

Oliver House School

Hallgate, Astley Village, Chorley, Lancashire PR7 1XA

Inspection dates

20–22 September 2016

| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
|--|-------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Outstanding |
| Sixth form provision | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The principal and headteacher have created a school in which teachers and support staff have a deep understanding of each pupil. This enables them to meet pupils' needs very effectively and ensure that they make outstanding progress.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. This is supported by the rigorous initial assessment and monitoring of pupils' learning by the expert specialist team. This is because of the work of the headteacher and principal.
- The development of pupils' communication skills is central to the work of the school. This enables pupils to express their feelings about learning so that teaching can be individualised to meet their needs.
- Policies and procedures to ensure pupils' safety and welfare are implemented effectively. All pupils have a history of extremely challenging behaviour. Although this continues on joining the school, the frequency and seriousness of incidents decline significantly.
- The school promotes pupils' personal, social and cultural development extremely well and this means that they are well prepared for life after school. Pupils' fears and anxieties decrease and their confidence grows significantly.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Great care is taken to ensure that students' transition from the sixth form to adult life, further education or training is smooth and successful.
- Links with parents are very strong. They are given extensive information about their children's progress through home–school diaries and are treated as real partners in the development of the whole child. However, leaders do not always highlight the strengths of the school as accurately as they could.
- The proprietors ensure that the staff team has a wide range of professional skills. Funding is targeted to meet the needs of each child, for example through the use of individual learning spaces, high pupil–staff ratios and specialist equipment.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

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?

- Develop further leaders' and proprietors' self-evaluation skills by:
 - providing a more precise description of the school's unique strengths for parents that is not over-reliant on external frameworks and generic data.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal's and headteacher's passionate commitment to the pupils and parents is the driving force behind the success of the school.
- Leaders have a detailed knowledge of each pupil's learning and they check progress in a very systematic and thorough way. This leads to all groups of pupils making outstanding academic, social and emotional progress.
- Senior staff closely monitor the daily one-to-one sessions and small-group classes and provide strong support to teachers and support staff. They accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of lessons and set challenging targets for staff.
- All staff feel proud to work at the school. They recognise that it is an extremely challenging environment but feel that their work is valued and appreciated.
- An individual approach to each pupil ensures that the curriculum is closely matched to their needs. The range of activities provided is huge. Pupils who are non-verbal and communicate through signs and symbols through to pupils who take academic qualifications are very well catered for. The school uses research methods to analyse the progress of some pupils and this provides a useful tool for teaching and assessment, especially when very small steps in progress have to be identified.
- The school's assessment procedures are outstanding. Pupils are assessed by a range of specialist support staff, including an occupational therapist, a speech and language therapist and a behaviour analyst. In this, way a picture of the whole child is created that does not rely solely upon mainstream school measures of success. Pupils often take time to settle into school because of the singular approach it offers, but once they have been integrated they make rapid progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is promoted effectively through the individualised curriculum and trips to places such as the Hindu temple or local leisure facilities. Most-able pupils also have the opportunity to learn about fundamental British values through discussions with staff and guest speakers, including police officers.
- The welfare, safety and security of pupils are high priorities for the school, particularly for pupils who are unable to readily distinguish between what is safe and what is not. All policies and procedures are regularly updated and available on the website, although recent changes to the website have made some policies less accessible than they could be.
- The school provided a plethora of parental feedback about the school for the inspector to examine. The inspector spoke to three parents and examined questionnaires. Parents praised the school and the dramatic impact it was having on their children's progress. They explained that the school had 'become part of the family' and they felt that 'to work here staff have to love the children and they do!'
- Leaders ensure that there is accountability at all levels to enhance pupils' progress. They use purposeful and precise performance information to identify the very small gains that some pupils make.
- The principal and headteacher have an accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness. A wealth of information is collected and analysed relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance and achievement. In addition, externally commissioned reports about the work of the school are considered.

- Leaders have ensured that the school meets the independent school standards and is compliant generally, and that an appropriate safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. They have created a safe culture in the school and engage effectively with parents, carers and other partners to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe.

Governance

- Governance is strong. The proprietors of the school know its strengths and talk with pride about the significant improvements that have taken place in the last five years. They review policies and procedures in a structured way and take into account national reforms to special educational needs provision. They ensure that resources are targeted towards pupils in an effective way.
- The proprietors also have an accurate view of the work of the school but sometimes use generic measures that are more effective for use in less specialist schools to evaluate aspects of the school's work. This leads to a lack of precision in the way in which senior staff are guided to celebrate its strengths.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet current requirements. The designated safeguarding leaders have undertaken effective training at the required level.
- Staff receive regular update training on how to keep children safe and have read and understood the appropriate key documents on keeping children safe in education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding across the school. The very high pupil-to-staff ratio is a key element used to support the learning and behaviour of individual pupils. Pupils have individualised learning rooms that they can use when they feel anxious or need space to thrive. These rooms are personalised in a range of ways to ensure that each pupil is stimulated. For example, one room contained a range of antique items a pupil had collected and another a range of floor coverings that a pupil was interested in.
- Staff have excellent knowledge of pupils and combine this with subject knowledge to personalise learning and ensure that pupils are faced with challenging and achievable targets for learning. As a result, pupils are well motivated and anxiety reduced. Staff know the triggers that can result in challenging behaviour and use appropriate material and resources to reduce their frequency.
- Pupils have an extremely broad range of aptitudes and prior attainment. The most able progress well to take part in and achieve good passes in GCSE subjects including English, mathematics, science, geography, history and languages.
- Staff have established a flexible but balanced approach to establishing routines. This helps pupils lengthen their concentration span but at the same time does not result in a confrontational situation.
- Some of the most able pupils use exercise books and their work is of a suitable quality and contains useful comments from staff that point them in the right direction to improve. With younger pupils, where appropriate, teachers focus on teaching the sounds of letters and the alphabet, and this helps pupils to improve their reading skills.

- There is a strong focus on teaching a range of mathematical skills. During the inspection the most able were in the process of learning about the patterns of squared numbers and prime numbers. Others were trying to understand the concepts of basic shapes such as circles or triangles.
- All staff are skilled in using a wide range of signs and symbols to communicate with pupils. They also know how and when to intervene physically where pupils' behaviour puts themselves or others at risk.
- Staff use a wide range of visits and trips to enhance learning, including activities related to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Policies and procedures for the welfare of pupils are appropriate and implemented consistently by staff. Despite the challenging behaviour of some pupils, the atmosphere around the school is calm and controlled. As a result, pupils' anxiety reduces and they enjoy school.
- Pupils' behaviour varies widely, but all pupils exhibit the most challenging behaviours at times. They are provided with a range of expert therapeutic intervention. Parents, staff and pupils explain that they are happy in school. One parent whose child has very limited verbal skills explained that during the summer vacation the child said 'Oliver House, Oliver House' indicating that they wanted to return to school.
- Pupils are able to express pride in their achievements and do so through a variety of means. A wide range of comments include how proud they are in gaining good grades at GCSE, in becoming more independent in social skills such as using the toilet, and in becoming more self-aware.
- The school environment has been specifically designed for pupils' challenging conditions. Almost all pupils have their own individual learning room that they can decorate themselves. Other resources include multisensory provision and specialist equipment designed to have a calming influence.
- Levels of attendance are very high. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of many pupils previously. A number would refuse to attend school or found school too stressful to cope with.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. All pupils enter the school with complex and challenging behaviour. In almost all cases the prevalence of this behaviour and levels of anxiety decrease. This is because of the strong links with parents and the highly skilled staff team that attempts to take away the potential cause of the challenging behaviour before it happens.
- Staff are very proactive about praising good behaviour. They frequently reinforce positive behaviour and record this to ensure that it is not forgotten and can be used as a foundation for further work.
- Pupils are encouraged to recognise the progress of their peers and develop friendships.

- Pupils are given good opportunities to socialise during breaktimes, with very close supervision. The school records show that there have not been any exclusions or incidents of bullying.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below that expected of their age because of their cognitive abilities, their challenging behaviours or the impact of autistic spectrum conditions. Around a third of pupils at the time of the inspection did not use spoken language to communicate. Progress towards their personalised targets from pupils' different starting points is outstanding.
- The most able pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. Last year, four Year 11 pupils gained a range of good grades at GCSE, including English, mathematics, science, history and geography. Others gained certificates in a range of leisure-based subjects.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those looked after, make outstanding progress. The proportion of girls who attend the school is lower than that of boys. However, girls and boys make equally good progress.
- School records show that pupils on roll at the end of key stage 4 usually stay on into the school's sixth form. Pupils are well prepared for a seamless transition into the sixth form and have a high success rate in their personal learning goals by the time they leave school. Evidence in pupils' records is extensive and complex. Often data is difficult to interpret or compare because of the small numbers involved. However, taken holistically, it clearly demonstrates outstanding progress.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- Outcomes for this group of students are outstanding. Each learner has a personal learning pathway, closely matched to transition to adulthood and life beyond school. All students continue to focus on developing communication skills, English and mathematics, and many build on their achievements in earlier years.
- Students typically leave the school with a range of qualifications including GCSE, ASDAN awards and entry-level qualifications across a wide range of subjects.
- Students and their parents receive impartial advice, including potential work and career options. As a result, many progress to local colleges or into protected employment or training.
- Work experience and work-related learning is provided to those students for whom it is appropriate. The high levels of support provided at school are maintained in those environments.
- School records show that all students who start the sixth form are able to stay until the end of their studies. Progression to adult life is carefully managed by the school in partnership with parents and, where appropriate, the referring local authorities.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 131575 |
| DfE registration number | 888/6094 |
| Inspection number | 10012971 |

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 | Independent special |
| School status | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 6–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 31 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 12 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Priory New Education Services Ltd |
| Chair | Not applicable |
| Headteacher | Ms Wendy Sparling |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £67,340– £106,708 |
| Telephone number | 01257 220011 |
| Website | www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/find-a-location/oliver-house-school-lancashire |
| Email address | Oliverhouseschool@priorygroup.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 11–13 June 2013 |

Information about this school

- Oliver House School is an independent specialist day school registered for up to 40 boys and girls aged 6 to 19 who have severe autistic spectrum conditions and associated complex learning needs, challenging behaviour and associated anxiety.
- Pupils come from several local authorities and around one third are looked after.
- The school is part of the Priory New Education Services group. The group also operates residential children's homes in the area, where some of the pupils may stay.
- There are 57 staff drawn from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Pupils are usually provided with one-to-one support throughout the day. Learning is organised on an individualised basis or in very small groups.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- The school does not use any alternative providers for its pupils.
- The school does not have any specific religious affiliation. It aims to 'enable students with an autistic spectrum condition to learn to manage their behaviour and cope with anxiety; access positive educational experiences, develop strategies to manage everyday life, develop independence, social and communications skills and become empowered to make appropriate choices.'
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted at one day's notice and took place over two days.
- The inspector had discussions with a representative of the Priory group, the principal, headteacher, deputy headteacher and a selection of staff.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and talked to them about the school. He also looked at extensive documents and data on pupils' progress and their progression beyond the school.
- The inspector considered the views of parents that the school had recorded on 25 recently completed questionnaires and spoke to three parents in person. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to consider.
- The inspector took into account of the 36 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and looked at a number of documents relating to referring local authorities and a point-in-time survey of some pupils' views.
- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent schools standards, the inspector examined policies, procedures and other records. These included the checks of the suitability of adults to work with children, recorded on the school's single register, the attendance register and serious incidents records.

Inspection team

Andrew Johnson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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