

Inspection of The Grange Learning Centre

Low Willington, County Durham DL15 0TY

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2023

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
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The quality of education	Outstanding
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Outstanding
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
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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?

The Grange Learning Centre is a very special place where pupils flourish. Pupils arrive at the school following significant periods of disrupted education, including very poor attendance. Leaders and staff know and understand pupils' issues and make releasing their desire to learn the top priority.

Adults get to know individual pupils' needs and wishes. Strong and trusting relationships are developed and nurtured. Leaders have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve academically, socially and in their personal development. Leaders work with other professionals, including experts in therapeutic care, to fully understand the young people who come into their care. Staff quickly identify pupils' interests and gaps in their knowledge. They put in place highly personalised and ambitious educational and pastoral intervention programmes.

Pupils rise to staff's high expectations. Staff help pupils to achieve their very best. Pupils feel very safe in school. They know that staff care for them. Leaders have put in place strong pastoral systems that help to keep pupils safe. Pupils say that bullying sometimes happens. Adults deal with incidents of bullying quickly and effectively.

All staff are relentless in developing pupils' independence and resilience. They carefully identify the gifts and talents that their pupils do not realise they possess. For example, pupils become skilled horse riders, take part in talent shows and realise their ambitions of studying post-16 courses of interest. Pupils are extremely proud of their achievements.

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

Leaders recognise the turbulent previous experiences in education that their pupils have experienced. They act quickly to understand pupils starting points using a range of strategies. Using this information, the correct pathways which precisely match the needs of each pupil are identified and put in place. Leaders design the curriculum with ambitious end points in mind. They combine this approach with intensive therapeutic, clinical and personal support. Leaders know that pupils must first understand themselves, before learning about their place in the world. On arrival at the school, pupils quickly feel safe and secure. Impressive increases in their attitudes to learning, behaviour and attendance are a testament to this. All pupils make impressive progress from their starting points. They take all of the opportunities to excel that the school provides.

Leaders know that reading opens the doors to pupils' future learning. Teachers and learning support staff prioritise reading in each and every lesson. Teachers have expert knowledge of how to teach the fundamental skills of reading. Teachers in the primary phase are experts in the delivery of the school's phonics scheme. Pupils read books that contain the sounds that they know and match their reading ability. This helps them to grow in confidence and become familiar with new vocabulary.

Pupils are keen to apply their developing vocabulary to their writing. All pupils benefit from carefully chosen books within each area of the curriculum. For instance, the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) lead ensures pupils access stories which reflect equality and diversity.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The mathematics curriculum sets out the important mathematical knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn and when. Pupils reach ambitious end points. Pupils participate regularly in a wide range of activities such as swimming, horse-riding, tennis and the creative arts.

Pupils and staff have strong professional relationships. Staff get to know pupils, including their likes and dislikes, well. Leaders ensure that all on-site partners, including staff based in residential settings, engage in meaningful and purposeful dialogue about the pupils in their care. As a result, classrooms are settled, focused places to learn. Most pupils are unsettled and anti-education when they join the school. Leaders' policies and practices are clear and understood quickly and well. Pupils make remarkable progress. They are not afraid of making mistakes. They learn from each other. The Grange Learning Centre is a highly productive learning community.

The provision for pupils' wider development is at the heart of the school's work. The curriculum for relationships and sex education provides pupils with important knowledge to help them form healthy relationships and keep themselves and others safe.

The schools' staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from leaders for their workload and well-being.

The school's governing board is committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve their best outcomes. Members share senior leaders' relentless determination for every pupil to leave the school fully prepared to face their next destination, whether it is in education, employment or training, with confidence. They have a wealth of relevant knowledge and provide substantial challenge to senior leaders about the quality of education that pupils receive. The governing board ensures that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a culture where safeguarding is a priority. Staff are vigilant and aware of the need to safeguard pupils at all times. Leaders have established highly effective partnership working with colleagues employed in residential settings and professionals working in local authorities across the country. The safeguarding policy meets current government guidance. This policy is published on the school's website.

A robust training plan ensures that all staff understand the additional vulnerabilities

that pupils at the school may face. Staff are experts in supporting pupils who have faced traumatic events. This work goes hand in glove with leaders' priorities in safeguarding pupils.

Pupils learn how to keep safe through a carefully planned curriculum and adults' in-depth knowledge of them as individuals. The curriculum includes a range of topics that teachers use to help pupils stay safe. For example, pupils learn about how to keep safe online. They also engage with speakers from local and national groups on issues such as county lines and substance misuse.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	135834
DfE registration number	840/6010
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10267648
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 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 the sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Stephen Hall
Headteacher	Mark Boyle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£83,449
Telephone number	01388 742022
Website	www.withslackgroup.co.uk/
Email address	mark.boyle@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 March 2019

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 19 pupils in the age range of seven to 19. Currently, there are 19 pupils at the school and no students 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 needs. A small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in March 2019.
- Pupils who attend The Grange Learning Centre often presented challenging behaviour in their previous schools. Many pupils experienced significant disruption in their education previously and/or substantial periods of non-attendance.
- Currently, pupils are placed at the school by 14 local authorities.
- The school does not use alternative education provisions.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The lead inspector toured the school's site to check the facilities against part 5 of the independent school standards. These relate to the premises and accommodation at the school.
- The inspectors observed learning taking place in a variety of lessons. The observations were carried out jointly with leaders. Lessons visited included the teaching of reading, mathematics, PSHE and physical education.
- The lead inspector held meetings with senior leaders, the designated safeguarding lead, the lead for behaviour and attendance and the school's therapeutic lead.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing board, including the regional director who represented the proprietor.
- An extensive range of documentation was scrutinised, including policies, curriculum plans, information provided to governors and documents relating to

staff training, behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching, safeguarding and complaints against the school.

- The lead inspector looked at the school's single central record of employment checks.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at social times, in classrooms and when they moved around school.
- The lead inspector considered the results and views generated from Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Marcus Newby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Penny

Ofsted Inspector

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