



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Oracle School

February 2019



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School's Details

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|---------------------------------|--|----|--------------|---|
| School | Oracle School | | | |
| DfE number | 822/6013 | | | |
| Address | Oracle School Unit 54 Wrest Park Silsoe Bedfordshire MK45 4HS | | | |
| Telephone number | 01525 863808 | | | |
| Email address | bedfordschool@oraclecare.com | | | |
| Headteacher | Mrs Lisa Patterson-Igwe | | | |
| Proprietor | Oracle Care and Education Ltd | | | |
| Age range | 8 to 18 | | | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 20 | | | |
| | Boys | 13 | Girls | 7 |
| | Seniors | 20 | | |
| Inspection dates | 26 to 28 February 2019 | | | |

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Oracle School is an independent co-educational day special school for pupils aged 8 to 18 years. Founded in 2006, it is owned and managed by Oracle Care and Education Ltd and is overseen by a proprietorial governing board.
- 1.2 The school occupies a single building on a small commercial estate. It is structured flexibly around pupil age, ability and interests, dependent on the school's population of pupils at different points in time. A new headteacher and chair of governors were appointed in September 2017.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to provide an outstanding holistic service of care and education within a therapeutic environment.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and are referred for admission by local authorities nationally. The school's own assessment indicates that the overall ability of pupils is average. All pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and their special educational needs include specific learning difficulties and mental health issues. All receive specialist help, including occupational, art and music therapies and counselling. No pupil has English as an additional language (EAL). The school focuses on the individual needs of each pupil whatever their ability, and the curriculum is modified for them on a personalised basis.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 Some pupils take GCSEs, but due to the small numbers involved the results are not statistically significant.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 **The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 **The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 **The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils' academic achievement is good in relation to their individual starting points.
- Pupils make good academic progress because they develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils' academic achievement is occasionally restricted by teaching which is insufficiently engaging, motivating and challenging.
- Pupils' digital learning skills are underdeveloped because of limited access to computer equipment in some lessons and, as a result, progress in overcoming their specific learning difficulties is sometimes slower.
- Pupils display good non-academic achievement because the school supports them well in developing their interests.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' personal development is excellent because the school supports their mental health very well, so they are able to realise and demonstrate their individual strengths effectively.
- Pupils have excellent self-understanding, and empathy for others' needs and circumstances.
- Pupils demonstrate a very strong respect for diversity.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Enable pupils to further strengthen their academic achievement by ensuring that all lessons are sufficiently engaging, motivating and challenging.
- Enable pupils to apply and develop their digital learning skills in all lessons, particularly for those with specific learning difficulties.

The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 Pupils of all abilities, all of whom have SEND and mental health issues, make good academic progress in relation to their individual starting points on admission to the school. They achieve well academically and in their extra-curricular activities because the governing body, the senior leadership, and the teaching and therapy teams fulfil much of the school's aim to provide an outstanding holistic service of care and education within a therapeutic environment. Pupils respond well to the welcome extended to each of them at whatever point in the school year they may be admitted, re-engaging successfully with their studies, often following lengthy periods of school non-attendance and associated difficult personal circumstances. Pupils display a keen readiness to look closely at their individual academic priorities in order to make up any lost time in their educational career, and to plan ahead for the next steps in their education when they leave school. They commented in their questionnaire responses that the school enables them to get back on course and regain confidence in their ability to learn and make progress, typically focusing on their personal interests, motivations and aspirations. Parents expressed the same view about the pupils' re-discovered faith in their ability to achieve well with a positive sense of purpose.

- 3.6 All pupils have an EHC plan and they respond well to the objectives agreed within them, so that they understand why it is so important for them to take personal responsibility for their own learning. They do so with considerable success because they quickly come to trust the school's leadership, teaching and therapy teams, and counselling support, and develop stable and positive attitudes to learning. In lessons, pupils focus well on activities and rise to challenges, overcoming inhibitions to trying new tasks which have limited their progress in previous settings. Pupils say the school has given them a fresh start in which they feel safe to take risks in their learning without fear of being misunderstood or, worse, ridiculed.
- 3.7 Pupils are included in decision-making about their personalised learning programmes and the accredited courses they will follow, and so feel a sense of ownership for their chosen studies. They complete English and mathematics functional skills courses, a basic information, communication and technology (ICT) qualification, and GCSEs from a small range of subjects, which includes English, mathematics, science, citizenship and food preparation and nutrition. Individual levels of success achieved vary, but outcomes reflect that pupils are usually giving of their best in relation to their previously fragmented schooling and often ongoing mental health issues. The very small number of pupils in the school means that GCSE results are not statistically significant when compared to national averages. Comparison of the number and range of qualifications gained does show a trend of increased success overall in the last two years, although much depends over time on the profile of the pupil cohort at any particular point. Pupils' work in their books shows good progress over time in relation to their starting points and length of time in school. Pupils' progress is good overall, as indicated by data created by new assessment procedures introduced a year ago. This statistical information is being used effectively to guide interventions, promote pupils' success and prevent any from falling behind their targets. Pupils' achievements are reported regularly to parents and guardians and the evidenced-based evaluative comments suggest achievement is good. The school's leaders competently self-evaluate all sources of evidence to appraise the quality of academic achievement. This is being used to inform school improvement and represents effective leadership and management.
- 3.8 Pupils and parents surveyed stated that the school helps pupils make good progress, and pupils also responded that teachers always help them with their work. Pupils also said in questionnaires and during discussion that lessons are not always sufficiently interesting. The inspection found some evidence to support this view: for example, during a sports afternoon, too many pupils became disengaged because the activities did not stretch or motivate them enough and they became bored and restless. However, in the large majority of lessons seen, pupils were observed responding well to teaching which mostly happens in very small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Pupils displayed positive attitudes to each other, and interest in and appreciation of each other's work whatever their respective ages.
- 3.9 Pupils' good attitudes to learning, as seen particularly in their perseverance and readiness to collaborate and cooperate well with their peers, are enabled by consistent staff attention to pupils' individual needs. Importantly, too, pupils are able to approach their academic work positively because the therapy and counselling teams help them maintain mental health fitness, so that pupils learn how to deal very well with their personal emotional issues and therefore maintain their focus on learning objectives, and to work well in lessons. Their confidence and self-esteem in learning is also boosted by their knowledge that the headteacher is very interested in their successes and is ever-present and approachable for them as individuals.

- 3.10 In an art lesson, pupils showed good knowledge and skills when making papier-mâché masks, understanding that their care and skill in layering materials was a critical factor in producing a worthwhile end-product. The teaching facilitated the activity well, without compromising pupils' personal responsibility for their own work. Pupils receiving individual tuition in English GCSE lessons demonstrated eloquent oral communication skills when discussing evidence for agreement with a statement in the text and the teaching used questioning very well to draw out the pupils' thinking. Pupils displayed good speaking, writing and reading skills generally, often making quick progress following delays in their learning caused by previous issues in their schooling elsewhere. In a mathematics lesson, pupils made good progress in understanding fractions because when some became initially confused, they were helped by teaching which skilfully referred to portions of pizza. Pupils' numeracy skills are good generally and, importantly, are applied in their learning for independence, for example in personal budgeting. These examples are representative of pupils' good achievement and teaching effectiveness in the majority of lessons seen and evidenced over time. There were also some instances of pupils exceeding expected achievement and moving on to accelerated access to more advanced coursework and early entry to examinations.
- 3.11 Some pupils felt work was too easy for them at times, and this was occasionally seen to be the case in lessons and in written work, but the school's assessment procedures are increasingly identifying and rectifying these issues. Pupils' progress is sometimes restricted because marking is inconsistently completed and then they do not have a clear enough understanding of how to improve their work, plan next steps and keep targets firmly in mind. Pupils expressed reservation about the usefulness of marking in their questionnaire responses. However, pupils' learning advances well overall because oral feedback from staff is immediate and helpful, and based on very constructive rapport with pupils.
- 3.12 Pupils develop good digital skills and use them well in extended project work and research. However, pupils' pace of work sometimes slows in lessons because they experience inhibitions about hand-writing and do not have sufficient access to computer equipment as an alternative.
- 3.13 Pupils demonstrate good non-academic achievement in activities such as sport, music, theatre, dance and involvement in minority support groups, which mainly take place outside of the school day. Whether pupils' successes are at a regional level, or occur as a leisure or special interest involvement, they all represent considerable gains in achievement following periods of previous non-engagement during disrupted educational experiences. Pupils' initial motivation in becoming re-involved in non-academic pursuits is often fostered when they take up the offer of taster experiences in lunch-time club activities such as yoga, occupational therapy activities, walking and art. Pupils' good progress in both their academic and non-academic achievement go hand in hand, and reflects their very good response to the school's encouragement and care for them as individuals.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils understand themselves very well. They are articulate about the challenges they have experienced in life and communicate openly about their learning difficulties and mental health issues. They say that the school represents a new start for them and provides them with the opportunity to plan ahead for when they leave and seek a college place or employment. They welcome the chance to take responsibility for their own learning, setting their own academic and personal targets in liaison with staff, and sometimes challenging themselves and staff to engage in even more aspirational aims. Reflecting on previous experiences, pupils describe feeling under-confident, undervalued and marginalised in other schools but comment on their present setting very favourably. These positive views about their current placement were stated clearly in their questionnaire responses and during discussion, and their parents and guardians echoed these perceptions in their replies.

- 3.16 Pupils' self-assurance is quickly restored following admission to the school as expressed in comments such as "this school has rescued me", and "I have been to quite a lot of schools but this is the first one that really cares". Pupils' self-confidence is strengthened because the school wastes no time in identifying their personal special interests so that, for example, an aspiration to become a tattoo artist receives immediate support from the art department, or a passion for cars and mechanics is facilitated by work experience in a local garage. Pupils' resilience in life is strongly rewarded by the school's commitment to them as valued individuals.
- 3.17 Pupils' take full advantage of an empathic school setting to make decisions about their lives with a sense that they can determine their own futures for the better. They choose to access the therapies and counselling on offer to them within the school day, not only with regard to their mental fitness for their academic studies, but in order to resolve often long-term mental health issues which have prevailed in their lives. They express trust for the therapists and counsellors, who in turn respect the pupils' need for their intervention, always maintaining a fully professional and confidential stance overseen by a lead clinical practitioner. Pupils benefit appropriately because assessment for access to therapy is carefully carried out, and pupils are only accepted where there is evidence that it is an appropriate provision. Pupils also demonstrate the ability to make balanced decisions about matters of everyday life, organising themselves well during the school day and contributing to the school council's deliberations on such issues as school rules and responsibilities.
- 3.18 Pupils show a deep respect for the non-material and spiritual aspects of life. They appreciate how the personal challenges that they and their peers have faced can have a profound effect on what is considered important in life and are very respectful of one another's' feelings and perceptions, however unique. Their expressiveness in art and music, both within academic work and therapy includes a distinctive spiritual dimension and is a tribute to individuals' personal journeys. Pupils refer to assembly themes thoughtfully, and sensitively described a recent topic on vulnerability and the meaning it had for them. The school provides the space and time for pupils to reflect, including a room for prayer.
- 3.19 Pupils' behaviour and their awareness of right and wrong were very good throughout the inspection. Pupils report that this is so normally, with occasional exceptions which are swiftly resolved because pupils and staff are keen to put matters right between pupils when things go wrong. Pupils are proud that their school is a place where good behaviour is expected and compare it to previous placements where they were more likely to find themselves in trouble, bullied or ridiculed. They also have an understanding of broader moral issues and the rule of law, pointing out an event the school shared with a previous prime minister. Pupils are courteous and kind, and although they may occasionally experience difficult moments regarding their mental health issues, they are overwhelmingly considerate and respectful young people. Their strengths are enhanced because the school's leadership and staff provide excellent role models and are clear in their expectations that calm order will prevail, whilst understanding and responding supportively and sensitively when it is necessary.
- 3.20 Pupils demonstrate mature social awareness and the ability to collaborate well with others and solve problems together. They look out for each other, showing care and consideration for how others are feeling and behaving, and were observed helping and comforting a classmate when they were experiencing an emotional upset. They also show a readiness to take up roles of responsibility in school, such as membership of the pupil council. Pupils also display a strong commitment to the wider community where they actively support a foodbank and other charitable causes. Pupils gain mature perspectives and understanding for others' needs and predicaments because the school is keen to avoid pupils in this very small school community from becoming isolated or introspective.

- 3.21 Respect for diversity is displayed distinctively by all pupils. Pupils develop a positive view of mental health and extend their insights to better understand others, as a result of an effective citizenship programme, informative assemblies and the school' consistent attention to their personal development at an individual level. Pupils also respect different religions, and staff from a range of faiths share details with them about their belief systems and celebrations. They are also respectful of the full range of those with disabilities and of others who may be discriminated against in society.
- 3.22 Pupils know how to stay safe, including online, because the school is committed to these objectives, particularly as pupils may be more vulnerable to risks than some other groups of young people. Pupils described a recent assembly which dealt with the risks of on-line streaming and had found it valuable. Pupils have a good sense of healthy eating and of the importance of regular exercise, and healthy lifestyle is a regular agenda item at pupil council meetings.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Mr Andrew Farren | Reporting inspector |
| Mr William Burn | Accompanying inspector |
| Miss Helen Newman | Compliance team inspector (Head of human resources, HMC school) |
| Mr Koen Claeys | Team inspector (Head, Society of Heads school) |