School report

The Shires at Stretton

Shires Lane, Stretton, Oakham LE15 7GT

Inspection dates	23–25 February 2016
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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Pupils make outstanding progress both academically and in their personal development.
- Senior leaders and staff are very skilled at supporting pupils to manage their behaviour and focus on positive and productive activities.
- Senior leaders effectively promote a positive attitude to success for all pupils. Adults share an exemplary commitment to ensuring that all pupils feel safe, enjoy school and are proud of what they achieve.
- Pupils, many of whom have had negative previous experiences of education, clearly like school and as a result attend regularly and develop positive attitudes to learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff enable all pupils to engage in learning and achieve their personal goals.
- All staff are highly committed to pupils' learning and well-being.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. Excellent arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress ensure that their range of experiences are continuously reviewed and improved.
- Senior leaders have a strong and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and personal development.
- Governance arrangements are rigorous. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's achievements and planned future developments.
- Post–16 learners are provided with learning opportunities which contribute strongly to their preparation for adult life. The school ensures that all appropriate options are explored for learners' transition to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Proprietors and senior leaders have ensured that all 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 associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend further the range of additional accreditation that recognises pupils' achievements, particularly in creative activities.

- Increase the impact of the classroom support workers on pupils' progress by strengthening their understanding of how best to intervene to support pupils' learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher provides inspirational and ambitious leadership. In response, staff work tirelessly and successfully to improve and extend the school's provision and outcomes for pupils.
- There is strong integration between the management of the school and the residential provision. Pupils benefit from a safe, secure and productive environment in which their individual needs are placed at the heart of the combined efforts of all staff.
- Senior leaders and staff promote an ethos in which every pupil is seen as a successful learner. All staff focus effectively on removing barriers to pupils' communication and personal development.
- Pupils enjoy excellent opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities. This includes regular singing assemblies, art and design, physical education and off-site visits. The breadth of experiences contributes well to pupils' enjoyment and their progress in individual areas of interest. An excellent recent development has seen the school enrol as a centre for a national award scheme involving service, skills, physical recreation and outdoor activity.
- The curriculum is being extended appropriately through the recent introduction of unit awards to accredit pupils' achievement in a range of life skills. Although this work is at an early stage of development, pupils are enjoying the increased opportunities.
- Excellent attention is given to the continuous training and professional development of staff. All members of staff work towards suitable personal targets, and leaders reward them appropriately for additional responsibilities and leadership.
- Senior leaders and governors ensure that the work of the school is kept under continuous review; priorities are agreed, implemented and reviewed through an effective process of improvement planning.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is integrated into all aspects of learning. Teachers promote British values very well through experiences suited to the personal needs and communication skills of pupils.
- All staff demonstrate outstanding commitment to removing barriers to learning, and ensuring equality of opportunity for pupils to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives. Senior leaders work extremely effectively with specialist careers advisers, social workers and families, to explore all appropriate possibilities for further education, supported living and employment. The expert management of transition review meetings brings specialist services together to ensure that effective plans are made to meet the continuing individual needs of pupils.
- Staff are proud to work at the school. They demonstrate commitment to the school's aims and values; staff turnover is low.
- Parents and carers are well informed about the progress of their children. Daily communication between school and home ensures that any concerns are quickly identified and addressed effectively. Parents value the regular written reports and robust arrangements for the annual review of provision for individual pupils.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together to evaluate and improve the quality of the curriculum. The school has recognised the need to provide new challenges for pupils. Work is in hand to increase the range of award schemes, involving creative activities both on- and off-site.
- Classroom support workers are not all sufficiently trained to understand the variations in support required by different pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The proprietors have established excellent, effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of the work of the school.
  - The Chair of Governors regularly monitors the school's effectiveness. As a result, he has a very good understanding about the development of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' progress.
  - Senior leaders and staff are held to account appropriately through effective arrangements for individual appraisal.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school implements excellent arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff. All required checks to ensure staff suitability are completed robustly and recorded accurately.
- Governors and senior leaders ensure that staff training in safeguarding, first aid and fire safety is updated regularly. The administration and oversight of the school's statutory responsibilities are rigorous and effective.

- Pupils are safe in school. Staff have a clear understanding of the potential threats to the welfare of vulnerable pupils. Risks are thoroughly assessed, levels of supervision are high, and constant attention is given to the well-being of individual pupils.
- Senior leaders work effectively with the proprietors to ensure that all the independent school standards are met.
- Governors, senior leaders and staff at all levels of responsibility demonstrate excellent capacity for continued improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The excellent quality of teaching results in outstanding learning by pupils of all ages.
- Teaching staff have an exemplary knowledge and understanding of the individual characteristics and learning needs of each pupil in their care.
- The curriculum is imaginative and continuously extended because of the effective teamwork shared by all staff. Pupils have access to effective one-to-one support within small teaching groups. A very good range of activities and tasks take full account of the previous achievement and current needs of each pupil.
- Teachers successfully use a range of different approaches to communicate with individual pupils. As a result, pupils' anxieties are reduced and this enables them to access learning. Pupils are reminded regularly of the importance of what they are learning and of what will come next. All lessons aim to improve pupils' communication skills, particularly the development of listening and verbal or nonverbal communication.
- Mathematics is taught effectively and numeracy skills are incorporated appropriately in learning activities across a range of subjects.
- Pupils enjoy opportunities to take an active part in learning activities and make good use of the excellent range of stimulating visual resources provided to develop their learning skills, particularly in the use of communication technologies.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are particularly skilful at monitoring pupils' learning through effective questioning. Teachers are highly skilled at interpreting pupils' knowledge and understanding, despite the limitations in many pupils' communication skills. Staff are very aware of the need to allow time for pupils to process and respond to questions and they manage this sensitively and successfully.
- Staff ensure that pupils understand what they are doing and know when they are succeeding. This includes regular dialogue with classroom support workers who provide individual support for pupils.
- Incidents of challenging behaviour are managed extremely effectively. Staff anticipate anxieties and frustration and act promptly to divert attention or to provide appropriate moments of 'time out' from the current learning activity.
- Pupils are motivated because of their teachers' skilled management of learning through regular changes of activity. Teachers have developed considerable skill in breaking down learning into small, achievable steps. These steps form the basis of effective assessment of pupils' progress. Pupils' achievement is assessed regularly against national expectations. Excellent arrangements are in place to record the outcomes from these assessments and for monitoring the extent of pupils' progress over time.
- Classroom support workers have established excellent relationships with individual pupils, based on mutual respect and trust. They demonstrate sensitivity and considerable patience while encouraging pupils to take responsibility for completing tasks and activities. They do not always have a consistent understanding of when to intervene, or the extent of independence required of pupils when completing tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Detailed and clear personal education plans outline the range of approaches to support each pupil to develop their skills in communicating their personal feelings and anxieties. These plans are used very effectively by all staff to ensure that pupils make excellent progress in their personal development.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and demonstrate an outstanding ability to sustain concentration and complete activities. They show determination to complete tasks and are proud of their achievements.

- There is an ethos of mutual respect throughout the school and pupils demonstrate trust and cooperation with familiar adults. Teaching staff and support assistants work tirelessly to ensure that pupils feel relaxed and are able to take an active part in learning activities.
- All staff understand well the rigorous arrangements required to manage transitions throughout the day, including readiness for the next lesson, assembly, break or lunchtime.
- The school provides a safe and secure environment. Risks in all aspects of the school's provision are assessed thoroughly and minimised. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe and healthy, for example through the safe use of communication technologies and understanding healthy eating.
- Parents, in their responses to a school questionnaire, state that they are highly satisfied with the provision made by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Individual instances of challenging behaviour are managed skilfully by the staff. Appropriate action is taken to ensure that anxieties or misbehaviour do not have a negative impact on the learning of others.
- Attendance is in line with the national average. Pupils enjoy school and, for many, their attendance shows a sustained improvement compared with their previous placements.
- School records, including admissions information, illustrate outstanding improvements over time in pupils' attendance, behaviour and engagement in learning.
- Pupils are strongly supported in the development of their emotional and social resilience. Staff give excellent attention to the development of empathy; the most-able pupils consider and understand the impact of bullying and racism.
- 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 are outstanding

- Over time, pupils make strong and sustained progress from their starting points. They consolidate their achievements and their progress is measurable and substantial.
- The majority of pupils make progress which is in line with, or exceeds, national expectations from their various starting points.
- Pupils' progress in developing their communication skills is excellent. Nonverbal pupils develop the ability to communicate through signs and gestures, through the use of pictures and symbols. They demonstrate success in recall and repetition of learning routines and procedures.
- The most-able learners make outstanding progress with their ability to speak and listen. They show good recall of vocabulary and technical terms in the development of English grammar. They develop the ability to formulate their own questions, to seek reassurance about their progress through activities, and confidence in sharing their answers.
- Some older pupils and the most-able pupils make excellent progress with their reading, learning to decode text and explaining the context and meaning of the text.
- Pupils also make outstanding progress in numeracy, starting with the ability to count and sort accurately. They are proud of their achievements and often keen to repeat their successes. The most-able pupils at Key Stage 4 make outstanding progress with the use and calculation of algebraic symbols.
- Many pupils encounter difficulties with abstract ideas and concepts. They benefit greatly from teachers' use of concrete examples to present new ideas.
- Pupils develop self-confidence in sharing their skills with other pupils and staff. They particularly enjoy singing assemblies where some demonstrate the confidence to lead singing, and many can identify choices of songs through the use of the interactive whiteboard.
- Throughout the school, pupils make outstanding progress in their ability to engage in sustained periods of learning. Older pupils and the most-able pupils develop and consolidate a wide range of responses through which they communicate their interest and desire to succeed.

Sixth form provision is outstanding

- Post-16 learners are taught in groups together with pupils of similar cognitive ability and temperament. Senior staff make sensitive and well-informed decisions about groupings and how the individual learning targets of older learners may best be met.
- The quality of teaching for post-16 learners is outstanding. Staff explore and provide creative experiences and challenges that enable these learners to prepare appropriately for life beyond school. Learners continue to make excellent progress and achieve well.
- Work with post-16 learners focuses effectively on the successful consolidation and extension of life skills and the ability to manage in a supported adult environment. They study themes which emphasise personal safety and the ability to succeed, with appropriate support, in the wider community.
- Learners are provided with excellent opportunities, for example to take part in shopping and to contribute their ideas about what needs to be purchased. They enjoy excellent opportunities to cook and to apply their number and reading skills through the use of recipes and instructions.
- Careers advice and guidance includes excellent, expert contributions which ensure that all appropriate options are considered. The views of learners' families are taken fully into account alongside the expertise and experience of senior school staff in planning for transition to adult life.
- Learners progress to continued supported living, often in specialist accommodation or with their families. The school ensures that the outstanding provision made by the school is continued and enhanced in adult settings. Learners' progress into supported living is monitored effectively through liaison with families, and with the homes into which learners transfer.

School details

Unique reference number	131018
Inspection number	10008935
DfE registration number	857/6004

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	Day special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
Chair	Graham McEwan
Headteacher	Marina Gough
Annual fees (day pupils)	£73,000
Telephone number	01780 411944
Website	www.acorncare.co.uk
Email address	info@theshires.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 July 2012

Information about this school

- The Shires provides full-time education for up to 20 pupils and learners in the age range 11 to 19 years who have autistic spectrum conditions and severe learning difficulties, together with associated challenging behaviour.
- There are currently 18 boys and girls enrolled, including eight post-16 learners. The majority of pupils live in residential accommodation provided by the proprietor, Acorn Care and Education.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan; the majority are in public care.
- The previous inspection of the school took place in July 2012. The residential care provision was not inspected during this inspection. The previous inspection of the residential care provision was in November 2015.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers as part of the curriculum.
- The school aims to achieve 'a real balance between supporting pupils and meeting their individual needs, and stretching and challenging them so that they can better access the wider community'.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work across the full age range of the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the teaching manager, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a small number of parents. Additional discussions took place with a number of members of staff.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's 'Parent View' questionnaire. Consideration was given to survey responses from a number of parents, completed when they attended annual review meetings at the school.
- Consideration was given to six inspection questionnaires completed by members of staff.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of school policies, procedures and records in order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Young, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector

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