

The Grange Learning Centre

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	840/6010
Unique reference number	135834
Inspection number	348740
Inspection dates	22–23 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

Age group: 8–16

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

Information about the school

The Grange Learning Centre is an independent special school for pupils with significant behavioural, emotional, social and complex learning difficulties. It is situated in a semi-rural location on the outskirts of Durham and is part of Witherslack Care and Education Initiatives within the Witherslack Group. It is registered for up to seven pupils aged between eight and sixteen years of age. There are currently five pupils on roll aged between eleven and fourteen years, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Three pupils have a statement of special educational needs. All pupils are looked after by their local authorities. Pupils live in nearby residential accommodation owned by the same proprietor. The school opened in April 2009 and this is its first inspection.

The Witherslack Group's vision statement is, 'promoting resilience: developing independence' and it seeks to adhere to the principle that 'the individual has a combination of personal characteristics and skills which allow them to function beyond what would be expected in the light of that person's vulnerability of exposure to adversities'.

Evaluation of the school

The Grange Learning Centre provides an outstanding quality of education that fully meets its aims. Pupils make outstanding progress because the quality of the curriculum, teaching and assessment are outstanding. Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development and their behaviour are outstanding. The provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding; safeguarding arrangements are securely in place and meet requirements. The school meets all of the regulations for independent school registration.

Quality of education

The school provides an outstanding quality of education for its pupils. It achieves this through an outstanding curriculum that is very carefully structured and targeted to closely meet the career aspirations, needs and interests of each individual pupil. This is based on a model which includes therapeutic, academic and vocational aspects. Pupils have access to all subjects of the National Curriculum and those in Key Stage 4 are offered a number of curriculum pathways, including vocational courses. There are many opportunities for cross-curricular work and pupils have ample opportunities to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy through other subjects. There are detailed and comprehensive curriculum policies and schemes of work to ensure continuity and progression for pupils in their learning.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught throughout the curriculum and in discrete lessons in addition to the social and emotional aspects of learning programme (SEAL). Pupils also engage in the Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) including the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE). The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is excellent as it is used in all subjects of the curriculum and motivates and engages pupils in their work. High quality work is also produced in art and photography and pupils have opportunities to learn music and a modern foreign language. The curriculum is greatly enhanced through a wide range of visitors into school and visits to places of interest, such as Durham Cathedral, Beamish Museum and through a pilgrimage to Holy Island. Links with a local college and leisure centres extend curricular opportunities for pupils to engage in design and technology, science and a wide range of sports and leisure activities.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding enabling pupils to make outstanding progress. The pupils are taught in small classes and there is a high ratio of staff to pupils. Lesson planning is of a high standard with individual learning objectives to meet the different learning needs of the pupils. Daily assessments are carried out and these lead into planning the next steps in learning for each pupil. Pupils are fully aware of their individual learning targets and strive very hard to achieve them. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace with regular changes of activity to enable pupils to maintain their concentration. Excellent support is given to enable pupils to achieve to the best of their ability, but there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to work independently. Pupils take a pride in their work and it is neat and well presented. Pupils respond well to teachers' probing questions and are confident in sharing their views and opinions. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and share their expertise with pupils. Misconceptions are handled very sensitively enabling pupils to have the confidence to try to answer questions. Good humour between staff and pupils promotes pupils' enjoyment in learning. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. He is very well supported by a strong team of staff who also demonstrate high levels of commitment to improving outcomes for pupils.

Each pupil is given a detailed baseline assessment soon after entry to the school. The school has appointed a Director of Clinical Services who provides a highly detailed analysis, through diagnostic testing, which pinpoints exactly where pupils are underachieving. This is shared with staff and provides a firm basis for addressing pupils' behavioural, emotional, social and learning needs. The staff maintain detailed records of each pupil's progress. Assessments are carried out on a half-termly basis and the results of these are reported to parents, carers, key workers and local authority representatives. Formal assessments are also carried out on an annual basis and feed into pupils' annual review statements. Pupils are closely involved in assessing their own work and have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. Marking is very effective and pupils are given opportunities to respond to any feedback.

Pupils make outstanding progress from their individual starting points, for example, one pupil improved their skills in literacy and numeracy by two National Curriculum levels in one term. Pupils often exceed their challenging targets. This is because pupils feel safe and secure in the school environment and in their relationships with staff and this enables them to reach their potential.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils quickly settle in because of the warm welcome they receive. Relationships between pupils and staff and between pupils themselves are very strong. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they have very positive attitudes to learning. They all clearly know the difference between right and wrong. They develop their self-esteem and self-confidence because of the wide variety of experiences they undertake and because their work is valued and celebrated by all staff. Pupils know they have a strong voice in respect of contributing ideas to improve the school. They make a strong contribution to the local community through, for example, involvement in a woodland project and in helping to organise athletics activities for other special schools in the area. They have been praised for their conduct when meeting the local Mayor and a Member of Parliament, and have good links with the local police service. They are fully aware of British institutions through citizenship lessons. Provision within the curriculum enables pupils to have an appreciation and understanding of other faiths and cultures in the wider world; for example, pupils visited a mosque and learn about other cultures in geography and through special theme days. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and their attendance is high. This is demonstrated by one pupil who stated, 'I am proud of my school and teachers. They got me a college place and I am grateful for it.' Pupils are well-prepared for their future lives by developing good basic skills, including excellent skills in ICT. They receive very good careers guidance and this has raised their aspirations in respect of future education and employment. Enterprise skills are developed well through opportunities for fundraising, for example, by making and selling Christmas cards.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. There is a wide range of comprehensive policies and procedures in place to safeguard pupils' safety, health and welfare which meet all the regulations. All staff receive training on child protection, health and safety, first aid and fire awareness and there are robust procedures and training in place for tackling any incidents. School records show that staff are fully aware of how to deal with these and record them accurately. The school carries out appropriate risk assessments, including those for educational visits, health and safety and fire risk assessments. The parent company carries out termly inspections of the buildings and health and safety checks. Appropriate action plans are produced and prompt action is taken to address any issues. The school buildings are able to accommodate any pupils with disabilities, but there is also a comprehensive accessibility plan in place which complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Pupils are very aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles and bring healthy snacks into school for break times. They enjoy participating in a wide range of physical education and exercise, both in school and in local leisure centres. All pupils say they feel safe and that they can approach any member of staff if they have a worry or concern. As one pupil stated, 'I am happy here. I enjoy learning at this school. The teachers listen to me and understand me'. Pupils are aware that any rare incidents of bullying will be appropriately and sensitively handled.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has undertaken all the required measures to ensure that its staff, proprietors and visitors are suitable to work with pupils. There is a robust recruitment policy in place which is suitably enforced. The school maintains a single central register which meets the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises provide a very safe and attractive environment for pupils. The accommodation, adapted from former farm buildings, provides classrooms of an appropriate size and fully meets regulations. There are some limitations in respect of specialist facilities for physical education, science and design and technology but this is currently being addressed by accessing local college and leisure centre facilities and plans are in place to increase the facilities on site. The grounds are extensive and include a playground which is used for games and physical education and grassed areas which are used for educational purposes.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The organisation provides clear, accurate and up-to-date information in an informative prospectus and on its attractive website. Appropriate reporting systems are in place, including annual reviews and reviews for pupils who are looked after, which keeps parents, carers and local authorities informed about pupils' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy and set of procedures which meet all of the regulations. No formal complaints have been registered since the school opened.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development.

- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop more independence in their learning when this is appropriate, on an individual basis.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	√			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	√			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	√			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	√			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	√			
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School details

Name of school	The Grange Learning Centre		
DCSF number	840/6010		
Unique reference number	135834		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	20 April 2009		
Age range of pupils	11–14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 1	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,752 - £55,057		
Address of school	Low Willington County Durham DL15 0TY		
Telephone number	08448 806520		
Fax number	08448 806521		
Email address	learning@wcei.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Strong		
Proprietor	Mr James Bowers		
Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster HMI		
Dates of inspection	22–23 April 2010		