



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

## **Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports**

**Oracle School**

**November 2019**



## Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>School's Details</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Background Information</b>	<b>4</b>
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
<b>2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection</b>	<b>5</b>
Preface	5
Key findings	6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	6
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	7
PART 6 – Provision of information	7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	7
<b>3. Educational Quality Inspection</b>	<b>8</b>
Preface	8
Key findings	9
Recommendations	9
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	10
The quality of the pupils' personal development	12
<b>4. Inspection Evidence</b>	<b>14</b>

### School's Details

<b>School</b>	Oracle School			
<b>DfE number</b>	895/6035			
<b>Address</b>	Oracle School Unit 2 Dane Valley Mill Havannah Street Congleton Cheshire CW12 2AH			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01260 296 790			
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@oraclecare.com			
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Simon Ashurst			
<b>Proprietor</b>	Oracle Care and Education Ltd			
<b>Age range</b>	8 to 18			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	14			
	<b>Years 4 to 6</b>	0	<b>Years 7-11</b>	11
	<b>Years 12-13</b>	3		
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19 to 21 November 2019			

## 1. Background Information

### About the school

- 1.1 Oracle School, Congleton, is a co-educational special school for pupils aged between 8 and 18. The school specialises in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). Currently, all pupils are aged 11 and over. The school opened in 2006 and is located in a former mill in a residential area. There is no outdoor area, but pupils go to a local leisure centre for physical education (PE) lessons and use a number of other local facilities for regular weekly outdoor education sessions. The school and a sister school in Bedford are owned by Oracle Care and Education Ltd which also runs a number of residential homes. Oracle provides an advisory governing board.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide education to young people with a variety of complex needs. The goal is to offer breadth and depth across a curriculum which is broadly in line with a mainstream education, working with pupils who have struggled to attend school regularly. The school tailors a curriculum for each young person to offer the right support to ensure progress towards meeting the social and emotional aspects of their Education Health Care (EHC) Plan. The overall aim is to help to develop confident young people who will be able to maximise their potential, function in society and integrate independently into adulthood.

### About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from across the country, from many backgrounds. The majority are looked-after children (LAC) and some live locally in Oracle residential homes. A small number of pupils live with parents or family members or are fostered. School assessments show that the overall ability of pupils is below average. Each has an EHC plan. Pupils' educational difficulties include special educational needs (SEND), such as ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder), or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Pupils receive specialist support and teaching in very small groups. There are currently no pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL). The school identifies and makes specific provision for more able pupils. Many pupils join the school not having attended school for long periods.

## 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 \(Independent School Standards\)](#).

## 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 the small number of entries does not allow reliable comparison with averages for pupils in maintained schools to be made; all pupils make appropriate progress.
- 2.3 In the sixth form, pupils do not take public examinations but their progress is judged to be at least appropriate for their ability.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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**

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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**

2.12 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.

**2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.14 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.

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

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.16 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.

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

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.18 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.

**2.19 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
OS4	Year 8
OS3	Year 7 and Year 9
OS2	Year 10
OS1B	Year 10 and Year 11
OS1A	Year 11

## Key findings

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

- Pupils make appropriate progress over time for their ages, overcoming the difficulties they have experienced in their earlier education.
- Pupils gain a range of basic key skills including in literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils' progress is occasionally restricted when teaching lacks sufficient planning, pace or challenge.
- Pupils are capable users of information and communication technology (ICT) but make less progress in their learning when teaching does not fully exploit their ICT skills.
- Pupils develop positive study skills and attitudes to learning.

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

- Pupils learn to value their own achievement and potential by identifying their progress in behaviour against the personal targets they set with staff.
- Pupils develop the ability to work alongside each other well and to work together through the range of experiences the school provides.
- Pupils learn successfully how to make and be responsible for key personal decisions.
- Pupils understand the importance of being part of a community and contribute well through undertaking responsibilities such as membership of the school council or volunteering for charity work.

## Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Strengthen pupils' learning outcomes by improving consistency in the planning, pace and challenge of teaching.
- Enable pupils' improved progress by further development of testing, assessment and tracking regimes to identify pupils' needs and to support planning.
- Enable pupils to learn more effectively by strengthening their use of ICT in the classroom and by providing further technical aids such as computer programmes.

## The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is sound.
- 3.5 Pupils make appropriate progress in both academic and other achievements. This is in the context of their wide range of educational, social and mental health difficulties which mean they have often not attended school for long periods of time, three years in some cases. Pupils' EHC plans are therefore seldom able to include reliable information about their ability levels from results in standardised tests or previous in-school assessments. This makes accurate analysis of pupils' needs at the time of entry problematic. In addition, many pupils are resistant to testing as they do not want to fail. The school encourages participation and standardised testing is carried out during the transition period as pupils successfully progress towards attending the school, and then at regular six-month intervals. Pupils make steady progress over time in their reading, writing and numeracy skills, at least in line with test expectations, and some pupils make significant progress over time. The testing regime does not offer detailed information on reading ability or specific support for progress in numeracy and other skills. In order to support rapid progress, the school, supported by the governing body, is reviewing the nature of the tests available and is implementing plans to support the identification of needs and pupil progress with a further range of assessments.
- 3.6 Pupils' effective learning and progress are suitably supported by individual education plans which contribute effectively to planning and target setting. Pupils sometimes show their awareness of success and where they could improve in review sheets for success included in their books and folders but these are not consistently being used regularly. This limits pupils' independent self-assessment and identification of action for progress. Pupils develop strong relationships with staff due to the detailed knowledge of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by staff. Pupils can demonstrate difficult behaviour at times and this is well managed by staff. Pupils make good progress when teaching demonstrates detailed planning and skilled presentation. However, pupils' involvement in lessons and their progress is limited when teaching shows low expectations and pace, or demonstrates a lack of appropriate knowledge or expertise. Staff development in these areas is the current focus of regular training sessions and sharing and spreading of best practice is actively encouraged.
- 3.7 Pupils achieve success in a range of external tests and examinations including functional skills tests in English, mathematics and ICT and, over the past three years, GCSE citizenship, English, food preparation and nutrition, mathematics and science. The very small numbers of pupils taking these exams does not enable effective comparison with national data but inspectors judge pupils' attainment to be sound for their ages and abilities. Some pupils, including sixth-formers, also succeed at various levels in vocational courses at local further education (FE) colleges, and in the 14-16 programme, reflecting effective guidance from the school as to suitable courses to enable pupils to maximise their potential.
- 3.8 The pupils value their successes outside the formal curriculum. For example, they described what they have been able to achieve, such as by being able to go to college and attain certification in motor mechanics, and to strip a car engine down to its component parts. Such success inspires pupils to greater ambition, for example to pursue careers in related vocational fields. Each year a small number of pupils are prepared for re-entry to mainstream schools and successfully move on, usually continuing to live in their residential home. Currently, three Year 11 pupils are working towards full-time study at the college which they attend part time, as have others in the past. On leaving school, the majority of leavers go on to full time post-16 or post-18 FE courses or apprenticeships.

- 3.9 Pupils develop effective communication skills, which they apply to other areas of learning. In discussion, pupils are quick to link achievement in these skills to their own self-esteem. They say that this is due to the support they receive from staff and the focus on key skills in lessons. Some reflected that greater emphasis on these skills by staff would help them achieve even more. Inspection evidence supports this view. In lessons pupils speak clearly and make competent presentations or can explain their understanding and ideas. In an activity session with reptiles pupils demonstrated good oral skills and knowledge of the creatures.
- 3.10 Pupils learn key mathematical skills which they apply successfully in real life situations, for example pupils were observed to work confidently with percentages. In a vocational skills lesson promoted by an educational charity, pupils used all four mathematical operations, along with discussion of the national minimum wage, to create a working budget. Pupils are confident in their use of technology and readily use these skills to access the wider curriculum. This was seen in a computer club session where a pupil successfully completed a demanding task to improve his gaming materials. Pupils were quick to showcase their ICT skills in adjusting settings on the interactive boards when required to by teachers. Whilst pupils were engaged and their learning was robust in some lessons where the interactive features of available technology were exploited, not all teaching made use of this resource, limiting or slowing pupils' progress. In the activity session with reptiles the pupils had prepared and delivered an interesting set of computer slides to support their oral presentation.
- 3.11 In conversations, pupils were quick to emphasise the extent to which the school has helped them develop study skills in preparation for external examinations. This confirmed the views expressed in the pupils' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires. In workbooks where pupils respond to teachers' comments, they can be seen to make steady progress, but such comments are not used consistently, limiting pupils' development. From the time pupils join the school they constantly experience opportunities to collaborate, developing such skills most readily and successfully in the outdoor education sessions which occur regularly through the week. In class, pupils learn to collaborate effectively through carefully structured tasks. During the inspection there was evidence of successful collaboration in pupils' science books. Pupils were seen to collaborate in a number of lessons and activities, in one example pupils worked together well to set up and carry out a treasure hunt.
- 3.12 Given the difficult educational history of the pupils involved, their attitudes to learning are sound, They demonstrate awareness of how they have improved educationally and in behaviour since they came to the school, and some older pupils understand that they are taking a position as an active role model for younger pupils. On occasion pupils' progress is hindered by poor engagement because of their educational difficulties. It is a crucial achievement for the majority of pupils that they attend school regularly and learn key skills and attitudes which enable them to move on into further education or apprenticeships. They benefit from the detailed planning and support of the staff, management and governors of the school.

## The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 Pupils develop self-esteem and self-discipline well in response to the school's recognition that these are crucial areas for development and the key nurturing role that committed staff play in taking account of pupils' individual needs. Many pupils join the school having experienced serious educational and emotional difficulties. In discussions older pupils reflected on the extent to which the individual planning and support they receive has enabled them to see that they are making progress and nurtured their self-esteem and resilience. They perceive that they are developing positive relationships which help them overcome the challenges they experienced previously, as they state, 'giving them hope for the future'.
- 3.15 Many of the decisions pupils make are related to their own future plans. Pupils say that they are fully involved in determining the path for the next stage of their education building on the interests and strengths they possess. As they move through the school, they learn to articulate their goals and aspirations. Pupils develop effective understanding of a wide range of opportunities and careers through personal, social and health education (PSHE), the wide range of opportunities included in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) curriculum and charitable educational programmes. Pupils' self-understanding develops and their decision-making skills are strengthened by their experience of a range of therapies such as play therapy and speech and language therapy as well as counselling. Those pupils who participate in the school council develop a good awareness of the decisions which are made at school and their inclusion in this process is source of pride to them.
- 3.16 Pupils value the non-material aspects of life well and are aware of the extent to which their experiences at school develop their horizons. Over time, some pupils develop empathy through charity and fundraising events which take place. This is usually in response to an assembly theme, part of a programme that gives pupils experiences in a wide variety of topics and in which they are encouraged to take part and discuss ideas. They develop an understanding that the contributions they make in school can have an impact outside school. They develop awareness of the importance of caring for animals through a programme of introducing pupils to a range of reptiles.
- 3.17 Pupils learn to respect the systems in school, many of which are effectively designed to help them recover from periods of reluctance to attend school and to understand the issues raised when they challenge school rules and expected behaviour. They benefit from everyday routines which focus on embedding positive behaviour models, underpinned by the school's three Cs: choice, chance, consequence. Pupils learn to distinguish right from wrong effectively and accept responsibility for their own behaviour in response to staff working together to support them in this. Pupils take part in setting the targets in their own detailed individual education plans and in meetings to review the plans. They successfully identify targets for improved behaviour, where they have succeeded or where they need to focus on further development. Pupils focus on behaviour outcomes and successes within each day, reacting positively to daily records which include a points system and rewards.
- 3.18 As pupils move through the school they learn effectively how to work alongside others, strongly supported by their experiences in the vocational areas they study in the 14-16 college programme. This ensures that pupils take part in practical programmes where they have regular experience of working together. The majority of pupils take part in the outdoor education programme and again many of their experiences ensure that they work with a partner or in a team and succeed. Pupils value their individual timetables, and also the way they are teamed up with others when common interests are identified. For example, pupils who enjoy gym workouts but who are normally challenged by each other's presence work together at the gym successfully.

- 3.19 Pupils of all ages contribute positively to the local community and wider society through the development of the school council and relationships with local organisations. The impact of such contributions can be a source of real pride, for example for pupils who are members of the council. Pupils volunteer their time at the local foodbank, and support Christmas box collections for disadvantaged, overseas children. In discussion, pupils spoke with pride about the effect their cancer support fundraising had on the community outside school. They appreciate that there is a charity event nearly every month, and that they are able to contribute.
- 3.20 Pupils are aware that they do not always get on with fellow pupils, but they say that they learn to work alongside each other. In the context of a small school with a range of behavioural issues, this is a considerable achievement. Pupils sometimes express negative views about each other and their differences, recognising that they do not always agree. Pupils develop greater tolerance and sensitivity towards each other because staff use conversation and mediation to challenge differences between pupils and develop acceptance. Pupils learn about wider cultural differences and the importance of respecting diversity in the world outside of school in their PSHE lessons.
- 3.21 Pupils understand the need for them to maintain physical and mental health and appreciate fully the role that exercise and outdoors education has on mental health. From lessons observed and evidence in book scrutiny, pupils demonstrate a broad understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They express enjoyment of PE and the outdoor education programme, both of which support their mental health and encourage collaboration and acceptance.

## 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 chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the classrooms of the school. 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

Mrs Gwen Caddock	Reporting inspector
Mr Andrew Farren	Accompanying Reporting inspector
Mrs Tanya Hill	Compliance team inspector (Assistant head, IAPS school)
Mr Richard Lynn	Senior Team inspector (Headmaster, ISA school)