

Inspection of Chilworth House Upper School

Thame Road, Oxford OX33 1JP

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils grow in happiness and ambition during their time at Chilworth House Upper School. Many join the school following long periods out of education. Some take a little time to adjust to the routines and high expectations at the school. Pupils recognise that staff support them well during this transition.

From the word go, pupils are inspired by the belief that staff have in them. The vast majority of pupils who have left the school in the previous three years are enjoying success in their education or training options. Staff are determined to develop pupils' ambitions. This creates a buzz of possibilities, especially among older pupils.

Pupils are reassured by the constant availability of staff. Pupils feel that adults at the school take pupils seriously and will always listen and act in their best interests. The school council are proud that their ideas are acted on. For example, they are particularly pleased with their idea to make lunches more reflective of different world cuisines.

Many pupils do need support with their behaviour. Pupils recognise this and are confident that staff support them well with this. They are also confident that staff sort out any incidents of bullying effectively.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have created a school that combines academic ambition and therapeutic provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are determined that pupils shall attain academic qualifications that will enable them to access and be successful in their post-16 options. They are successful with this. Alongside the academic offer, leaders ensure that therapeutic provision addresses pupils' individual needs, including those outlined in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The curriculum is broad and helps to prepare pupils well for adulthood. Some pupils struggle to read fluently when they arrive at the school. Leaders prioritise teaching reading and make sure that staff follow the chosen scheme closely. This helps pupils to grow in confidence and fluency.

Most academic subjects are planned logically and help pupils to develop their knowledge securely over time. Here, staff use ongoing assessment well to check what pupils know and understand. They adapt activities carefully to meet pupils' needs, working with the therapy team where required.

However, some aspects of provision do not clearly set out the knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember in order to progress through the curriculum. Consequently, staff are not consistently focused on what knowledge pupils know and

what they need to know next. Sometimes, pupils all work through the same worksheet or textbook with little consideration of what they remember.

Leaders recognise that their monitoring and checking processes have not effectively identified where aspects of provision are weaker. Existing quality assurance and staff development processes have been hampered by the pandemic and by turbulence in staffing, including staff absence due to the pandemic.

The wider curriculum is rich and supports pupils' overall development well. Often, it is linked to EHC targets. It enables pupils to be reflective about their own beliefs and develop understanding of different ways to view the world. Pupils are increasingly willing to reflect on and learn from their own experiences and engage in discussions about possible consequences of actions. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the 'option Friday' afternoons where they chose which project to join. This allows them to develop new interests and work with different year groups, thus building their social skills further.

Pupils are proud of the girls' group and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender group. Leaders set these up to help give a voice to pupils in these school minorities. They help to raise important societal issues in the school. All pupils that inspectors spoke with recognise the importance of inclusivity. Some pupils are still learning to think about the meanings of words they use. Leaders intend to help pupils learn about this. However, some pupils told us that not all staff respond robustly to derogatory language, including homophobic and sexist language, when it occurs.

Careers information, education, advice and guidance is a strength of the school. It helps to prepare pupils for adulthood in modern Britain. Leaders are creative and determined to help pupils to think ambitiously. Independent, unbiased careers advisers support pupils well over time. They contribute to the annual reviews of pupils' EHCs to ensure that plans for adulthood are kept central to discussions.

School leaders have been supported well by the Witherslack Group (WG) through networks of staff performing the same role, for example safeguarding. The WG has helped to ensure relationships, sex and health education is taught effectively.

The members of the new leadership team have the confidence of most staff. However, some parents report poor communication from the school. The pandemic has restricted face-to-face events, but leaders recognise that they need to address this urgently.

The WG directors and leaders keep a tight eye on the independent school standards to ensure that they are consistently met. For example, they make sure that the site is safe, secure and in good repair. They have supported leaders to resolve complaints, taking appropriate action when required. They also explore how to support staff with their workload, which was something staff commented favourably on.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff know pupils exceptionally well. They use this knowledge to help them to identify any pupil who might be at risk of harm. Pupils who need additional help to recognise risks and deal with them appropriately are supported well. Risk management plans are thorough and reviewed frequently.

Leaders ensure that all staff have well-considered training that enables them to identify and act on concerns swiftly. This training is effective. It is supported with thorough documentation, including a comprehensive safeguarding policy that is published on the school's website.

Leaders manage concerns well. For example, incident records show that leaders take prompt actions and follow them up tenaciously.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Existing quality assurance processes have not identified development priorities precisely enough. Consequently, curriculum planning in some subject areas is not sufficiently refined. Leaders should ensure that monitoring processes enable them to promptly identify and improve weaker aspects of provision.
- Not all staff respond robustly to derogatory language when it occurs. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are confident to address this when it happens. They need to ensure that pupils learn more consistently what is not acceptable, and why.
- Some parents report poor communication with the school. This can make them feel disengaged from their child's experiences of education. Leaders need to ensure that communication is effective, particularly during the pandemic when face-to-face interaction is restricted.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	137334
DfE registration number	931/6000
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10214064
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Limited
Chair	Richard Wilkins
Headteacher	Michelle Johnson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£74,281 to £110,676
Telephone number	01844 337 720
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/chilworth-house-upper-school/
Email address	chilworth-house-upper@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 to 18 July 2019

Information about this school

- Chilworth House Upper School is an independent special school that caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and an additional diagnosis, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered for male and female pupils aged 11 to 18 years. There are currently no pupils over the age of 16.
- The school is split over two sites. Older pupils spend most of their time at the Arts and Vocational Centre, Edon Park, Thame Road, Wheatley OX33 1JN. Younger pupils travel here by school minibus in order to make use of the specialist rooms, such as the science laboratory.
- There have been many changes in leadership since the last inspection in July 2019. The headteacher took up post in September 2021, returning to the school after having previously held that role some years previously. The deputy headteachers and designated safeguarding lead have joined in the last year.
- The school is part of the Witherslack Group Limited and has adapted the group's policies for the specific context and pupils of Chilworth House Upper School.
- The school is governed by a school board which reports to directors of the Witherslack Group. Regional directors and senior leaders from Witherslack Group provide a range of quality assurance measures and training support.
- The school makes use of a range of alternative providers as part of their provision for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The Department of Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned due to anonymous concerns received about safeguarding, leadership and management. The lead inspector telephoned the school to announce the inspection 15 minutes prior to arrival on site to start the inspection.

- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the proprietor body, directors, the chair of the school board, the regional director and Witherslack Group leads, including the leads for safeguarding and for therapeutic provision.
- Inspectors also met with a range of staff and pupils.
- When considering the quality of education, inspectors did deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics, physical education and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and higher-level teaching assistants, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about a wider range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through consideration of the 37 responses to Ofsted's online parents' questionnaire and the 32 accompanying free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff through conversations and scrutiny of the 38 responses to the online questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils around the school and met formally with groups of pupils.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking to members of staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and the Witherslack Group's safeguarding lead in order to examine their knowledge, records and actions. During these meetings, records were scrutinised, including those relating to the safer recruitment of staff. Case files were sampled to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm. Inspectors also visited both sites, checking premises, including outdoor areas, and security arrangements.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who attends this school that has occurred outside of school since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection in order to inform inspectors' judgements.
- Inspectors checked compliance with the independent school standards through inspection activities and scrutiny of records and leaders' actions.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector

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