

# Smallbrook School

Smallbrook Lodge, Smallbrook Road, Whitchurch, SY13 1BX

## Inspection dates

5–7 November 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	Adequate	3
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- The school fulfils its aims well; the curriculum is highly individual and tailored precisely to what students need. As a result, they are well prepared for future life.
- Despite students often finding it difficult to conform to the school's high expectations when admitted, they flourish through the strong relationships formed, the personal approach to learning and staff's effective management of behaviour.
- Those that stay the longest are able to hold mature conversations and work sensibly with others. They have clear aspirations of what courses they wish to complete and achieve a good range of awards.
- Students appreciate the high levels of expertise of teachers and the thorough knowledge they have of their academic and personal development. They also like the excellent resources and facilities they are provided with.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for students to do well. They regularly review the curriculum and the way they help students learn to ensure that what is provided is what they exactly need. Their work with the company's therapists, external agencies and others ensure that there is a clear view about the next steps for each student.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- A few subjects, although taught as part of other subjects, are not as well developed as others.
- The use of residential care staff, as arranged by the company, is inefficient and their role is solely to manage behaviour. They contribute very little to students' learning.
- Although the school has many indirect ways of monitoring the quality of teaching, few direct observations of teaching occur.
- Some of the routine checks which should be made, information to be recorded, and updated training to be arranged are not always undertaken in a timely manner.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- 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

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place at one day's notice.
- Four hours of observation was undertaken across two school sites. Eight lessons, taught by eight staff in total, were seen.
- School policies and other documentation, such as students' records and their work were examined. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the head of post-16, school staff and some of the administrators. Discussions were undertaken with students on both sites.
- No information was able to be gathered from Parent View as no responses had been made by parents and carers. The Ofsted online surveys carried out earlier in the school year were not available.

## Inspection team

George Derby, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Smallbrook school is registered to admit up to 50 boys and girls, aged 11 to 19 years, with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The vast majority of students have had severely disrupted educational and family backgrounds. All are looked after by local authorities and reside in homes run by the company who own the school, Bryn Melyn Care.
- The company provides therapy support to students and a range of other interventions, such as through clinical psychology.
- The school is on two sites, approximately 15 miles apart. The Smallbrook site for students mainly aged 11 to 16 is located in Whitchurch, Shropshire. A second site which opened in 2010, known as Gateway Vocational and Education Training, is located on an industrial park at Sleaf, near Wem. This is for students who are usually post-16 and it also provides a range of vocational learning. Occasionally, younger students may be admitted if the environment or curriculum is deemed appropriate.
- There are currently 21 students on roll, although this number can change from month to month as new students are admitted. During the inspection, a large number of students on the Smallbrook site had been admitted in the last six months.
- The students currently range from Year 9 to Year 12 but many enter the school in Year 10 or 11. All students have special educational needs; 15 have a statement of special educational needs.
- For a high proportion of time students are taught individually by a subject teacher, although there are social and other educational opportunities for them to work together in groups.
- The school's aim is to 'encourage and promote effective, individualised learning where pupil dialogue is encouraged and appropriate learning pathways ascertained'.
- The school was last inspected in December 2010.

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

- Ensure that planning for humanities, a modern foreign language and some aspects of citizenship is in the same level of detail, and studied to the same depth, as other subjects.
- Extend the school's ways of evaluating the quality of teaching to improve it further by ensuring that first-hand evidence is collected, reviewed and areas for improvement identified.
- With the company, review the role and responsibilities of residential care staff who are required to work in the school and ensure they are used efficiently throughout the day.
- With the company, ensure that routine checks to be made, training to be updated and information to be recorded are undertaken to the required timescales.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Students make good progress from their starting points. This includes students who have a statement of special educational needs. Students achieve well and gain a good number of qualifications. A strong focus on basic skills, as well as practical, vocational learning, and the high level of individual support stands them in good stead for the next stage of their education at college or the world of work.

When they enter the school, students' attainment is often low. This is often due to their previous negative experiences of life and non-attendance at previous schools. Staff are successful in helping students to re-engage with learning and to quickly make up lost ground. Initial assessment clearly identifies a student's levels and helps ensure they are on the right course, at the right level. Clear criteria for successful learning help students to achieve their goals and awards. Diagnostic assessment identifies where they need the most help and staff then target support, especially with reading, writing and number work.

Last year, the highest number of GCSE equivalents in the history of the school was gained by students. Students reached a good range of Entry Level (pre GCSE), Level 1 (equivalent to GCSE D to G grades) and some Level 2 qualifications (equivalent to GCSE A\* to C). While for many this still represents attainment at a lower level than their peers, for nearly all it is a significant improvement on past performance.

Once a student has completed sufficient work and show they are capable, they are entered for an award. The relentless focus by staff on students achieving their objectives, reaching the next level or stage and how to reach this, is spelled out regularly. This helps them plan ahead, knowing there is always a higher level or next step.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Good**

The key to the school's success is the way staff are highly committed to helping students improve their behaviour and to believe in themselves. The school's 'multi-agency' approach helps to consider students' needs from all angles and provide individually tailored solutions to students' problems.

On entry to school, self-esteem is very low and behaviour often challenging in nature. Students' concentration and ability to listen for any length of time is often very short lived. Behaviour improves considerably over the period students are in school, although there are still a few occasional lapses where staff need to intervene to help students manage themselves.

Students quickly gain an understanding of right from wrong through the school's clear moral code, their understanding of the consequences of their actions and also through aspects of personal, social and health education connected with the rule of British law and the role of public institutions, such as courts and legal process. They regularly participate in local community activities and raise money for charity.

Many students' attendance has previously been very poor. They generally settle quickly. A few are supported through the school's outreach programme to integrate from their home and then build to full-time attendance. Although attendance at 84% is below the national average, for many students their attendance at Smallbrook school represents a considerable improvement. The school works tirelessly with an extremely small number of hard-to-reach students who are permanently taught at home and who do not come to school. However, the school's success has sometimes been limited by the number of home staff changes and the outreach teacher's ability to gain a

consistent approach because of this.

The range of social opportunities has improved well since the last inspection, for example, group activities in media studies and drama, Forest School planning, and school council decision-making at Gateway, so that students learn to work with each other and learn to respect differing views. Their cultural understanding is developed through a good range of opportunities in art, media, music and the focus on other cultures taught in a range of subjects. The school has made a clear commitment in its teaching policy to ensure that no partisan political views will be presented during lessons and that during any political discussion a balanced range of views will be sought.

### Quality of teaching

### Good

Lessons are thoroughly planned; learning is highly individual and well matched to students' needs. Staff take good account of students' behavioural and learning targets, the information from their thorough initial and ongoing assessments, detailed individual education plans and the computerised tracking of their progress. As a result, students are clear about what is expected of them. Staff's encouraging and supportive approach means that they usually get the best out of students; students like the relaxed way lessons are approached and say it helps them to learn effectively. Staff do all that they can to avoid students' sense of failure and ensure that learning is successful.

Practical skills, such as when measuring and sawing wood, are demonstrated with careful precision so that students' own first attempts are often successful. This spurs them on to try harder and do more. Commentaries made by some staff during lessons add a great deal to students' learning. This gives them a wider perspective on the subject, such as in art when they cover art history or in motor vehicle maintenance when working practices in the motor trade are discussed.

The learning atmosphere in post-16 is considered by students to be like a 'college'. They rise to this and realise that because their behaviour is much improved they can be given more responsibility. Older students are encouraged to do as much for themselves and to work independently, something which they greatly appreciate and know they need to do in preparation for the next stage of education or work.

Staff manage students' well and usually use the school's points system effectively to reward good behaviour. A few students, especially those relatively new to the school, sometimes find it difficult to cooperate at first and staff try a variety of ways of coaxing them to respond. Students say that the incentives they are offered help them when they have difficulty. Staff make clear what they expect and remind students of the awards they are working toward. Occasionally, though, staff miss the opportunity to remind students what they must do to achieve their points or to review these at the end of the lesson.

### Quality of curriculum

### Good

All regulations are met and all areas of learning covered. The opportunities that pupils have to learn have a positive impact on their achievements. These are very wide ranging and selected to very closely match students' needs, interests and abilities. Activities include traditional academic functional skills courses such as in English and mathematics, but they also encompass a wider range such as drama, media and photography and vocational learning, such as in construction and motor vehicle maintenance. Literacy and numeracy skills are also taught and practised in a range subjects, such as when collecting data about averages when using spreadsheets, and learning about leverage when undoing a bolt. Courses are uniquely tailored where needed, such as equine studies at a work-based placement embarked upon this year

Students have gained GCSE passes in the past and a few are embarking on courses this year.

Some older students in post-16 believe that for them they should have the opportunity to study these, as they view them as more important to employers. In fact, older students have a good understanding of future courses and work-related requirements due to the strong careers guidance provided.

Schemes of work and short-term plans are detailed and highly personalised for each student. They clearly outline what each student should achieve with carefully planned steps taken to reach the goals set. Built into the curriculum are opportunities for students to gain incentives based on their participation, good behaviour and effective learning, which supports their personal development and caters effectively for students' special educational needs.

The school provides the National Curriculum, as required by students' statements. Although not a failure of the regulations, students' opportunities to learn about humanities, a modern foreign language and some aspects of citizenship mainly occur as aspects of other subjects. However, the school does not always plan these subjects in the same detail as for other subjects and sometimes it is left to individual teachers to determine the depth of study to be undertaken.

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

### **Adequate**

All regulations are met and students' welfare, health and safety are judged to be adequate. Although not affecting students' health and safety, some checks and training have not been carried out in a timely manner.

The child protection policy and procedures are thoroughly implemented. Key staff have been trained very well in safe recruitment and the checks and processes undertaken when appointing teachers are meticulous. Safeguarding matters are thoroughly followed up and there is considerable liaison within the company and with other agencies. The six designated persons (three for each site) have up-to-date training and child protection matters are regularly discussed with staff throughout the year. Staff have a considerable understanding of such matters. For a number of them though, formal training, arranged by the company, has not been renewed and expired six months ago. They are now booked on training which will take place shortly.

Reporting of any issues which occur, such as behavioural incidents, where first aid has been required, or those relating to safeguarding, is comprehensive. All staff and their details are fully included on the single central register.

On the Smallbrook site, some of the routine checks in relation to fire safety are not always carried out to the timescales set; alarm and emergency lighting checks have not always been undertaken at the frequency recommended. Fire risk assessments are in place and drills are carried out very regularly.

The detailed behaviour policy outlines how good behaviour can be promoted, such as through the points reward system, and how any difficulties should be dealt with by sanctions or, in extreme cases, by physical restraint. High levels of teacher supervision aid the effective management of students. Anti-bullying procedures are clearly in place; where bullying sometimes does occur, students say that staff deal with matters quickly and there is good liaison with the children's home when incidents originate there.

The school has considerably improved its admission register and the recording of student information since the last inspection. The register goes well beyond basic requirements, although some students' last school details are not recorded. Attendance data is thoroughly recorded and analysed. Office staff follow up students' absence or late arrival with the children's home staff, although in a small number of instances this information is not received quickly enough by the school.

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

Leadership and management are good and all standards are met. Staff are highly focused on the core purpose of the school, which results in students' good personal and academic achievement. A key strength is the way that the headteacher has built a highly skilled staff team across the main school and the post-16 vocational site, whose skills complement each other's well. In addition, individual programmes and the curriculum as a whole are regularly reviewed to ensure they precisely meet students' needs.

The school has improved well since the last inspection and self-evaluation is generally accurate. A new monitoring system provides a clear view of pupils' progress from their starting points, which is now thoroughly tracked. Leaders' clear vision for the development of the school has led to a superb extension of provision at Gateway. Academic and vocational programmes have been developed very successfully, and students have risen well to the challenge of greater independence and responsibility in a more 'grown-up' atmosphere.

Appraisal of staff's work is regular and thoroughly covers the progress that students make and the awards they are working to, teaching issues and the learning of students. There is little direct or systematic observation of teaching, often due to the sensitivity around students being taught on an individual basis. The school is considering the ways it can arrange this, such as through the recording of video evidence.

Training is organised well to support the development of the school and the therapeutic approach staff used to support pupils. Training logs show that staff have considerable opportunities relevant to their work. Despite this, some staff's basic child protection training was out of date by the time of the inspection.

The company has arranged for a large number of residential care staff from the children's home to transport the students to school and to stay during the day. Their role is exclusively one of behaviour management and they do not contribute to lessons or activities. They spend the large majority of the day sitting unoccupied. Discussions about this are being undertaken with the company, as it is recognised that this requirement is a considerable inefficient use of staff.

An excellent range of teaching accommodation with specialist facilities, including motor vehicle, construction workshops and horticulture facilities and resources, has been provided. Parents, usually social workers *in loco parentis*, are provided with the appropriate policies and information.

## What inspection judgements mean

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

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134000
<b>Inspection number</b>	422758
<b>DfE registration number</b>	893/6026

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Independent special school
<b>School status</b>	Independent School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	21
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Sarah Morgan (Bryn Melyn Care)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Sinclair
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 December 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£30,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01948 661110
<b>Fax number</b>	01948 666979
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