

# Oliver House School

Hallgate, Astley Village, Chorley, Lancashire PR7 1XA

## Inspection dates

16–18 July 2019

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
Sixth form provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Leaders, managers and governors have maintained their ambitious aims and the school's outstanding provision. Their vision drives continuous improvement.
- Teaching is outstanding, because of teachers' determination and expertise in addressing the aspects of learning that pupils need to acquire at each stage of their development.
- Pupils are not taught in key stages or age groups, but according to the phase of development they are at, and the support they need. This enables them to make excellent progress.
- Pupils' progress is assessed daily in learning logs. Progress summaries for each pupil include communication and engagement; behaviour; education, health and care plan (EHC) targets and academic progress. This gives a complete picture of the outstanding progress that pupils make.
- Challenging behaviour is exceptionally well managed by staff. Pupils' behaviour improves rapidly as a result.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. It is adapted to suit the needs of each pupil. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their awareness of British values are outstanding.
- Post-16 students are provided with learning opportunities which contribute strongly to their preparation for adult life. All appropriate options are explored for students' transition to the next stage of their lives.
- Parents have nothing but praise for the school's work: 'The ability of staff to see my son's potential has given him confidence' and 'He is encouraged to be the best version of himself that he can be; they believe in him' are typical of the many comments from parents.
- Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's achievements and planned future developments. They have the necessary expertise to ensure that the independent school standards are met. Leaders are looking to find ways of sharing their undoubted expertise with other professionals.

### 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?**

- Continue to find ways of sharing the excellent practice at Oliver House with other professionals.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The school development plan reflects the ambition and dedication of the school leaders. Their target is to create a relentless, uncompromising focus on school improvement, where there is a vision and ambition for all pupils. The school aims to provide an outstanding personalised curriculum, that not only meets the needs of the pupils, but also challenges them to reach their maximum potential. Inspection evidence confirms that leaders are succeeding in both these aims.
- Leaders clearly know their school exceptionally well. They are experts in the field of autism spectrum disorder. In their self-evaluation documents, leaders have identified next steps to maintain or improve the already excellent provision.
- Since the previous inspection, a peer review has been carried out by the National Autistic Society. As a result of this review, Oliver House has been awarded Advanced Accredited status for achieving the highest standards of best practice in supporting autistic people.
- Professional development is promoted very effectively by the company and the school leaders. Career pathways are available across the entire company. This offers a whole range of opportunities not only in this school, but also in other organisations owned by the Priory group.
- Leaders thoroughly check on the quality of teaching and learning through a programme of observations, work scrutiny and review of pupils' outcomes. High expectations are set for teachers to ensure that they secure at least good progress for their pupils. Teaching assistants are also held accountable. They are closely involved in the teaching, learning and assessment process.
- There is high-quality training for staff on all aspects of their work. This includes training on safeguarding, teaching and therapy techniques. This reflects the leaders' uncompromising commitment to developing the excellent provision even further.
- EHC plans are in different formats because 17 different local authorities place pupils at the school. The school writes its own EHC plans based on that provided by its own local authority. The plans show meticulous attention to detail. Leaders and teachers set challenging targets for all pupils. Every opportunity is maximised to ensure that pupils gain the skills of independence and communication to support them to move successfully to the next stage of learning.
- Every pupil follows an individual curriculum tailored precisely to their needs. This offers work and activities that are interesting and enjoyable. Academic work is combined with different therapies. This is so that pupils develop communication, social and emotional skills as well as academic qualifications.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is underpinned by the outstanding example set by staff. Pupils learn to tolerate each other and to manage their own anxiety. They are encouraged to do this through therapy sessions and positive behaviour support. Knowledge of public institutions and awareness of British values is delivered through themes such as 'happy helpers', 'cheerful Chorley', and 'my community and me'. Pupils make regular visits to the post office, the library, local churches and other places of worship, museums and the park.

- The school adopts a proactive culture of acceptance, where all pupils, staff and those in the local community are valued equally, treated with respect and given equal opportunities.
- The vast majority of staff are proud to work at the school. They said that they know that they are part of a unique team.
- Parents said that this is an exceptional school. Parents are always included in discussions about their children and kept informed about their progress and well-being. They commented on the exceptional progress that their children have made. Parents have been given opportunities that would have seemed impossible in the past. Parents praised the high-quality staff and said that their children now enjoy school. Parents feel that this school has succeeded where all previous schools have failed their children.

## **Governance**

- Governors know their school inside out. They are well aware of its numerous strengths. They are not complacent. They seek to develop, enhance and improve the school's provision. Governors have a very high level of expertise. Since the previous inspection, the proprietors have changed the system of governance to better reflect the unique nature of the school.
- The chair of the governing body is recognised as a national expert in understanding autism spectrum disorder. She is able to devote her time to developing and continually improving provision in partnership with the headteacher. Other governance roles are undertaken by other members of the Priory management team. Examples of these include ensuring that all the health and safety standards are met, compliance with the independent school standards and financial audits. The northern managing director of the Priory group challenges the chair of the governing body and other school leaders and asks relevant questions about the school's effectiveness.
- The building is very well maintained and well decorated. It is safe and attractive.
- One of the great strengths of the school is the medical and mental-health expertise that staff have, as well as a wide range of links with multi-agency professionals. The chair of the governing body is contributing to national research to support even greater understanding of autism spectrum disorder.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders take safeguarding arrangements very seriously. The school has extra protection measures in place because of the vulnerable nature of the pupils on roll. The safeguarding policy ensures that all statutory requirements are met. It is updated annually and published on the school's website.
- The safeguarding policy is very clear in identifying any additional barriers, in order to ensure the safety of pupils with complex needs. Safeguarding training is delivered in-house and reflects the complex difficulties in identifying abuse. The training looks in depth at some of the specific indicators that may raise concern. Parents, pupils, staff and other health professionals are all consulted in the drive to make sure that safeguarding measures are as secure as possible. This creates a safe environment in which pupils can flourish.

- Online safety is part of the curriculum. The school has secure systems in place to ensure that there is no inappropriate access to harmful material on the internet. All staff are required to undertake training to the appropriate level, linked to their roles in school.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Outstanding

- When pupils enter the school, the multidisciplinary team conducts an in-depth analysis of the pupils' needs. The team develops learning plans with the teachers. This is always done in close partnership with parents. Once this assessment is done, a whole range of activities is provided, which will help to educate pupils and give them skills for life.
- Each pupil has their own timetable, specifically tailored to enable them to make at least good progress, and often outstanding progress. Many pupils have their own individual classroom. They are encouraged to decorate these as they wish, according to their interests. This enables pupils to overcome previous anxieties. All pupils enter the school after at least one, and sometimes several, unsuccessful placements.
- Teachers display consummate expertise and experience in meeting pupils' diverse needs. Teachers' and teaching assistants' deep knowledge of each pupil gives them confidence to challenge pupils effectively. Developing pupils' communication skills is central to all learning. This was seen in a physical education lesson where each pupil's strengths were understood and developed. The staff created a calm, purposeful and yet relaxing atmosphere, in which pupils enjoyed their learning and made excellent progress.
- In literacy, the main emphasis is on communication skills. Teachers employ many methods of communication to support pupils' learning, such as songs and visual images. All learning is very carefully planned to meet pupils' individual needs.
- Excellent and very positive relationships exist between staff and pupils. The work in pupils' books shows strong progress over time. This was evident in science lessons, where the curriculum is well thought through because it links learning in science to real-life situations. For example, there is a strong emphasis on issues of safety, such as the dangers and hazards of different substances and the rules for using heat in cooking.
- In mathematics, most-able pupils can take GCSE examinations and continue with their studies. Teachers are very skilled in the way that they pose questions, leaving time for pupils to think about their answers. When a pupil does not respond quickly to questions, teachers gradually draw out the knowledge that the pupil already has, and so build the pupil's confidence in their own abilities.
- Teachers have high expectations for pupils' involvement. Teachers are enthusiastic. They give praise and provide reassurance, which inspires pupils to work hard.
- Pupils are taught in four mixed-age phases depending on the level of additional support that they need and on the severity of their learning difficulties. The school has developed a fifth phase for pupils who do not fit into the profile of its other four phases. This is called the Nurture Phase. The phase is led by the therapeutic team. Their aim is to support pupils' social, emotional and communication development through intensive programmes of therapy. This phase is designed by therapists to help mainly younger pupils. It has the following aims for pupils: to help them to integrate more in school, to become successful learners, to make them more independent and improve their communication, and to improve their social interactions. This was demonstrated in a soft-

play session. The pupils enjoyed all the activities. They communicated well with the occupational therapist and the visitor and made strong progress.

- The teamwork between teachers and teaching and support assistants plays a crucial part in the successful learning and progress of all pupils. Teaching assistants are involved in all pupils' learning activities. They complete daily assessments of pupils' progress through learning logs. These build a clear picture of pupils' progress. They also help to plan the next steps for pupils' learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils see themselves as 'learners' and are encouraged to meet their challenging targets. The ethos of the school's approach is to develop individual pupils' emotional stability, self-control, dignity and self-awareness, so that they build the confidence to think and learn for themselves.
- Pupils feel safe in school and nurtured. They said that there is no bullying. The personal, social and health curriculum enables pupils to have a good understanding of society and to be able to distinguish right from wrong. The school encourages pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles through their diet, and through participating in leisure and sports activities.
- There is a huge focus on pupil voice. Pupils are able to voice their opinions through the school council. This has led to improvements in the school environment. Pupils are exceptionally positive about their experience of school. Some expressed the view that 'this is a school like no other'.
- Pupils are aware of the different kinds of people who live in modern Britain. They know what is meant by the protected characteristics. They understand about different lifestyles and the different religious faiths of people living in Britain.
- Pupils serve the school and local community through work experience. For example, cleaning the local church, volunteering at the recycling centre and shopping for elderly local residents.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The staff work hard to ensure that the right package of support is provided for all pupils to help them to manage behaviour incidents caused by their medical conditions. The data shows a decline in incidents in each academic year.
- Some pupils manifest very challenging behaviour, which sometimes requires medication. All medication is under the care of consultant psychiatrists and paediatricians. School records shows that the school is very successful in improving the behaviour of individuals.
- Attendance is above average, at 96%. This reflects how much pupils enjoy school and appreciate the help that they receive. Almost half of all the current pupils on roll have either not attended at previous placements or have been out of education for over 24 months.

- Pupils benefit from continuous high levels of adult support and supervision. As a result, behaviour around the school is cooperative and positive.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Outstanding

- The school measures progress in a way which reflects the unique nature of the pupil cohorts. Pupils are not taught in key stages or age groups. They are taught according to the phase of development they are at and the amount of support they need. This means that pupils of different ages are sometimes taught in the same class.
- All pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points, not only in their learning, but also in their personal development, communication skills and in their preparedness for the future. School information and analysis shows that there is no difference in the progress made by girls and boys and by children looked after by the local authority. There is also no difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils nationally.
- Pupils' progress in developing their communication skills is excellent. Non-verbal pupils learn to communicate through signs and gestures and by using pictures and symbols. The most able pupils make outstanding progress in their ability to speak and listen. They develop the ability to formulate their own questions. By doing this, they gain confidence in expressing their answers.
- From Year 10, pupils start the two-year Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network programme of transition challenge. There are five modules. One module is covered in each term. These are: 'knowing how', 'making choices', 'feeling good', 'moving forward' and 'taking the lead'.
- Pupils who have the ability sit either GCSE examinations or foundation level awards in English and mathematics, and sometimes in other subjects. All pupils follow a 'preparing for adulthood' course. This includes sex and relationships education, independent living, community inclusion, healthy lifestyles and community volunteering.
- Older pupils begin work on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, working towards bronze and silver levels. The majority of pupils continue their education in the sixth form at Oliver House School.

## Sixth form provision

## Outstanding

- Post-16 students take options within one of the three pathways that they follow. These are: sensory, work- or college-related learning and life skills. Some students follow the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance extended work-related programme and complete a course in enterprise skills. Where appropriate, students may attend college courses. All pathways are flexible and take into account students' individual aspirations and interests, as well as their needs.
- Most students gain accreditation in literacy, numeracy and information technology. Some students complete a course in enterprise skills by taking part in a mini-enterprise challenge, such as making and selling Christmas decorations.
- Work experience is an important part of the curriculum for older students. This is carefully

managed. Some begin by helping the administration staff in the school office, doing such tasks as photocopying and laminating. The students might help the maintenance team by painting, painting fences and car washing. Students learn practical skills, such as shopping, preparing food and doing the laundry.

- When staff are confident that students are ready, they do activities in the community. Some volunteer at the recycling centre by sorting cardboard. Others help with gardening and making hanging baskets. Students can also work in the nearby 'pets corner', volunteer at a local primary school and do activities such as dog walking.
- The school has excellent links with local facilities, which they use to support pupils' learning. These include: a shop and post office, a retirement home, a farm, an open garden, the local church and the recycling centre.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expertise. They also have a very deep understanding of individual student's needs. This supports students to secure new learning before they move on to the next stage of their lives.
- Students value and enjoy their learning. They benefit from very good relationships with adults and each other. Students feel safe. Their conduct is excellent; they show a high regard for each other and the community.
- The school puts enormous effort into helping students and their families to identify the appropriate next steps for students when they leave school. Every effort is made to prepare students for life after school. Much of the work experience that students do assists them in becoming independent, responsible individuals, able to play a part in society.



## School details

Unique reference number	131575
DfE registration number	888/6094
Inspection number	10092576

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	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory New Education Services Ltd.
Chair	Wendy Sparling
Headteacher	Lisa Sharrock
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,474–£106,708
Telephone number	01257 220011
Website	<a href="http://www.priorygroup.com">www.priorygroup.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:jennypowell@priorygroup.com">jennypowell@priorygroup.com</a>
Date of previous inspection	20–22 September 2016

## Information about this school

- Oliver House School is an independent specialist day school. It is registered for up to 40 boys and girls aged six to 19, who have severe autistic spectrum disorder and associated complex learning needs, challenging behaviour and associated anxiety.
- Pupils come from several local authorities. Around one third of pupils are looked after.
- The school is part of the Priory New Education Services group. The group also operates

residential children's homes in the area, where some of the pupils may stay.

- There are 76 staff drawn from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Pupils are usually provided with one-to-one support throughout the day. Learning is organised on an individual basis or in very small groups.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers for its pupils.
- The school aims to 'enable students with an autistic spectrum condition to learn to manage their behaviour and cope with anxiety; access positive educational experiences, develop strategies to manage everyday life, develop independence, social and communication skills and become empowered to make appropriate choices'.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector had discussions with representatives of the Priory group, the chair of the governing body, the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the occupational therapist and some members of staff.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all phases, looked at the work in pupils' books and spoke to them about their learning.
- The inspector considered the views of 11 parents expressed on the Ofsted questionnaire and met three parents during the inspection.
- The inspector took account of the 32 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- The inspector held meetings with a small number of pupils to discuss their experience of school.
- The inspector scrutinised documents on pupils' progress and the school's systems to check on the quality of its work. Other documents were scrutinised to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards and the quality of the school's safeguarding measures.

## Inspection team

Judith Straw, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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