

The Shires at Oakham

3 Uppingham Road, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6JB

Inspection dates

21–23 March 2017

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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and managers demonstrate creativity, imagination and total dedication, to ensure that all pupils have access to outstanding learning experiences.
- Teachers provide creative opportunities for all pupils to learn and make outstanding progress from their different starting points.
- Arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress are exemplary. Staff have a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the learning needs and characteristics of each pupil.
- Senior leaders know the school's strengths extremely well because they evaluate teaching and pupils' progress rigorously. They plan effectively for further improvement.
- The governors have an excellent understanding of the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and the extent of their progress. They ensure that the school improves continuously.
- The school provides an extremely safe environment for pupils. Arrangements for all aspects of safeguarding are exemplary. Pupils respect the staff and understand how well adults throughout the school care for them.
- Post-16 students enjoy excellent opportunities to increase their independence in line with their individual personal plans. They rapidly develop confidence to experience and understand the local community.
- The use of individual electronic communication aids is at an early stage of development. Staff recognise the potential to increase the benefits of these devices for individual pupils.
- While pupils make excellent progress with their personal development and behaviour, evidence to demonstrate these improvements is not as systematic as for progress with their learning.
- Proprietors and senior leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

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 develop the use of electronic communication aids, particularly for non-verbal pupils, in order to extend adults' understanding of their needs.
- Ensure that arrangements to assess and track improvements in pupils' personal development and behaviour are based on a systematic analysis of all available evidence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The proprietors and senior leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards because they implement rigorous arrangements for evaluating the school's provision and outcomes.
- Senior leaders have established expectations of excellence. All staff work extremely hard with enthusiasm and creativity to ensure that they translate the school's vision into outstanding provision for all pupils.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent respect for adults throughout the school. Strong, positive relationships with staff ensure that difficulties with communication do not impede pupils' enjoyment of school.
- The proprietors and senior leaders ensure a continuous focus on improvement. They implement excellent arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning. The school's curriculum is innovative and imaginative and kept under continuous review to ensure that it meets the needs of current pupils.
- Staff ensure that the school curriculum is extended very effectively at the end of the school day to integrate well with activities provided for pupils out of school. This extended provision ensures, for example, that pupils have access to a range of appropriate experiences at home and in the community.
- Available information from parents indicates that they are very satisfied with the breadth of opportunities available to their children. They appreciate the high priority that staff give to the safety and well-being of pupils.
- School records demonstrate an excellent commitment to staff training. All staff are trained to required levels in safeguarding, first aid and the management of behaviour. Leaders also encourage staff to study for additional professional qualifications and to improve their performance in delegated areas of responsibility.
- All staff who completed an inspection questionnaire agree that they enjoy working at the school and that the school is well led and managed.
- The high quality of staff's commitment has a strong impact on the outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. The school upholds fundamental British values and ensures that each pupil enjoys equality of access to all that the school has to offer.
- Leaders, teachers and support staff demonstrate an excellent commitment to, and success in achieving, outstanding progress in learning and personal development for all pupils.
- Information about pupils' personal development and behaviour is not evaluated systematically to enable leaders to identify trends and patterns which could contribute to further improvements.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have made rapid and substantial progress in establishing outstanding provision and outcomes for pupils. They demonstrate strong capacity for sustained improvement and enhancement of provision.

Governance

- The proprietors have established systematic and comprehensive arrangements for governance. There is a high quality of evaluation and reporting at all levels of leadership and management.
- Governors provide strong support and effective challenge to school leaders. Governors are extremely well informed and minutes of meetings demonstrate high levels of engagement together with appropriate scrutiny.
- Governors have established a culture of questioning and problem solving. School leaders and staff value their support and encouragement.
- The governors have clear expectations that leaders will manage the performance of staff through effective procedures for appraisal and target setting. Staff know their personal goals and understand the expectations placed on them.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. Senior leaders implement comprehensive, rigorous procedures for the safety and well-being of pupils. They keep procedures under continuous review and ensure that staff implement the latest statutory requirements robustly.
- Senior leaders keep the safeguarding policy under continuous review and ensure that it has regard to the latest statutory guidance. They maintain an up-to-date version of the policy on the school's website.
- Senior leaders work closely with parents and external agencies to ensure that the school tailors all aspects of provision to the individual needs of pupils. They work closely with parents and carers to ensure that pupils understand how to keep themselves safe.
- All staff are extremely vigilant in their care for pupils. They understand the vulnerability of pupils and their individual characteristics and needs. They are very responsive to any indications of pupils' anxiety or uncertainty. Through effective training, they regularly update their awareness of any threats to the well-being of vulnerable pupils.
- Senior leaders implement robust arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff, the security of the premises, and all aspects of health and safety, including fire safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding because staff enable pupils with complex learning needs and low starting points to make outstanding progress with their learning.
- Staff have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach and an excellent understanding of how to interest and motivate pupils to achieve.
- Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants work very effectively together to plan an inspirational, imaginative curriculum, which includes all required areas of learning. Pupils, for example, travel in an imaginary time machine and have their 'passports' stamped as they follow the journeys of famous explorers.
- The integrated nature of learning within the curriculum ensures that all pupils have

excellent experiences of different subjects. They make strong progress across a wide range of subjects and activities. Pupils enjoy their learning and concentrate very well as they listen to teachers' explanations and follow the visual information provided on the whiteboard. The most able pupils answer questions accurately and show excellent recall, for example of names and dates learned in previous lessons.

- Teachers and teaching assistants are very skilled at repeating and reinforcing learning for non-verbal pupils. These pupils are beginning to make good use of recently introduced electronic communication, for example they can point to correct answers as they identify the different features of birds and insects. The full potential of this software is not yet used as staff are still developing pupils' understanding of how to express their needs and achievements.
- All adults that work alongside pupils demonstrate excellent patience and appropriate expectations that pupils will concentrate and respond. Teachers model their expectations and continuously remind pupils of what they are able to do.
- The most able pupils enjoy reading and are keen to read aloud. In response to teachers' questions, they show excellent understanding of what they have read and discussed.
- Staff are skilled at progressively building up levels of difficulty in learning tasks. They maintain an effective pace to learning that retains pupils' interest and challenges them to listen and respond continuously.
- Pupils enjoy opportunities to work off-site, for example travelling by bus or train and shopping for fruit in the local town market. Pupils with very limited communication skills learn very effectively how to identify their purchases, to pay for them and to accept change. This emphasis on the development of life skills is an outstanding feature of the development of increasing independence within the different capabilities of pupils.
- All adults work extremely effectively together to manage pupils' behaviour. They recognise when any pupil is becoming anxious, or when an individual requires encouragement. As a result, pupils maintain their concentration and enjoy considerable success.
- Senior leaders have established exemplary arrangements for the assessment of pupils' achievements and progress. Staff work together to assess and record small steps in pupils' learning and to measure these against national expectations for pupils with similar starting points. They remind pupils regularly of how much they have learned and support them to manage their own records of rewards.
- Throughout the curriculum, staff place a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' skills in reading, writing, numeracy and oral communication. They make excellent use of the software on pupils' digital tablets to enable spoken answers in response to pupils' choices.
- The school provides comprehensive and detailed written information for parents. Staff inform parents extremely well about pupils' progress with their learning and their personal development. School staff work very closely and successfully with parents and carers to ensure that all are aware of, and able to contribute to, the next steps in each pupil's development and learning.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils enter school with significant emotional and social difficulties as a result of their autism. They do not always understand verbal and visual clues in the voices or facial expressions of adults with whom they work. Staff have a comprehensive understanding of their individual behavioural characteristics and demonstrate high levels of skill in managing communications very effectively throughout the school.
- Staff continuously work hard to develop high levels of trust between pupils and adults throughout the school. Pupils rapidly grow in confidence because they know that they are valued and cared for.
- Pupils engage continuously in their learning and show excellent, sustained concentration. Staff support them very effectively to understand what they must do now and what will happen next. The school's strategies to enable pupils to understand time and the sequencing of tasks are very effective in managing their anxieties and impatience.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and respond very positively to verbal feedback. They value the school's reward system and this helps to encourage and motivate them. Pupils achieve excellent improvements in their ability to focus, to follow instructions and to respond positively to staff.
- The school provides excellent support for pupils' personal development, including their awareness of relationships, sexual health and keeping safe. Staff ensure that there are appropriate controls on internet access to protect pupils from any external threats to their emotional and social well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. There are no incidents of deliberate misbehaviour or disruption. Pupils enjoy learning and staff support them extremely well to demonstrate respect and consideration for each other.
- Great care is taken by staff to prepare pupils for any new learning activities, including trips out of school. Pupils are helped to understand the different environments in which they will be working and how to respond to other people in the community.
- Staff are well trained to identify when any pupil becomes anxious or agitated. They are quick to intervene and to provide a period of respite from the classroom. They manage any incidents very effectively to prevent disruption to the learning of others.
- The school provides excellent facilities, both inside and in the school grounds, for pupils to relax and to find an environment that matches their current mood and feelings. Staff provide continuous and effective support to pupils in helping them manage their emotions throughout the day.
- Attendance is above the national average with no unauthorised or persistent absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are well below the average for their age. They make substantial progress from their starting points in English, mathematics and a wide range of additional subjects and experiences.
- They develop secure knowledge of events and places. The recall of information by the most able pupils is impressive. They constantly improve their understanding of concepts and reinforce their learning skills.
- All pupils make outstanding progress, in small steps. Staff enable them to reinforce their knowledge and understanding through patient repetition of essential learning skills.
- Staff place a strong and appropriate emphasis on the development of pupils' communication skills. Pupils across the age range of the school make measurable improvements in their communication. Non-verbal pupils learn to communicate through picture exchange, the use of signs and symbols and, increasingly, by using digital communication tools.
- The most able pupils develop their reading skills very effectively. They learn to read complex words and to explain what they have read. A small number of pupils read with excellent expression and appropriate use of emphasis in their voices.
- Pupils enjoy reading and listening to adults read to them. The most able readers are confident to read aloud and to present their own written answers. This represents outstanding progress for these pupils.
- The most able pupils are able to communicate effectively in writing. They make excellent progress over time with the formation of their letters, their spelling and the use of capital letters and full stops.
- Overall, pupils make well above average progress in comparison with other pupils working from similar starting points. Staff have compiled impressive folders of pupils' work across the full range of subjects studied, including history, geography, art, cooking, physical education and practical activities. Staff agree the standards achieved in these work samples in consultation with independent external moderators. Pupils' work demonstrates outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Pupils' excellent progress is achieved as a result of the exemplary commitment and determination of all staff working with them.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- The school provides individual timetables for the small number of post-16 students. All students continue to study the full range of available subjects, including English and mathematics, at levels suited to their individual starting points. They work and learn alongside younger pupils who are working at the same level of attainment.
- The school tailors its post-16 provision flexibly to provide opportunities for students who require additional time to extend their key stage 4 learning in a familiar and supportive environment. Staff make individual arrangements with sensitivity and understanding of each student's continuing educational needs.
- The school has recently introduced excellent, externally examined courses for students to

study unit awards in subject areas of interest to them. These provide students with basic qualifications on which they may build as they continue with their education. No students have yet completed their accredited courses, as this is the first year the school has offered post-16 provision.

- Students also study suitable courses to assist them with the transition from school to supported independence, including elements of careers advice and guidance, preparation for working life and independent living. Their timetables also provide access to suitable work-experience placements in the local community, taking account of individual needs and social development.
- The quality of teaching and assessment is excellent and contributes to students' highly effective learning and personal development. Staff give excellent attention to the assessment of risk and ensuring that any external working environments are safe.
- This is the school's first year of operation and, to date, no post-16 students have moved on to further education, employment or supported independent living.
- The proprietors and leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school requirements related to post-16 provision.

School details

Unique reference number	142635
DfE registration number	857/6006
Inspection number	10026055

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	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
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	01572 720357
Website	www.theshires.org.uk
Email address	marina.gough@theshires.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Shires provides full-time education for up to five pupils and students 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 three pupils and two post-16 students on the school roll.
- All pupils and students live in residential accommodation provided by the proprietor,

Acorn Care and Education.

- All pupils and students have an education, health and care plan.
- This is the school's first standard inspection since it registered as an independent school in February 2016.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- The Shires at Oakham operates under the leadership of the same director of education as The Shires at Stretton. All current pupils and students transferred from Stretton to Oakham when the school opened.

Information about this inspection

- This was the school's first inspection since it opened in April 2016.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in various subjects across the full age range of the school. Observation included accompanying a group of pupils and students to the local town market. He scrutinised samples of all pupils' and students' work across a range of subjects.
- The inspector held meetings with the proprietor's director of care and education, the school's teaching manager and the chair of the governing body. He discussed aspects of the school's provision and outcomes with a number of members of staff and took account of inspection questionnaires submitted by 12 members of staff.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire for these to be taken into account. The inspector took account of the views of a small number of parents as expressed in a recent school questionnaire.
- 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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