

# Witherslack Hall School

Witherslack, Grange-Over-Sands, Cumbria, LA11 6SD

<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–10 October 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- Students achieve well and make good progress because teaching and assessment are good and the curriculum is carefully tailored to meet their individual needs.
- Behaviour is good. Students develop good attitudes towards learning and take pride in their accomplishments. Any challenging behaviour is managed well and contributes to the calm learning environment.
- Careful attention is given to the welfare, health and safety of students in school. Policies and procedures are robust and students feel safe and well-cared for.
- Leadership and management are good. The senior management team work well together to ensure good teaching and outcomes for students. The overall effectiveness of the residential experience is good.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- The new system for monitoring students' achievement and progress and identifying what needs to improve is not yet embedded
- Data is not analysed as well as it could be so staff are not always aware of behavioural patterns that impede learning.
- The curriculum is not enriched as well as it could be during activities that take place in the care setting.
- Arrangements for students' safety in the residential setting, although adequate, are not yet good or better.
- Senior leaders do not provide enough challenging feedback to teachers after lesson observations and teachers do not have enough opportunities to share outstanding practice.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice. An inspection of the residential provision took place at the same time as the inspection of the educational provision.
- The inspector observed 11 lessons taught by 10 different teachers.
- The inspector looked at students’ work and held meetings with members of the senior management team, staff, parents and students. The inspector took account of the views expressed in 21 school questionnaires returned by students and 29 questionnaires returned by staff. The social care inspectors conducted meetings with boarding staff, senior educational staff and groups of students and boarders.
- The inspector looked at the school’s documentation including schemes of work, teachers’ planning, records of students’ progress, assessment records and records pertaining to the professional development of staff. He checked the school’s compliance with the regulations for independent schools.

## Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Anne Bannister

Social Care Inspector

Elaine Claire

Social Care Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Witherslack Hall School is an independent residential special school that is registered for boys and girls aged from 10 to 19 years. The school has operated since 1973 as part of the Witherslack Group of schools and is located in the building and grounds of a former country estate in South Cumbria.
- The school is registered for boys and girls. There are currently 41 boys on roll, of whom 19 are boarders, and no girls. All have a statement of special educational needs, most in respect of behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties.
- Witherslack Hall aims to raise the standards of achievement of students and to enable them to develop into socially and emotionally capable adults that have the skills for lifelong learning and employment.
- Young adults that are over compulsory school age attend courses at local colleges.
- The school was last inspected in November 2010 and by Ofsted's social care inspectors in February 2013.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by:
  - embedding the new system of monitoring and tracking students' achievement and progress so that teachers can use this information to ensure students are challenged to achieve their best
  - embedding systems of using behaviour data to minimise barriers to learning.
- Improve the curriculum by developing opportunities for its enrichment in the residential setting.
- Improve leadership and management by strengthening systems for the professional development of staff through:
  - feedback and dialogue that consistently challenges teachers to improve
  - giving teachers more opportunities to share outstanding practice.
- Improve the provision for residential students' safety and care by:
  - reviewing the complaints procedure with students to secure their full trust in the complaints process.
  - reviewing the practice of locking telephone rooms in the residential units in order to improve students' access to telephones at all times.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

All students have special educational needs and join the school with a wide range of abilities; most present very challenging behaviour. Taking account of their different starting points and personal difficulties, students achieve well and make good progress during their time at the school. Data related to achievement and progress over the past three years indicates that a high percentage of students made expected or more than expected progress in English, mathematics, science and information communication technology (ICT). GCSE results for the same period are comparable with national averages.

Students acquire knowledge quickly and gain a good understanding of the subjects taught. They develop reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills well and are able to apply these skills across a good range of subjects. Students are motivated by the good teaching to apply themselves in a broad range of subjects and pursuits, and to take interest in their studies. As a result, they become responsible learners and are well-prepared for their futures in education, training or employment. Students who are very capable attain high standards. Parents and carers acknowledge that their children make good progress at school. One parent commented, 'When my son joined the school he couldn't read, write, tie his shoelaces or tell the time...all that has changed, he can now communicate and has made great progress!'

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Good**

Students' behaviour and personal development are good, reflecting the positive impact of the school's strategies in helping them to improve. Students have positive attitudes towards learning and behave well in lessons, around the school and in the residential setting. This contributes to a calm, purposeful learning environment where students take interest in their studies, attend regularly, participate in all aspects of school life and make good progress. Staff expect good behaviour at all times and make this clear to students. At the end of each lesson, teachers assess behaviour and engagement with students so that they can reflect on their performance during the lesson and acknowledge areas that they need to improve. When students display challenging behaviour, teachers and senior leaders use effective methods to calm them down and maintain control; as a result, disruptions to learning are rare. Incidents of poor or anti-social behaviour have been steadily reducing and students re-engage in learning quickly if an incident occurs. Staff in the residential setting respond effectively to the high level of challenging behaviours and vulnerabilities that students present, ensuring that their safety is a priority.

Students say that they feel safe at school and appreciate the good support and supervision they receive from staff. They are aware of the different forms of bullying and say that bullying rarely happens. Attendance is good and lessons start punctually. Students gain self-confidence through plenty of praise and positive encouragement from staff. Staff build upon students' skills and interests. Great care is taken to enable students to take part in extra-curricular activities that they enjoy and are good at. Student leaders take an active role in the workings of the school; often the most vulnerable students are promoted to these positions and this helps them grow in self-esteem and confidence. Students raise funds for local, national and international charities. They prepare Christmas food boxes for elderly neighbours who are unable to attend the annual event that the school helps to arrange. Students learn about democracy and the attributes that enable them to contribute to British society. When topics of a political nature are discussed, they are presented in balanced and unbiased ways.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good in all respects. Students experience spirituality through prayer and reflection during daily assemblies. Often, assemblies contain important spiritual content. For example during the inspection, the local vicar helped

students appreciate creation and the wonders of the human body. The school emphasises morality during religious education (RE) and citizenship, during discussions between teachers and students and during assemblies. Topic work helps students make reasoned judgements on moral issues. An example of this is work that Year 11 did on the legal and moral issues surrounding Muslim women wearing the veil in a court of law. Students are encouraged to be sociable and help each other at every turn. For example, a student in Year 9 offered suggestions to a peer who was writing a poem about water.

Good support is given to students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions. Students learn about other religions and cultures through RE, music, art and food technology; they visit places of worship such as the local Buddhist Temple, and listen to guest speakers such as the local vicar during assemblies. They are interested in other cultural traditions and express these interests in practical ways. For example, during assembly a student leader suggested that the school arrange cultural weeks as part of the curriculum.

The residential provision makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Outcomes for residential students and the quality of the residential provision are good. Close working practices between education and residential staff ensure that residential students benefit from their residential experience and the individualised care that they receive. Sensitive, positive and nurturing relationships with staff help them to develop trust in the adults who care for them. As a result, residential students' self-confidence and self-esteem develop significantly as they progress through the school.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

Teaching is good; as a result most students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well and make good progress over time. Teachers expect students to take interest in their studies, engage in lessons and to succeed in their learning. Lessons are planned well according to the abilities and interests of students; as a result, students are enabled to develop good skills in all areas of learning including reading, writing, communication and mathematics. Teachers use a good variety of resources and teaching methods, and lessons are well-paced. They are imaginative in the ways that they engage and captivate students' interests, resulting in an environment that is conducive to learning. Examples of this seen during the inspection include where a student bonded with a newborn chick during a Year 6 environmental studies lesson, and in a Year 8 history lesson on medieval forms of punishment where the teacher dressed up as a dungeon warden and displayed 'forms of punishment' to the students. Teachers listen to students carefully and employ effective questioning in order to ensure that they gain a firm understanding of the subject matter.

Assessment and tracking systems are good. Teachers assess students' academic progress regularly and this helps them know what they need to do to improve. Teachers' marking helps students focus on their accomplishments and improve where necessary. The school has introduced new systems aimed at monitoring progress even more thoroughly, and for using behavioural data to identify and minimise barriers to learning. These systems are not yet fully embedded; as a result, achievement and progress have not been accelerated to the maximum. The school has established effective methods to control challenging behaviour and to de-escalate incidents of aggressive behaviour; as a result, disruptive incidents are decreasing and classrooms are generally calm. Effective and cohesive links between the residential and school staff provide residential pupils with individual support tailored to their needs and help to address presenting issues promptly.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The curriculum is good. It is broad, balanced and enriched with a wide range of activities that are carefully organised to meet students' needs and interests. The curriculum provides students with good opportunities to progress well, especially in developing their skills in reading, writing,

communication and mathematics. Detailed schemes of work and planning demonstrate good progression and how all students are challenged and supported. The curriculum is individualised to suit the needs and interests of young adults who are above compulsory school age, most attending college courses of their choice. Education for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good and provides students with important insights into acceptable social behaviour and how to maintain healthy lifestyles.

Students are well-prepared for their future economic well-being through an emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science both as discrete subjects and through being integrated into other subjects. Examples of this include a focus on weights and measures in a Year 9 food technology lesson where students made kebabs, and an emphasis on grammar and punctuation during a Year 10 ICT lesson on the evaluation of graphic work. The school provides regular career lessons that help students prepare for their futures after they leave school. In addition, students have significant vocational and work-related opportunities, for instance during car mechanics and animal care.

Extra-curricular activities that enrich the curriculum during the school day are very well organised and meet the needs and interests of the students fully. These include activities specially individualised for students on Wednesdays and Fridays such as archery, animal care, bird watching, geocoaching, fishing and trips to promote independence. Although students take part in plenty of valuable activities during the times that they spend in their residences, these are not linked to topics being covered during the school day. As a result, important opportunities for extension and enrichment are missed.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good overall. The relevant independent school regulations and national minimum standards related to the residential setting are met. Staff are committed to providing high levels of care and are competent in promoting students' health and safety. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust; a comprehensive policy is in place and staff have been trained to the required levels with refresher training at the required intervals. Arrangements for the recruitment of new education and residential staff are good. All school and residential staff and the proprietor have undergone the required checks on their suitability to work with children; these and all the other required information are contained in a single central register. Risk assessments for individual students, the premises and activities out of school are carefully attended to and supervision is consistently good. The school works well with parents, carers and other agencies to ensure that students are kept safe at all times.

All of the school's policies related to welfare, health and safety comply fully with current legislation, are reviewed regularly and effectively implemented. Bullying is rare; when it does happen, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. The school places great emphasis on the importance of good behaviour and deals with challenging behaviour effectively; as a result, the atmosphere in school is calm and purposeful. Students learn about safe practices and healthy living through PSHE and science and during regular assemblies. As a result, most are keen to keep themselves safe and achieve healthy lifestyles. The school has a good level of fire safety. Fire risk assessments are thorough, fire drills are held regularly and are duly recorded, and electrical equipment is checked. To the school's credit, many members of staff are trained in first aid, significantly more than is legally required.

The safety of residential students is adequate. The residential setting has many robust safeguarding procedures and practices; students say that they feel safe and that bullying is very rare. A significant number of students do not have confidence in the complaints procedure and some feel restricted from making telephone calls to external agencies because they do not always have free access to telephone rooms. In addition, some aspects of decision-making by staff are not as clear as they need to be. The school is aware of this and is now reviewing its procedures with a

view to amending its guidance for staff.

Residential students experience a good standard of day-to-day pastoral care. They benefit from good routines, clear boundaries and access to a range of supportive activities. As a result they make good progress in their educational, social and personal development. Committed and motivated residential staff work well together and with education staff to provide consistent, good quality care. The health, medical and dietary needs of residential students are well known, effectively provided for and closely monitored by the registered nurse.

**Leadership and management** **Good**

Leadership and management of both the school and the residential provision are good. Senior leaders communicate high expectations and ambition to staff. As a result, teaching is good and this secures good achievement and progress. Overall, systems for managing the performance and professional development of staff are good and meet staff needs. However, opportunities for teachers to share outstanding practice are limited and senior leaders do not consistently challenge teachers to improve. As a result, the quality of teaching is not outstanding. Senior leaders have produced a self-evaluation document and a development plan that are realistic assessments of the school’s strengths and areas that need to improve. They have produced effective curricular policies that ensure that students make good progress in all subject areas including literacy.

Representatives of the proprietor systematically challenge school leaders to improve. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and good achievement and progress has been sustained over time. The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for students to make good progress and the school ethos promotes good behaviour and personal development well. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is strong.

The school works well with parents, carers and other agencies to ensure positive benefits for students. The premises and accommodation are exceptionally suited and very well maintained to support the curriculum and residential care. The school meets all of the requirements related to the provision of information for parents and carers and the complaints procedure includes all of the necessary details. The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is judged as being good because of the good outcomes for residential students, good quality of residential provision and its good leadership. The setting continues to make good progress in its provision for residential students.

Managers of the residential facilities have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the provision. A detailed development plan is in place that has already begun to drive forward improvements as the setting strives to promote excellent outcomes for all of the residential students in its care. Significant changes in personnel appointed to manage the residential provision have been managed very effectively and this has ensured that there is not any adverse impact on the quality of care residential students receive.

Senior leaders have ensured that all of the independent school regulations and national minimum standards for residential schools are met.

<b>Outcomes for residential pupils</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Quality of residential provision and care</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Residential pupils’ safety</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>Leadership and management of the residential provision</b>	<b>Good</b>

## What inspection judgements mean

School and residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education and care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education and care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education and care has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112452
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC040063
<b>Inspection number</b>	422703
<b>DfE registration number</b>	909/6027

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	Independent
<b>School status</b>	Independent residential special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	10–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	41
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	2
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	19
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mr Michael Barrow
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Jude Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Graham Steele
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 November 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£29,390–£68,651
<b>Annual fees (boarders)</b>	£45,469–£106,366
<b>Telephone number</b>	01539 552397
<b>Fax number</b>	01539 552419
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@whs.uk.com">admin@whs.uk.com</a>

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