

Oversands School

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

Inspection dates 22–24 September 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
Quality of care and support in the residential provision	Outstanding
How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision	Good
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management at all levels and across the school are good. There is a cohesive approach to ensuring student's good outcomes.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge successfully to plan lessons which are interesting and linked well to students' needs. Teachers build effectively on students' previous learning, with clear steps to ensure gains in students' knowledge are secure.
- Students, on the whole, progress rapidly from their low starting points. Sixth-form students build on this success by following appropriately challenging courses at a local college.
- Adults have a thorough understanding of each student's welfare needs. Consequently, relationships between students and adults are strong and set the bedrock for students' personal development.
- Students behave well. As they leave the school they are beginning to grow into well-rounded young adults, able to contribute constructively to society.
- The residential provision contributes well to the wider development of all students. Students resident at the school benefit from outstanding care and support.
- The school's systems to safeguard students are robust. Students are safe at the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all students reach the highest standard of which they are capable.
- Teachers focus insufficiently on the development of students' understanding to enable them to be more independent and attain at higher levels.
- A small proportion of students do not attend regularly.
- In monitoring the quality of teaching, leaders at all levels tend to focus on what the teacher is doing rather than on the impact of teaching on students' learning.
- It is not always made clear to residential students how senior leaders have acted on students' suggestions to improve the school.

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

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers' planning for lessons and their feedback to students focuses relentlessly on how students should achieve higher standards.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to outstanding by ensuring leaders' feedback to teachers from lesson observation focuses precisely on the impact of teaching on students' progress.
- Ensure leaders in the residential provision give feedback promptly to students following any actions they have taken as a result of students' suggestions for improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision are good

How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision is good

- Leaders ensure that all the required regulations for independent residential special schools are met. The relatively new headteacher, along with his senior leadership team, has created a relaxed yet resolute learning environment within the school. Many students, often with a history of challenging behaviour, low attendance and poor attitudes to learning, make good progress to achieve academic and vocational qualifications at a level close to their peers nationally.
- Residential students who have attended the school for some time recognise and speak positively about the changes made to the culture and working practices during the last year. These students describe an approach which is sensitive to their specific needs.
- The headteacher sets high expectations and leads by example, particularly when he is conversing with students. The school's success is built on strong relationships between adults and students. Students respond well because they trust adults who demonstrate that they care for students' individual needs. Adults share information with each other effectively and, as a consequence, are able to respond quickly and appropriately when students require additional care, support and guidance.
- The headteacher and the proprietorial body have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and what remains to be done. The headteacher has used his evaluation to produce an action plan which carries forward his vision for the school. Clear priorities and targets set the stage for further improvements in teaching as a means to raising standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Consequently students, including those who are disadvantaged, those with special educational needs and those in the sixth form, make good progress both in terms of academic achievement and personal development.
- The school's curriculum is interwoven throughout the school day, on into the evening and, for some, into the weekend. Additional activities such as football matches with other schools, open water swimming, archery and sailing provide students with a renewed confidence in their ability to learn. Evidence of the school's promotion of students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is clearly visible in displays of students' work and in their experiences both in and beyond the school. Adults are effective in their drive to promote the tolerance and respect of difference by celebrating individuality and challenging stereotypes. Leaders promote effectively equality of opportunity for all students.
- Students are prepared well for their next steps and for a life in modern Britain. Students receive impartial careers guidance which results in the vast majority of them moving on to destinations which are appropriate to their needs and future aspirations. They learn about the differences in belief held by some people and apply this knowledge in lessons such as citizenship and personal, social and health education. Fundamental British values, such as the rule of law, are discussed at key times such as during assemblies led by senior leaders. Students also benefit from additional guidance in how to be resilient in the face of radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders have ensured that a system is in place to ensure teachers have the skills necessary to improve their performance. Teachers' and other adults' continuing professional development is aligned effectively to the school's performance management policy. Consequently, actions such as observations of teaching and learning by middle leaders and the sharing of good practice with other schools are beginning to have a positive impact in the improved outcomes for students. However, feedback from leaders to teachers does not always focus sharply on the impact of teaching on how students learn and the progress they make.
- The school's arrangements to safeguard students are strong and effective. Students are clear about who they will turn to if they have a problem. They feel safe because of the high ratio of staff to students in the school. Leaders have ensured that all incidents of students being unable to manage their own behaviour and requiring physical intervention by adults are recorded precisely. The school's own records show that leaders' actions have led to a reduction in the number of serious incidents involving students, compared to a similar period last year.
- The school's systems to keep parents and other professionals informed of students' progress are effective. The school's website meets requirements and provides appropriate information to parents, carers and local authorities. Representatives of local authorities spoken to said that communication between the school and the placing authority is a strength because leaders respond quickly to any concerns raised.

- Leadership of the residential provision is strong. Adults are well organised and coordinated throughout their shift, with high levels of communication, especially at key change-over times. As a result, the residential setting is an essential cog in the workings of the school.
- Leaders of the residential provision listen effectively to and take swift action following concerns or suggestions raised by students. However, the benefits of this are reduced because students do not always receive prompt feedback from leaders on the action they have taken.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The proprietorial body, through its directors, works effectively with the school to promote the headteacher’s vision to improve the school to outstanding. Directors visit the school frequently and are able to verify for themselves the school’s good progress, for example, in relation to areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.
 - Effective systems are in place to share good practice with other schools in the Witherslack Group. Peer support between leaders is a regular feature of meetings and is beginning to pay dividends, for example in the headteacher’s plans to raise standards in reading across the school.
 - Systems to link teachers’ salary progression to their performance along with the performance management of the headteacher are robust and understood well by the proprietorial body. The performance management system supports strongly the professional development of staff. For example, middle leaders are working towards national professional qualifications in leadership.
 - A senior director has responsibility for safeguarding and therefore directors have ensured that the school has a clear system in place for responding to safeguarding concerns.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective in all aspects of the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers use the information they have about students’ abilities and needs effectively to inform their planning for lessons. Lessons are generally well matched to students’ specific needs and as a result students are, on the whole, engaged in their learning, including in literacy, reading and mathematics.
- Teachers’ excellent relationships with students are used well to create an informal atmosphere in which the large majority of students thrive and build in confidence. For example, students were observed reading aloud in lessons and using appropriate strategies to correct their own mistakes when necessary. Also, good examples of extended writing were observed in several classrooms across the school.
- Students are assessed frequently and results are scrutinised by leaders each half term. Leaders’ analysis of assessment records demonstrate that almost all students make similar progress to that of their peers in mainstream schools.
- Students are proud of their work and will explain to visitors how they have improved and are keen to show the fruits of their labour. For example, in food technology students’ generosity in sharing their cooked food was matched only by the high standard of the end product.
- Teachers’ subject knowledge is strong, particularly in mathematics. Many teachers hook the students in to learning by combining their subject knowledge with their understanding of students’ individual needs. For example in an English lesson the teacher linked Macbeth to a teaching assistant with Scottish heritage and students became engaged and listened well.
- A good proportion of students are identified as having additional special educational needs. These students receive extra support to ensure they progress at a rate in line with their peers in school. Interventions ranging from support with reading and writing through to intensive speech and language therapy are of a high quality. Leaders’ evaluations of the impact of school-based interventions demonstrate that this group of students makes good progress overall.
- Teachers adhere to the whole-school marking policy by giving thorough feedback related to either the students’ behaviour or the next task they should complete in order to move on. However, students do not learn in enough depth because they do not understand how to reach the highest standards.
- Adults who work in the residential setting make a strong contribution to the overall quality of teaching. Students’ opportunities to extend their personal, social, emotional and behavioural skills are enhanced through the wide range of activities provided after school and at weekends. Leaders records show that students who reside at the school progress at a faster rate than their peers in school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- Students that inspectors spoke with said they are confident that adults are always available to support and advise them should the need arise. Students were observed throughout the school as being relaxed in the presence of adults because adults react positively in response to students' requests for support. This is a strong indication of the school's open culture which supports improvements in students' welfare.
- Students reported that bullying is rare in school. They also said that on the odd occasions when bullying does happen it is quickly dealt with, often through mediation. The school's own records corroborate this view.
- The school makes good use of opportunities beyond the classroom to strengthen students' resilience in wider society. Assemblies are used effectively to promote and reinforce whole-school messages, for example, in terms of tolerance of difference. During the inspection, an assembly observed by the inspector concentrated on a game of 'whispers'. This light-hearted start to the day was successful in engaging students to reflect on the importance of listening and the avoidance of mixed messages.
- The contribution made to students' care and support by the residential setting is outstanding. Residential students benefit from having outstanding relationships with residential staff who provide clear boundaries along with a safe and stimulating environment. This support, coupled with established structures and routines, allows new pupils to settle quickly.
- Strong relationships in the residential setting are typified by a morning routine which is flexible enough to meet students' specific needs. This creates a calm start to the day for all the students. Consequently, residential students arrive at school relaxed and ready to learn.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- On the whole, students respond to adults' requests and instructions quickly. Students' confidence grows during their time at the school. This enables them to participate well in lessons and contributes to their good progress.
- Students, in general, enter the school with a history of challenging behaviour and poor attendance, often refusing to engage in education. The vast majority of students make great strides in improving their behaviour due to adults' relentless resolve to see the positives in each student. The school's detailed records show that over time almost all students show a significant improvement in their behaviour along with a significant increase in their ability to self-manage their conduct. Records also show that serious incidents in the residential setting are becoming increasingly few and far between.
- A high staff-to-student ratio ensures that adults are well placed to intervene and support students quickly and skilfully should the need arise. As a result, disruption to learning from incidents around the school is kept to a minimum. In turn, a calm atmosphere which contributes effectively to learning is the norm.
- Students willingly told inspectors how they have made improvements in their behaviour. Opportunities to practise good behaviour in new situations and to take responsibility abound. The school's photographic records and displays, along with discussions with students, demonstrate that students manage their own behaviour well when involved in off-site activities.
- Poor attendance by a small minority of students results in attendance which is low overall. Leaders' records show that this group of students make less progress than other students in the school.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- The academic achievement of students across all year groups is good because teachers engage students in learning. As a result, students progress well overall, including in literacy, reading and numeracy.
- Disadvantaged students achieve as well as other students in school in a wide range of subjects. As with all other students, the proportion making the expected progress exceeds the national figure, although few make more than the expected progress.
- The most-able students are challenged successfully and make similar progress to other students nationally. However, teachers often concentrate on ensuring that students complete tasks without giving sufficient consideration to how they learn or how to make more rapid progress. Consequently, although a higher proportion make expected progress compared with national averages, few exceed this to reach the highest

standards.

- Students with additional special educational needs are well supported and progress at a rate in line with their peers. The school has responded efficiently to the introduction of education, health and care plans for students. Leaders use their most up-to-date assessment information to ensure no time is wasted when students enrol at the school. Students receive a thorough induction into the school and begin to close the gaps in their learning almost immediately.
- The vast majority of students gain a range of academic and vocational qualifications at GCSE or level 1. The school's own records show that the majority of last year's Year 11 leavers used their qualifications as a stepping-stone into further education, training or employment.

Sixth form provision

is good

- All of the independent school standards are met.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good, in part, because the person responsible for this group of students has high expectations. Students have a programme of study which builds effectively on their previous learning. The vocational qualifications followed at college are at a level which provides sufficient challenge while offering a link to future employment or training.
- The curriculum is appropriate and meets students' needs. Non-vocational subjects are studied at school. For example, sixth form students follow a study skills programme along with English and mathematics in order to boost their end of Key Stage 4 grades. They attend college to follow vocational courses at an appropriate level.
- Sixth form students are safe when they attend college because the person responsible visits and contacts college frequently. Systems for the students to report any concerns or difficulties they may have are in place.
- The sixth form leader plans to make use of both the external careers support and guidance offered by the school, alongside opportunities offered by the college to ensure that students are clear about possible future pathways. However, it is too early to show the impact of this initiative.
- Early indications are that students who have started their vocational courses at college are developing their employability skills. These students have full attendance, their behaviour is excellent and their self-esteem is growing significantly.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

are good

- Leaders have taken appropriate action to meet all of the specific areas for improvement following the last inspection of the residential provision.
- Residential pupils who have attended the school for some time recognise and speak positively about the changes made to culture and working practices during the last year. For example, they described how staff deal sensitively with students following incidents and take account of students' differences.
- Inspectors received positive feedback from parents and other professionals regarding the progress being made by residential pupils. Local authority representatives spoken to also highlighted excellent levels of communication maintained by residential staff as a strength of the school.
- The opening of Merewood House since the last Ofsted inspection of the residential provision, has improved the standard and quality of residential provision. The house is furnished to a high specification and all bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms to allow students privacy.
- The good range of evening and weekend activities is designed successfully to stimulate students' interests. For example, popular group activities that include visits to a skate park, cold water swims and various activities linked to arts, crafts, sports and independence, such as cooking, ensure that the varying needs of students are met well.

Quality of care and support in the residential provision is outstanding

- Residential students benefit from having outstanding relationships with residential staff, who provide clear boundaries along with a safe and stimulating environment. The excellent support coupled with the well-established structure and routines allow new pupils to settle and progress quickly.
- Residential students are at ease in the company of staff. Students were observed approaching and seeking staff out both for advice and to converse socially. Residential students, without exception, are happy to interact with staff.
- The school's records, verified by inspectors' observations, demonstrate high levels of communication and consultation between staff and students. Students are frequently given choices, within certain parameters, and therefore contribute effectively to the running of the residential provision. This results in very good levels of behaviour in the residential provision, as observed by all inspectors throughout the inspection.
- All of the residential students spoken to confirmed that they had someone they could talk with. All of the students are aware of the school's complaints procedures. However, no complaints, issues or concerns were raised by students during the inspection.
- Residential students are kept safe at the school. Systems to keep residential students safe are robust. Students feel safe while they are at the school.

School details

Unique reference number	112452
Social care unique reference number	SC040063
Inspection number	10007025
DfE registration number	909/6027

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.

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.

Type of school	Independent
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	8–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	3
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	11
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Ms Jude Jones
Headteacher	Mr Robin Adams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,687 – £79,167
Annual fees (boarders)	£62,537 – £106,366
Telephone number	01539 552397
Website	http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/oversands-school/
Email address	oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–10 October 2013

Information about this school

- Oversands School is an independent residential special school registered for male and female students aged between eight and 19 years. There are currently 36 boys on roll. Eleven students are borders at the school for up to 39 weeks of the year.
- All students currently on roll have either an education, health and care plan, or statement of special educational needs. In the vast majority of cases, these are related to their primary need of social, emotional and behaviour difficulties.
- All students currently on roll are eligible for pupil premium funding (a government grant used by schools to support disadvantaged pupils).
- The school has operated since 1973 as part of the Witherslack Group of Schools and was known as Witherslack Hall School prior to its change of name in August 2015.
- The school is located in the building and grounds of a former country estate in south Cumbria.
- Oversands School aims to develop resilience in young people through teaching the skills of emotional

literacy and developing confidence and trust within a carefully structured environment.

- Students who attend the post-16 provision have the opportunity to attend local colleges in order to follow vocational qualifications.
- All pupils who currently attend the school are of White British origin.
- Leaders have re-established the sixth form provision with effect from September 2015. There were no students in the sixth form during the last academic year, and there are three in this year's cohort.
- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2013 and by Ofsted's social care inspectors in September 2014.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice. It included an inspection of the residential provision.
- The inspectors observed several part-lessons, three of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- The inspectors observed all aspects of the school's work including in the evening and early morning.
- The inspectors looked at students' work and at the school's records of their progress.
- The inspectors held meetings with, or were in contact with, senior leaders, staff, students, parents and a range of other professionals.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school.
- The inspectors checked the school's compliance with the appropriate regulations for independent residential special schools.

Inspection team

Drew Crawshaw, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Graham Robinson

Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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