

Lakeside School

Naylors Road, Liverpool, Merseyside L27 2YA

Inspection dates

10–12 January 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school is positive, nurturing and very well organised. Staff are committed to pupils and their social and academic achievement. These, together with many other highly effective features, ensure that pupils make rapid gains in their learning.
- The headteacher is at the centre of the school's success. Her high expectations are shared across the school. She holds the confidence of pupils, parents and staff.
- Leaders seek opportunities to further improve the school and work in partnership with others to bring these about.
- Pupils' rapid academic progress means that any gaps between their achievement and that of others are reducing.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend very well. Their attendance is increasing. They are motivated to try hard by the support and rewards they receive. They are proud of their school.
- Leaders and other staff have a strong focus on all aspects of pupils' safety. The arrangements to ensure pupils are safeguarded from risk are thorough and effective. Staff are well trained.
- The systems to help pupils to manage their own behaviour are finely tuned to pupils' needs. These systems work very effectively and lead to pupils learning how to behave increasingly well. The school is calm and pleasant.
- Lessons interest and engage pupils. Teachers, teaching assistants and other staff work in close partnership to help pupils learn. They know individual pupils and their learning and wider needs very well. The team of therapists provides further effective support to pupils.
- Pupils and parents value the school's work highly. Local authorities which place pupils at the school fully recognise how well it supports them.
- There are strong relationships between leaders and staff from the proprietor's central team. The proprietor recognises the strengths of the school but also systematically provides challenge to ensure that it continues to develop. Sometimes, the planning for checks on this development is not as sharp as possible.
- The proprietor works closely with leaders to ensure that 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 the national minimum standards for boarding schools and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders further build on the school's success by sharpening how the intended impact and review of planned actions are recorded so that it is easier to demonstrate that completed actions have been successful and so determine what the next steps should be.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher provides clear and consistent direction for this highly effective school. She is dedicated to ensuring that the often complex needs of pupils are met. Her expectations of staff and pupils are high and her positive approach means that everyone works very hard to reach them.
- The ethos that leaders have created is of care and nurture for pupils. All staff work within this to support pupils as individuals, successfully responding to their social, emotional and behavioural challenges and so allowing them to make rapid academic progress. Leaders ensure that staff work as a coherent team with consistent approaches and standards but with the necessary flexibility to respond to pupils' individual needs.
- The school is very well organised which means that it runs smoothly. Communication between staff about pupils is frequent. This means that any changes in their behaviour or learning are picked up quickly and responded to. Staff complete entries in daily diaries which go home for parents to see and reply to. This further increases staff knowledge of pupils and their needs.
- Leaders have an honest and accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and how they can build on these further. They are not complacent and welcome advice and information from external review and accreditation if this helps them to improve the school. Much of this review is supported through the work of the proprietor, for example, in providing external consultants and specialist members of staff to consider the effectiveness of the school. Focused reviews from others confirm the strength of the school's provision over time. Sometimes, however, the planning and recording of developments lack details which would make it easier for leaders and others to ensure that actions put in place have the greatest effect.
- Staff morale is high. Leaders invite ideas from others to improve the school's provision. Those staff who spoke to the inspector indicated that recent changes, such as allowing teachers to use more of their professional judgement in deciding their teaching approach, have been welcomed because these mean that teaching improves even more. Staff also recognise opportunities provided by the training that is available to them, for example the training enabling teaching assistants to become teachers.
- The curriculum is very well planned and inspires pupils to learn. It is closely based on the national curriculum, which means that pupils are ready to return to mainstream schools, whenever possible, after they leave the school. For some pupils, leaders arrange for individuals to experience a bespoke curriculum tailored to their current learning and other needs. Leaders have decided that geography, history and science should be taught in intensive three-week blocks. This arrangement is suited to the particular needs of pupils because it allows them to consolidate their learning and gain success.
- Pupils' experience is broadened through clubs and other activities before school and at lunchtime, and in the weekly 'children's choice' afternoons. The activities offered range from dance and drama to horse riding. These are particularly enjoyed by pupils, as they are able to choose what they do.

- Visitors to school from organisations such as the police and ambulance service add to pupils' wider understanding of their society and how they can make a contribution to it.
- The school's own surveys indicate that parents are very positive about the help the school gives its pupils. The parents who spoke to the inspector reflected this, and the contrast between their children's current and previous educational experience. Two parents who said, 'my child has come on leaps and bounds at this school' summed up these views. A representative of one of the local authorities which places pupils at the school further added to this very positive picture, talking about being 'absolutely thrilled' at the impact the school has on pupils.

Governance

- The proprietor provides active support and challenge to the school. The arrangements for this have been changed since the previous inspection with, for example, a school board including representatives of the proprietor and senior leaders taking responsibility for some aspects of governance. This, together with close working with the proprietor's recently appointed regional director for education, mean that school leaders are now held even more closely to account.
- Many systems and procedures used in the school are based on models provided by the proprietor. These include the arrangements for checking how well teachers and other members of staff are performing. Staff are set clear annual targets including some relating to pupils' success. Leaders conduct regular checks to make sure that staff are being effective. This allows the proprietor to link any annual pay increases to how well staff are performing. This system is also used to identify what training or other development staff may want or need.
- The fees charged are significant but reflect the very small classes and high levels of support in the school. The proprietor is fully aware of the responsibility to make sure that this funding is used properly for the benefit of pupils. It is carefully accounted for with the local authorities that send pupils to the school.
- The proprietor recently arranged for members of the Witherslack Group's central team to check that the school was meeting the independent school standards. As in this inspection, this identified that the school was meeting the requirements of these standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive very regular training and updates to make sure that they know about the different risks pupils may face. They are also required to keep up to date by reading the latest guidance from the government as it is published. In addition, they are trained in first aid and on ways to reduce the need for any physical contact between staff and pupils when managing behaviour. If any concerns about a pupil arise, these are recorded in detail and shared with external partners as needed to make sure that the pupil concerned is safe.
- The single central record of pre-employment checks on staff is kept meticulously.

- The safeguarding policy is easily available on the school's website for parents and others to refer to if necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching across different classes and subjects challenges and engages pupils and ensures that they learn well and make rapid progress.
- Teachers and other staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils to plan learning which meets pupils' needs. The small class sizes mean that no pupils are missed out of class discussion and questioning. Learning is enhanced further because teachers ask questions which are closely targeted at individuals. Teachers plan for a range of activities that inspire and capture pupils' interest. Consequently, pupils listen carefully and try hard. When pupils are at risk of losing concentration or behaving less well, teachers and teaching assistants skilfully respond so that everyone's learning can continue.
- The individualised approach to teaching and learning means that pupils with different needs and starting points, including the most able, receive the support they need to do well.
- Teachers are aware of the importance of English and mathematics teaching. Their advice guided leaders to change from English being taught in ability sets, to the mixed-age classes in which pupils learn in other subjects. This reduced delays and disturbance from changing groups and allows teachers to more easily extend English teaching into other learning. An inspector saw this approach being used very effectively when younger pupils were engrossed in their mathematical study of shape and volume using practical scientific equipment. At the same time, they were being challenged to extend their writing skills and vocabulary.
- Across all subjects, teachers have strong subject knowledge and provide learning experiences which match the subject content. In addition, learning resources are used well. For example, practical experimentation is widely used in science.
- Teachers provide pupils with frequent opportunities to think about and discuss issues that promote an understanding of respect for others, including those who have a different culture or faith to their own. This helps pupils to be tolerant of others and to play their part in the school's welcoming and open approach.
- The systems for assessing pupils are well organised. They start as pupils join the school in order to establish a well-informed academic baseline and to understand their social and other needs. Teachers and leaders regularly discuss how pupils are moving forward from their starting points. If they appear to be falling behind, staff adjust their teaching or wider support so that learning continues apace.
- The school's marking and feedback policy was recently revised. Teachers use it consistently. The small class sizes mean that much feedback about learning in class is through talking to pupils about how well they are doing. Teachers also help pupils to understand if their behaviours and effort have been as good as expected in each lesson through 'ticks' which then contribute to the school's reward system. This is highly valued by pupils and so helps them to make sure that their behaviour is good enough for them and others to learn.

- Leaders successfully ensure that teachers' assessment is accurate by arranging for joint checking across other schools in the proprietor's group of schools and with a local mainstream primary school. In addition, as they progress through the school, pupils are set external tests which are nationally standardised against what is typical for children of particular ages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' strong academic progress is only possible because of the rapid improvement in their attitudes and behaviour which the school achieves. Pupils are very well supported and cared for by the academic staff and the team of therapists working together. The therapists provide additional specialist support, with, for example, pupils' mental health, emotional needs and physical skills.
- Pupils are very well known by staff. This means that staff can identify small changes in pupils' mood, helping staff identify what might be wrong when a pupil is upset.
- Pupils are exceptionally well supervised at all times during the school day.
- The pupils who spoke to inspectors said that the school helps them to behave well. Leaders have established a very clear reward system for good work and effort. For example, pupils enjoy displaying the 'blue moon' rewards they receive on large photographs of themselves; these are respected by all. There is very little bullying, with only one instance recorded over the previous school year. Pupils told the inspector that they feel very safe in school and know whom to turn to should they need help.
- The school's ethos is underpinned by a strong sense of moral values. Pupils are given many opportunities to understand the difference between right and wrong, particularly in their relationships with other pupils and with staff. They flourish through the school's work in this aspect of providing for their social and moral development.
- Leaders and other staff take great care to ensure that detailed arrangements are put in place to ensure that pupils are very well prepared as they move to their new schools at the end of key stage 2. A small number of pupils continue into key stage 3. Teaching of these older pupils is very closely matched to their needs and includes, for example, opportunities to start to learn about careers.
- Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when using computers or other electronic devices. Pupils' access to the internet is made safer because access to unsuitable websites has been blocked.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school is calm and orderly. Pupils know the school's systems well and respond quickly to staff instructions. The relationships between staff and pupils are very strong, which builds pupils' confidence. Pupils are keen to talk to visitors and get on well together. They are thoughtful and caring.

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons makes a strongly positive contribution to their learning. The inspector saw learning progressing well as a result.
- While pupils' circumstances and needs mean that some may exhibit challenging behaviour on occasions, staff manage such situations well. Staff members' carefully kept records, regular discussions about pupils and planning to meet pupils' needs mean that such incidents reduce over time.
- Attendance is high and is increasing. This reflects the way staff encourage families to make sure that pupils attend well but also indicates that pupils want to be in school and learning. Parents report that this is in marked contrast to their children's attitude before they joined this school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils typically join the school with incomplete assessment of their learning because of disruption to their previous education. Leaders, teachers and therapists assess pupils' potential as they join the school. The tests they use include those which measure ability as opposed to prior learning. These assessments indicate that most pupils are of middle ability and a small number are most-able. Leaders set targets from these starting points which require pupils to catch up with pupils outside the school. Pupils learn rapidly and so reduce this gap. Some are so successful that they are able to re-join mainstream schools when they leave.
- The pupils currently in the school are from Year 3 upwards. Some join in Years 5 or 6. When this is the case, pupils sometimes have not had enough time to catch up by the end of Year 6. In these circumstances, the school can accommodate pupils to the end of Year 8. The academic and wider success of pupils, together with careful liaison between staff in different schools, mean that, when they leave, pupils are well prepared for their next school.
- The rates of progress expected of the most able pupils are faster than those of others. This means that teachers ensure that they fully challenge such pupils. As the school does not receive the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, leaders do not identify this group within the school. However, the high expectations for the learning of each pupil and the school's success in achieving these expectations mean that pupils who may be disadvantaged achieve rates of progress at least as fast as those of other pupils elsewhere. Similarly, leaders and teachers do not accept pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities as an excuse or reason for slower academic progress.
- The school aims for as many pupils as possible to take the national curriculum tests. In 2016, all Year 6 pupils made progress in English, mathematics and science at least as fast as is typically seen nationally, and for over two thirds, rates were even faster.
- Observation of pupils' learning, and scrutiny of books and the files of pupils' completed work confirm that these high outcomes are built up right from the start.
- Reading is taught effectively. Some pupils who could not read when they joined the school learn how to read very quickly. The school's library has a good range of books which helps pupils to develop their reading skills to find things out and to read for enjoyment.

- Leaders and teachers recognise that pupils' wider outcomes, including their ability to understand themselves and others and to control their behaviour, are of at least equal importance to their academic outcomes. The rapid development of such aspects is a key strength of the school. Pupils' success in these areas is recognised and valued by parents.

School details

Unique reference number	133262
DfE registration number	341/6082
Inspection number	10026007

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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Craig Baxter
Headteacher	Victoria Size
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,793 to £75,743
Telephone number	0151 4877211
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/lakeside-school
Email address	admin@lakesideschool.uk.com
Date of previous inspection	22–24 January 2014

Information about this school

- Lakeside School is an independent day special school. It caters for boys and girls aged five to 13 years with complex learning and communication difficulties and associated challenging behaviours.
- The school was registered in January 2001. It is located in a semi-rural environment on the outskirts of Huyton near Liverpool.
- The school is registered for up to 34 pupils. There are currently 31 pupils on roll, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- Each pupil is referred and funded by placing authorities and the school currently provides for pupils from six different local authorities. A small number of pupils are children looked after.
- The school uses no alternative off-site educational provision.
- Since the previous inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed and some other members of staff have joined the school or have new roles. In addition, the proprietor has introduced additional arrangements for the governance of the school.
- Lakeside School is part of the Witherslack Group, which operates nationwide. It provides education and care for children and young people with complex needs.
- The school aims to provide a family-orientated, therapeutic and nurturing environment, where children grow in confidence and self-esteem, in order to make academic progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector toured the school site accompanied by the headteacher.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school. He visited an assembly. He observed pupils' conduct in lessons and at other times during the school day
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders, representatives of the proprietor and a group of members of staff. He met formally with a group of pupils and spoke to others during lessons and at other times during the school day. The inspector listened to a small number of pupils as they read.
- The inspector spoke by telephone to a representative of a local authority which places pupils at the school and to a small number of parents.
- The inspector examined pupils' books in a scrutiny of samples of written work across a range of pupils and subjects and in files compiled by the school to provide evidence of the progress pupils make.
- The inspector reviewed documents to confirm compliance with the independent school standards and to provide other inspection evidence. These documents included policies, health and safety records and other safeguarding information, leaders' summaries of pupils' achievement and their own evaluation of the school and development planning, minutes of meetings, and the attendance and admissions registers. The inspector examined the school's website.
- Too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were received for information from these to be available during the inspection. However, the inspector reviewed the findings from surveys of parents' views conducted by the school; also, 29 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were received and the inspector also considered the results of the school's own surveys of staff opinion. In addition, he looked at a summary of pupils' views collected by the school.

Inspection team

David Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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