therapy team offers emotional support and advice in meeting pupils' physical, mental and emotional well-being.
- The residential provision is of an excellent standard and is well maintained. Residential pupils say that they like their bedrooms. They confirm that they are regularly in contact with their families.

School details

Unique reference number	112456
Social care unique reference number	SC040058
DfE registration number	815/6041
Inspection number	10061241

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.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Number of part-time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	14
Proprietor	The Witherslack Group
Chair	Jude Jones
Headteacher	Kathryn Taylor
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,743 to £85,266
Annual fees (boarders)	£100,778 to £137,428
Telephone number	01524 261149
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/cedar-house-school
Email address	cedar-house@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–28 April 2016

Information about this school

- Cedar House School is a residential special school for boys and girls with a variety of emotional, social and mental health difficulties and associated challenging behaviour. It is part of the Witherslack Group, a national provider of specialist education and care for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school is registered to admit up to 88 pupils, aged between seven and 18 years.
- There are currently 71 pupils on the school roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan. Twenty-nine pupils are looked after by a variety of local authorities.
- Seventeen pupils live in four self-contained residential houses adjacent to the school site.
- The school does not make use of any alternative education provision for any of its pupils.
- The school has no religious denomination.
- Cedar House School says it aims to 'respect the value of all individual pupils and staff, to provide the highest standards of care and education and to ensure safety, security and opportunities for success.' The school says that it aspires to be 'an exemplar of best practice for children locally, regionally and nationally.'
- The school's previous inspection was in April 2016 when its overall effectiveness was judged as good. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2017 when the overall judgement was outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects and key stages.
- Samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects and ages were scrutinised with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing board of the Witherslack Group, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and staff in both the school and the residential provision. Morning and evening routines were observed in the residence.
- Inspectors considered responses to 36 questionnaires completed by members of staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses and free-text responses to Parent View.
- The views of pupils in the school and the residential provision were taken into account.
- Inspectors looked at policies, procedures and records related to the school and residential provision to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards and the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Inspection team

Suzette Garland-Grimes, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Elaine Claire	Lead Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Chris Scully	Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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