

The Shires at Stretton

Shires Lane, Stretton, Rutland LE15 7GT

Inspection dates

2–4 July 2019

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| 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 effectiveness at previous inspection | Outstanding |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders, staff and governors share a deep commitment to maximising the learning and personal development of every pupil.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and readiness for the transition to adult life. Staff throughout the school continuously assist pupils to overcome complex barriers to personal progress.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and there are no persistent absentees. Pupils make considerable improvements in their behaviour and readiness to learn during their time at the school.
- Teaching and learning are based on a thorough understanding of individual pupils' starting points. Consistently good teaching contributes strongly to pupils' good progress.
- The head of school has a powerful impact on the good quality of the curriculum and its consistent implementation across the school.
- The curriculum for post-16 students enables them to work alongside other pupils with similar starting points.
- Parents, carers and pupils agree that pupils are safe and well cared for in school.
- Recently introduced qualifications include opportunities for the most able students to prepare well for the transition to further education or employment.
- The head of school works very effectively with the governing body to evaluate all aspects of the school's work and to plan diligently for appropriate continuous improvement.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Staff fulfil their whole-school management responsibilities effectively. Their contribution to whole-school evaluation and development is not as clearly defined.
- Support staff make a strong contribution to pupils' concentration and participation in lessons. Their role in contributing to the monitoring and recording of progress is less consistent.
- Parts of the premises are cramped and used for multiple purposes. There are limited dedicated spaces for use by therapists and for one-to-one learning or 'time out' for individual pupils.

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?

- Review and extend the role of support staff in classrooms in identifying and recording pupils' small steps of progress with their learning.
- Review the staffing structure to enhance leadership and management capacity to support the wide-ranging responsibilities of the head of school.
- Review the extent and suitability of internal spaces within the premises to ensure appropriate facilities for pupils' personal development across the full age range of the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor, head of school and members of the governing body have a good understanding of the requirements of the independent school standards. They ensure that these are met in all aspects of the school's work.
- The head of school has created an effective ethos of teamwork and mutual support across the staff. All members of staff ensure that the individual needs of pupils are continuously prioritised.
- The head of school fulfils wide-ranging responsibilities very effectively. The governing body is reviewing the staffing structure to increase management capacity and support for the head of school.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. This engenders trust, reduces pupils' anxieties and promotes effective learning.
- Senior leaders have established an imaginative curriculum which provides pupils with appropriate experiences across a wide range of areas of learning. Externally accredited courses have been introduced this year, with qualifications matched well to the full range of pupils' abilities. Pupils with a wide range of starting points enjoy the challenges and successes of their work.
- The school's curriculum combines learning and personal development very effectively. Staff identify many opportunities for pupils to address successfully their anxieties and communication challenges as they learn.
- British values and activities contributing to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are promoted effectively. Members of the local community, such as the police community support officer, visit the school and work with pupils. Pupils enjoy opportunities to use local facilities, such as shops and the swimming pool at a local primary school. Pupils contribute to collections for a variety of charities.
- All pupils are equally valued and provided with the maximum opportunity to take part in all aspects of school life.
- The premises of the school are maintained to a high standard and equipped well to support the curriculum. Some well-used spaces are rather cramped, with limited access to breakout rooms, specialised therapy facilities and opportunities for one-to-one working.

Governance

- Senior leaders and members of the governing body share a perceptive and realistic understanding of the school. They support a culture of high aspirations for all pupils.
- The head of school produces regular comprehensive reports on all aspects of the school's work. The governing body demonstrates effective questioning and analysis of school information, including pupils' learning, outcomes and well-being.
- The governing body also benefits from a range of external audits and reviews to provide an independent view of the school's successes and areas for further development.

- As a result of effective evaluation, the proprietor and governing body ensure an appropriate balance between challenge and support for school leaders and staff.
- The governing body ensures that enough resources are available to support additional training and development for members of staff. This has a positive impact on the quality of the curriculum and teaching.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safeguarding and well-being of pupils are at the centre of the work of all staff. Staff work effectively with parents to protect any pupils at risk and to prioritise safety and well-being for each pupil.
- Senior leaders have produced a suitable safeguarding policy which takes account of the latest government guidance. The school's policy and procedures are available for parents to download from the school's website.
- Staff receive appropriate training during their induction to contribute to the school's arrangements for safeguarding. They understand the role of the designated safeguarding lead, how concerns are managed and recorded and how external partners have an important role to play in safeguarding pupils. All staff receive regular refresher training.
- Pupils are taught appropriately about risks in the wider community and how to keep themselves safe. The curriculum provides them, at appropriate times, with an awareness, for example, of online safety, the risks associated with substance abuse, sexual abuse and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The good quality of teaching and learning is based on a thorough knowledge of pupils' starting points. Staff understand the personal characteristics of each pupil, including their often-complex emotional needs, and continuously take these into account in the tasks and activities provided.
- Teachers are skilled at developing and supporting the skills of teaching assistants and other adults in the teaching process. Pupils are mostly supported by one-to-one adult support. The support staff enable pupils to access learning, particularly by supplementing the communication of the teachers and teaching assistants, using picture exchange and signing where required. Pupils respond positively to the support provided and value the sensitive advice and guidance.
- The lowest-functioning pupils, for example, used picture exchange to describe the colours and equipment required to take part in a game. They took turns patiently and learned to take their time in making choices to avoid errors.
- Time is used well in lessons and learning moves along at an appropriate pace to enable effective learning without causing anxiety or stress for pupils. Staff manage any uncertainty or anxiety very positively, making well-judged interventions or providing a brief time out for individual pupils.

- Pupils understand the expectations of classroom routines and behave appropriately. They develop new skills, while also continuously repeating experiences to reinforce previous knowledge and skills.
- Teaching staff and additional adults continuously monitor the small steps in pupils' learning. They often identify and record evidence of pupils' independent achievement and the extent of support required for the completion of tasks. This contributes effectively to teachers' assessment of pupils' progress, although the extent of these contributions by support staff is not consistent across all lessons.
- Pupils in an entry level 3 independence skills lesson made pizzas, following written and spoken instructions and responding to advice and questioning by staff. The teacher demonstrated excellent skills in challenging pupils to take responsibility and respond to new challenges. Pupils enjoyed the activity and demonstrated developing independence in aspects of the work.
- The teacher in an entry level lesson used strong visual images and appropriate sounds effectively to establish and maintain pupils' attention, developing their understanding of directional language. Pupils were able to follow the sequence of activities and to record their own answers with varying degrees of assistance from support staff.
- Teachers continuously reshape questions and recap learning through thorough reinforcement and appropriate repetition. In a group therapy session, pupils completed practical tasks to test their understanding of descriptive words and their response to tasks requiring sequencing and choice.
- Teachers ensure the development of higher-level skills in writing and verbal explanation with higher-functioning pupils. Post-16 students successfully recalled the location of internal organs in the human body, together with an understanding of the potential harm caused by a variety of human behaviours. Pupils in this group are working successfully towards a level 2 science qualification.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide them with suitably challenging tasks and activities to test and reinforce their learning. Higher-functioning pupils are provided with good opportunities to work independently, to research information and ideas and to present their understanding both orally and in writing.
- Teachers use the criteria for assessment in the accredited courses to create appropriate learning objectives for lessons. Pupils know what they are expected to do and understand and how their achievements will be assessed. Accurate and regular information is provided for parents about the progress being made in each course studied.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Most pupils enter the school with low self-confidence and often negative previous experiences of education. Parents report very positively about their children's growth in self-esteem, their trust in the staff and the way staff personalise tasks and activities to take account of their individual differences.

- Pupils demonstrate pride in their small steps of progress and enjoy celebrating their individual successes and those of others. The most able pupils develop the ability to respect the views of others and to recognise valid differences of opinion.
- Pupils learn how to relate appropriately to each other. There is virtually no bullying. Any potential incidents are predicted well by staff and appropriate actions taken to ensure that all pupils treat each other with respect.
- Staff provide strong support for the development of appropriate independence at a variety of levels. Many pupils, for example, develop their awareness of personal hygiene, the ability to make appropriate choices and a greater awareness of the wider community within and beyond the school.
- Staff encourage pupils to work towards ambitious goals and future destinations. The most able post-16 students express aspirations to continue into further education. Higher-functioning students are prepared well for further learning and employment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy their work and take an active part in lessons. There is very little disruption to learning. Staff anticipate and respond effectively to individual pupils' increasing frustration or anxiety.
- Pupils' overall attendance is above the national average and there are no persistent absentees. For many pupils, this represents a considerable improvement to their attendance in previous settings.
- Parents express the view that staff respond effectively to the individual characteristics of pupils, demonstrating considerable patience and sensitivity to needs.
- The work of the school's therapy team makes an important contribution to the creation of a supportive culture. The team helps staff to develop appropriate individual strategies and to evaluate what works best for each pupil.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make strong progress with their learning from mostly well-below-average starting points.
- Pupils make good progress in their ability to function well within the school community. Lower-functioning pupils demonstrate improvements in their ability to follow instructions using picture exchange, signing or gestures. Staff are skilled at focusing pupils' attention on means of communication which bring them success.
- Pupils enjoy reading or having texts read to them. The school has plans to encourage higher-attaining pupils to lead the development of reading with other pupils.
- Staff place an appropriate focus on the development of pupils' emotional and social skills. Pupils experience considerable success in learning how to manage their emotions and understanding how to react appropriately to anxiety and uncertainty. Over time, they

demonstrate improvements in cooperation with others and learn how to respond positively to other pupils.

- Pupils work well towards individual targets derived from their education, health and care (EHC) plans. These combine targets related to their personal development with course objectives in a range of subject and vocational learning.
- Pupils across a wide range of abilities are making good progress towards external accreditation for the first time this year. The lowest-functioning pupils learn, for example, how to identify and choose colours or how to take turns in a group activity. These small steps are recorded and contribute to the achievement of awards at entry levels appropriate to their starting points.
- Externally accredited work is a new feature of the school's work and only a small number of pupils have had their work externally verified to date. Higher-functioning pupils have made strong progress to achieve level 1 accreditation in English and mathematics.
- Pupils and post-16 students are completing work up to level 2 which meets the required standard to take up places at colleges of further education to study vocational or GCSE courses. Internal verification indicates that pupils across the ability range are on track to achieve qualifications, which represents good progress from a variety of starting points.
- In addition to English and mathematics, pupils are making good progress in courses at various levels in science, personal and social skills, independent living skills, British values, mental well-being and employability skills.
- All leavers in summer 2018 transitioned into appropriate and positive further study or supported living. The school's records demonstrate that all these leavers were continuing with their successful placements after six months.
- The attainment of most pupils is low but improving. Higher-functioning pupils and post-16 students are prepared well for future learning and employment opportunities. Parents are consistently pleased with their children's progress and the opportunities made available to them on leaving the school.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 131018 |
| DfE registration number | 857/6004 |
| Inspection number | 10078679 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 17 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Acorn Care and Education Ltd |
| Chair | Craig Ribbons |
| Head of school | George Alley |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £76,500 |
| Telephone number | 01780 411 944 |
| Website | www.theshires.org.uk |
| Email address | info@theshires.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 23–25 February 2016 |

Information about this school

- The Shires at Stretton provides full-time education for up to 20 pupils and learners in the age range 11 to 19 years. All pupils have an EHC plan related to their autism spectrum disorder conditions and severe learning difficulties, together with associated challenging behaviour.
- There are currently 17 pupils on the roll of the school, including six post-16 learners.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- The previous standard inspection of the school was in February 2016. An emergency

inspection took place in December 2017 and a monitoring inspection in September 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning across all teaching groups. He also observed the work of the school's speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. He met with each class teacher to discuss planning, assessment and outcomes for pupils.
- The inspector discussed the oversight and accountability of the school with the proprietor and the chair of the governing body. He discussed all aspects of leadership and management and the implementation of school policies with the head of school. He also met with members of staff responsible for oversight of therapeutic services and pupils' SMSC development.
- The inspector took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and in telephone conversations. He considered responses to the inspection questionnaire completed by seven pupils and 26 members of staff.
- The inspector scrutinised several school policies, procedures and records to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Young, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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