

# Oversands School

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

## Inspection dates

16–18 January 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Sixth form provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders, including the board of governors, are passionate, committed and dedicated to transforming the lives of the young people in their care. They are successful in this mission.
- The proprietor, directors and regional directors hold leaders robustly to account for the quality of education that the school provides. They meet all of the independent school standards.
- The arrangements for safeguarding across the school are exemplary. Leaders provide staff with good-quality, ongoing training that is responsive to pupils' needs.
- Staff feel very well supported by senior leaders. They receive appropriate supervision. As a result, staff morale is very high and the school is a happy place in which to work.
- Pupils make good progress in this school. By the end of key stage 4, they achieve a good range of qualifications, including GCSEs.
- Children looked after make good progress in their learning due to high-quality support.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. However, leaders have yet to evaluate the impact of the newly introduced key stage 2 curriculum on pupils' learning and progress.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are equipped to talk about their barriers to learning. This helps pupils to develop independence and a secure understanding about what makes them unique.
- The effective therapeutic support provided by a range of clinical professionals enables pupils to overcome multiple complex needs. The wraparound care that pupils receive is excellent.
- Overall, teaching ensures that pupils make good progress in their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. They do not use the range of teaching strategies available to them to ensure that pupils make more rapid progress.
- Students make good progress and achieve well in the sixth form. Programmes of study are personalised to meet individual students' needs. They incorporate opportunities for high-quality work experience and work-related learning.
- Pupils' behaviour is good overall. However, some pupils do not regulate their own behaviour sufficiently well.
- Pupils' attendance at school is excellent.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

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

- Further increase teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, so pupils make more rapid progress.
- Review and refine the strategies that teachers use in the classroom to maximise pupils' learning and progress.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the newly introduced primary curriculum to ensure that it meets the learning needs of key stage 2 pupils.
- Improve some pupils' ability to regulate their own behaviour so learning time is not lost.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders, the board of governors and the Witherslack Group are extremely passionate about providing a high-quality education for some of the most vulnerable pupils in society. They are successful in enabling many pupils to re-engage in education.
- Leaders provide high-quality ongoing training for staff. New staff value the rigorous induction programme that they receive. Staff feel that the training opportunities afforded to them enable them to fulfil their role well.
- Leaders know their school well. They accurately evaluate the school's effectiveness and identify appropriate priorities for further improvement. Leaders recognise, however, that some of their key priorities would benefit from more quantifiable measures of impact.
- Arrangements for evaluating staff performance are extremely effective. Leaders set appropriate targets. There are also regular opportunities to review the progress that staff make towards meeting their targets. Leaders effectively link the outcomes of performance management reviews to the ongoing staff training programme.
- The proprietor, governors and leaders ensure that staff well-being is a key priority. Staff are dedicated to supporting the pupils in their care, despite the challenges that pupils face. They are an extremely cohesive and competent group of professionals. They feel extremely well supported by leaders and they receive appropriate supervision. Consequently, staff morale is high.
- Middle leaders are confident in their roles. They are now developing the skills required to hold teachers to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas.
- Leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching. They use the findings from their monitoring processes effectively to improve continuously the quality of teaching.
- Leaders ensure that staff have high expectations of their pupils. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve good outcomes in relation to their starting points. Children looked after make particularly good progress. That said, leaders acknowledge that some pupils need more challenge to excel and reach their full potential.
- The pastoral care leaders provide is excellent. The Witherslack Group ensures that high-quality clinical professionals support pupils to overcome their individual barriers to learning. Wraparound care is exceedingly effective because it enables pupils to access learning.
- Behaviour management is a key strength in this school. Leaders have high expectations of pupils, and staff consistently implement the positive behaviour support policy.
- Leaders have taken effective action to reduce the number of incidents requiring the restraint of pupils. Since the previous inspection, the proprietor, leaders and governors have reviewed policies and practices around restraint handling across their schools. Leaders track meticulously incidents where restraint has been necessary and they review each incident for any learning points. Pupils say they are not unduly restrained. Leaders only use restraint techniques where pupils put themselves in dangerous situations.

- Parents are extremely positive about the school. During the inspection, some parents met with the lead inspector to say how much the school had transformed their home lives. Pupils who were previously disengaged with education, lacked social skills and were very withdrawn are now attending school. Staff help pupils to make long-lasting friendships by facilitating meetings out of school hours. This has a transformational effect on the health and well-being not only of pupils, but of the wider family too.
- Across key stages 3 and 4, leaders provide a broad and balanced curriculum which is planned effectively to meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders have recently taken key stage 2 pupils into the school. They have an appropriate curriculum in place. Nevertheless, leaders have yet to evaluate the impact of the newly introduced curriculum on pupils' learning and progress.
- Leaders provide a copious amount of enrichment activities for pupils. The school's grounds facilitate a wide range of sporting activities, including horse riding. Pupils engage in birdwatching, go sea fishing, mountain biking, play board games, make dens and play musical instruments.
- Pupils also benefit from enterprise activities and extension studies. For example, they prepare food to sell in the local farm shop and grow their own food in the school's grounds. Pupils also have the opportunity to undertake work placements in the school's kitchens, with the site maintenance team and in the local community.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn about British values. For example, pupils learn about different religions and the importance of tolerance and respect in our society. They do this through the personal, social and health education programme and through citizenship lessons. Pupils across this school value each other's differences and recognise each other's uniqueness.
- Leaders promote equality well. They are determined that pupils will take their place in society and make a positive contribution to their communities. Leaders are successful in ensuring that pupils receive the very best support so they can thrive.
- The proprietor and leaders ensure that all of the independent school standards are met.

## **Governance**

- Governance arrangements are good. The proprietor ensures that the school board can challenge leaders to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. On each school board is the regional director and a director from the Witherslack Group.
- The board of governors meets monthly. Leaders are required to produce a range of reports for the board. The board then submits the reports to the Witherslack Group. Directors at the group, with specific areas of responsibility, also check the effectiveness of leaders' work. The system is very effective.
- The Witherslack Group has robust systems for capturing information about the effectiveness of Oversands School. This enables the group to hold leaders effectively to account, for example, around pupils' attendance and behaviour and pupils' progress and attainment.
- The Witherslack Group, along with regional directors, undertake regular checks about the quality of provision. For example, the group monitors safeguarding arrangements rigorously.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are extremely robust and there is a strong culture of safeguarding right across the school. All staff understand what to do when issues arise.
- Leaders ensure that staff training is up to date and responsive to local needs. There are regular high-quality updates for staff so they know how to respond to situations, for example where pupils display oversexualised behaviour. Leaders ensure that a strong culture of safeguarding permeates this school.
- Leaders ensure that security arrangements at the school are sufficient to protect pupils. The site is extremely well maintained and risk assessments are detailed and appropriate.
- Leaders continuously review their approaches to managing pupils' behaviour and safety. For example, leaders have introduced a positive behaviour policy to reduce conflicts between pupils and staff. This is having the desired effect.
- Leaders report any safeguarding concerns immediately to the relevant authorities and to the local authority safeguarding team. Leaders work extremely well with different agencies. The local authority designated officers have no concerns with the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- All of the independent school standards are met in relation to the suitability of staff, the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the school's premises. Leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy, which takes into account current government requirements, is available on the school's website or by request.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well. As pupils join the school, staff undertake a full range of assessments on each pupil. This enables staff to formulate appropriate learning plans to address the gaps in pupils' education and in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Adults across the school work hard to break down barriers to learning for pupils. Good teaching is underpinned by extremely strong relationships between pupils and teachers.
- The provision for pupils who have autism is very good. Teachers are highly skilled in meeting those pupils' needs so they make good progress.
- Most teachers and other adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour in every classroom. They use a range of highly effective strategies to promote good behaviour for learning.
- Teachers ensure that each classroom provides a safe learning environment where pupils can flourish. There is a strong emphasis on developing relationships by modelling and facilitating the development of pupils' social skills.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this to help pupils to see the relevance in what they are learning.
- Teachers use the Witherslack Group's common assessment tool to assess where pupils

are in their learning. They use this effectively. Teachers also provide good-quality verbal and, where appropriate, written feedback to pupils.

- Pupils develop the capacity to learn from their mistakes. Teachers ensure that they develop pupils' resilience at every opportunity.
- Parents and carers receive valuable information about how well pupils are progressing in their learning.
- Teachers work in very close partnership with one another to share best practice and to ensure that they meet pupils' learning needs.
- The use of teaching assistants is effective. Leaders ensure that teaching assistants receive excellent training from the day they begin employment at the school.
- Teaching assistants are extremely passionate about pupils in the school. They are highly knowledgeable about pupils' individual barriers to learning and support them well so they make good progress.
- Teachers plan lessons which meet most pupils' needs. The teaching of mathematics, art and vocational subjects is very effective because teachers inspire pupils to achieve well. Teachers generally ensure that the work they set matches pupils' needs.
- Overall, teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Nonetheless, some pupils require more challenge in their learning. On occasion, the academic rigour that teachers provide does not match the excellent pastoral support that pupils receive.
- Occasionally, some teachers do not use the range of teaching strategies available to plan lessons that enable pupils to make more rapid progress in their learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders, alongside the clinical team, teachers and other key staff are successful in enabling pupils to become increasingly self-confident in their learning. Overall, pupils have positive attitudes to learning because they recognise the care, guidance and support that staff provide them with. There is a strong focus on developing independent pupils who can flourish after they leave Oversands School.
- Pupils value their education. Many pupils recognise the trust that adults at the school place in them. For some pupils, being at Oversands School is the first time that they have not been isolated in rooms alone. Pupils are unanimous in their view that this school meets their needs.
- Leaders have a strong programme of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have embedded it throughout the curriculum. In addition, pupils take part in a wide variety of visits, for example, trips to a Buddhist temple, and visits to farmers' markets, theatres and local areas of historical significance.
- Leaders have a strong careers education, information advice and guidance programme in place for pupils across key stages 3 and 4. Staff routinely link lessons to employment opportunities across a range of industries. Pupils value the support that they receive around future education, employment and training.

- Adults ensure that pupils know how to stay safe in risky situations. They receive regular information on a range of issues, including online safety and child sexual exploitation.
- Leaders ensure that pupils receive appropriate sex and relationships education. The clinical team plays a fundamental part in this work. Leaders respond extremely well to incidents that occur of a sexual nature, both within school and the wider community. They regularly review their policies, procedures and practices in light of their investigations and findings.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils arrive at Oversands having being absent from school for a considerable amount of time. Leaders, teachers and other adults in the school secure excellent rates of attendance for most pupils. The monitoring and tracking of pupils' attendance is effective. Leaders explore every avenue to support the very small number of pupils who remain regularly absent from school.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare. When it does occur, pupils say that leaders deal with issues quickly and effectively. Pupils feel safe in the school.
- Leaders and other adults help pupils learn to respect each other. Pupils learn the importance of forming strong relationships with one another. Leaders seek out plentiful ways to remove the additional stress that pupils can feel. For example, the school's mental health practitioner supports pupils in developing friendships.
- When they start at school, pupils often display very challenging behaviour. Adults in the school work effectively to manage pupils' behaviour. For example, in lessons where pupils' behaviour is likely to become an issue, staff use effective strategies to de-escalate situations. They help pupils to learn how to control their feelings and emotions.
- Leaders acknowledge that on some occasions, pupils' behaviour can affect other pupils' learning. However, leaders have appropriate risk assessments and learning plans in place to minimise the effect of these issues on other pupils' progress.
- Leaders have good systems in place to track and monitor pupils' behaviour. Their own records show that pupils' behaviour is constantly improving.
- A small number of pupils still do not regulate their own behaviour sufficiently well and some learning time is occasionally lost.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

**Good**

- Pupils at Oversands School have a wide range of complex needs and most have multiple diagnoses. Strong, effective pastoral support, including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and mental health practitioners, provide the wraparound care that helps pupils to overcome those needs.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have the tools to overcome their personal barriers to learning because they are clear with pupils about what prevents them from learning. Consequently, pupils can recognise and talk about their individual barriers to learning. This is effective in preparing pupils to progress to the next stages of their education,

employment or training because such frankness and honesty helps pupils to develop the independence that they needed to be successful in life.

- Leaders' tracking of pupils' resilience shows that pupils make strong progress in their personal and social development.
- Children looked after make good progress in their learning because of the wide range of support that they receive and strong multi-agency work.
- In 2017, all pupils attained at least five GCSE passes by the end of key stage 4. Every pupil achieved a GCSE in mathematics and science. Half of pupils achieved a GCSE in English language. Over time, attainment is continuously improving.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points because of good teaching. Across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and computing, pupils engage well in their learning and produce work of a good standard. Nonetheless, leaders recognise that some pupils could make more rapid progress and achieve more if teachers' expectations rose further.
- Pupils make excellent progress in art and catering. The work that pupils produce is of a high quality.
- Pupils in key stage 2 settle to their learning well and make good progress. However, some pupils need more challenge in their learning, for example, in history and geography.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often. Leaders recognise the need to capitalise on pupils' enjoyment of reading in key stage 2, for example, by providing even more challenging texts to the most able pupils.
- Teachers effectively help pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

### Sixth form provision

**Good**

- All of the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders provide bespoke programmes of study for each student in the sixth form. The overarching aim of the each programme is to enable students to gain the life skills required for independent living. Leaders are successful in this mission.
- The majority of students undertake vocational courses at either school and/or a local college. Students also have the opportunity to improve on their GCSE grades, for example in English and mathematics. Given their starting points, students make good progress and achieve well by the end of their time in the sixth form.
- Leaders are currently reviewing how they can incorporate more academic courses into students' programmes of study, so they can provide highly individualised and challenging learning that enables pupils to excel.
- Teaching helps students to make good progress in their learning. Teachers have high expectations of their students. Relationships between students and teachers are secure.
- All students have the opportunity to undertake well-planned work placements to complement their courses and career aspirations. Leaders also support students to undertake a vocational project.
- The programmes of study prepare students well for the next steps in their lives.

Progression rates to education, employment or training are good. Arrangements to support students as they leave the sixth form are highly effective.

- There are plentiful opportunities for students to develop personal, social and employability skills throughout their tailored programmes of study. For example, students can take part in a wide range of enterprise activities, including catering.
- Leaders provide high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance for students. Students value the support that they receive from a wide range of professionals.
- Students appreciate the ongoing support that they receive, for example high-quality mentoring and therapy, which leaders build into students' timetables.
- Leaders continue to provide good-quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural development throughout students' time in the sixth form.
- Students behave well. They have their own dedicated common room for use at breaktime and lunchtime that they value and treat with respect. This facility helps them to prepare for independent living. Students have also selected their own dress code to ensure a smart, professional appearance.
- Students' attendance in the sixth form is good.
- Leaders do not yet routinely monitor the quality of teaching that students receive in local colleges. They do, however, check that pupils attend regularly and behave well.

## School details

Unique reference number	112452
DfE registration number	909/6027
Inspection number	10043369

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 residential special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Headteacher	Robin Adams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,726–81,206
Annual fees (residential pupils)	£95,979–130,883
Telephone number	01539 552397
Website	<a href="http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk">www.witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:Oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk">Oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	22–24 September 2015

## Information about this school

- Oversands School is an independent school registered for boys and girls between seven and 19 years. There are currently 66 boys on roll, including four boys in the sixth form. Thirteen pupils are boarders at the school for 38 weeks a year.
- The school has 32 children looked after on roll.

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for key stages 2, 3 or 4 pupils.
- The school caters for pupils with complex needs, including autism, attachment disorder, trauma, attention deficit disorder, demand disorder and issues with self-regulation.
- The overwhelming majority of the pupils on roll have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. Those who do not are awaiting an education, health and care plan.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have admitted pupils into the key stage 2 provision.
- The Department for Education has approved a temporary material change to admit pupils from the age of seven from 4 September 2017 until 4 April 2018.
- The school has operated as part of the Witherslack Group since 1996 and was formerly known as Witherslack Hall prior to its name change in 2015.
- The school is located in the buildings 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.
- Ofsted last inspected the education provision in September 2015. Ofsted undertook an inspection of the residential provision in June 2017.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector toured the school site and checked the school's compliance with the appropriate regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects, classes and key stages. A range of observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspector met with pupils, both formally and informally, to listen to their views.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, a director of the Witherslack Group, senior leaders, middle leaders, the sixth-form lead, teachers and teaching assistants.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. However, the inspector met with parents and took into account the views of parents submitted to the school by email.
- The inspector took account of 29 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- The inspector observed pupils' conduct and behaviour in lessons, at social times, before school and during extension studies.
- The inspector undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work alongside senior leaders.
- During the inspection, the inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including: information about pupils' attainment and progress; leaders' own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school; leaders' improvement priorities; leaders' records relating to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; attendance and behaviour records; safeguarding information and a wide range of policies relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils.

## Inspection team

Jonathan Smart, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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