



Underley Garden



Ofsted Inspection Report

January 2018



Underley Garden School

Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth, Lancashire LA6 2DZ

Inspection dates

9–11 January 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The quality of leadership and management, including governance, is outstanding, and has significantly improved since the previous inspection.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have exceptionally high expectations of pupils and an in-depth understanding of how they learn. Excellent procedures are in place to assess and monitor pupils' performance.
- Pupils make exceptional progress to acquire qualifications, refine their basic skills, communicate and learn how to make their ideas and feelings known to others.
- Pupils' progress in reading is not quite as strong as in other areas of learning. On occasion, opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills across all subjects are not fully exploited.
- The care and support provided by speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists, and medical and care workers is second to none.
- Safeguarding procedures are exemplary, comprehensive and adhered to by all staff.
- Trips, off-site visits, outward-bound activities, work placements and external visiting speakers are plentiful and contribute well to the school's outstanding curriculum.
- Post-16 provision is outstanding. Students are safe and well cared for. They benefit from an engaging and exciting curriculum and good independent careers advice.
- Working with pupils can be challenging and intensive. Senior leaders are exploring ways to enhance support for staff to develop their resilience and effectiveness even further.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their appreciation of British values is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are happy and welcoming. They attend regularly because they thoroughly enjoy coming to school.
- Parents are highly complimentary about the school. They are of the view that their children are safe, happy, well looked after and making good progress.

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?

- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning by providing greater opportunities for pupils to practise and refine their reading skills across the curriculum.
- Explore ways to develop further the resilience of staff in their work with pupils who require intensive support.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal is committed to ensuring that all pupils realise their potential, despite the level of complexity of their educational, personal, emotional and social needs. She is exceptionally well organised. Together with her capable senior leadership team, and with the full support of the governing body, she has ensured that all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been fully addressed. In addition, senior leaders have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, all of which are outstanding.
- Senior leaders and governors have an excellent understanding of the independent school standards. With the full support of the proprietor, and other schools and services within the Acorn Care and Education group, leaders regularly review educational provision, premises and safeguarding procedures. They ensure that all the independent school standards are met.
- Senior leaders and subject specialists, including those responsible for English and mathematics, regularly review the quality of teaching. Typically, they scrutinise work in pupils' books, observe teachers and other adults in the classroom, and talk to pupils about their learning. Teachers, and other staff, are set challenging targets as part of their performance management. All targets are clearly linked to raising standards and ensuring the maintenance of outstanding provision.
- Morale is high among staff. Of those who completed the inspection questionnaire and the school's own surveys of staff views, the vast majority were highly positive about all aspects of school life. They indicate that they are well supported and state that they know exactly what the school is aiming to achieve. Staff are appreciative of professional development opportunities, which they say help to improve their practice. Senior leaders understand that working with pupils can be challenging, and are looking at ways to enhance the resilience of staff, especially those who work with pupils who have complex learning needs.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and personalised curriculum. Those studying national curriculum subjects in key stages 1 to 4 benefit from specialist English, mathematics and science teaching. Various options are available for older pupils in subjects such as art, science, history, computer technology, food technology, music and geography. In addition, older pupils, including those in post-16 provision, study 'open' awards, with tailored modules in reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills.
- Mathematics, writing and verbal communication skills are exceptionally well promoted across the curriculum. The promotion of reading is not quite as good.
- The school's work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as their appreciation of British values, is outstanding. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the major world faiths and celebrate events including Yom Kippur, Eid and Chinese New Year. They respect and understand each other's cultures and traditions, and appreciate the culturally diverse nature of British society. Pupils have a selfless insight into the needs of others and have raised money for an array of good causes and charities. Recently, they participated in a sponsored walk in the Lake District to raise money for a school in Kenya. Pupils know their rights. They recently worked closely with

staff, giving their views on renovating the playground and purchasing play equipment. They also share their views on suitable extra-curricular activities and games. For example, pupils' suggestion that the school should have a giant outdoor chess set was approved. The set was installed in December last year.

- Parents are highly positive about the school and say that their children are safe and well looked after. Comments included 'My child has made fantastic progress; staff are exceptionally caring', 'I always know exactly how well my child is performing' and 'I never thought my child could achieve so much... he loves the school.' Similarly, representatives from local authorities say that pupils' progress reports are thorough, staff are flexible and willing to explore innovative ideas, communication is excellent and the school provides good value for money.

Governance

- Highly effective arrangements for governance are in place. The principal provides comprehensive termly reports to governors and the proprietor on a range of matters. These include pupils' progress, work with local authorities and families, and pupils' behaviour and personal development.
- Minutes of governors' meetings show that governors challenge and hold senior leaders to account. They set the principal clear performance management targets. Governors know how well the school is performing because they are well briefed with information provided at meetings. In addition, they come into the school to find out for themselves.
- Governors are trained to a high standard in areas such as safeguarding, safer recruitment and child development. They have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards and help to ensure that all are met.
- The chair of the governing body has an especially close association with the school. As former principal, he has a comprehensive understanding of matters relating to funding. He is also acutely aware of the school's challenges, and successes, in meeting the needs of pupils with complex learning and personal development needs.
- Governors ensure that good and outstanding teaching practices, including those relating to assessing and monitoring the quality of pupils' work, are shared with all schools in the Acorn group.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a suitable and comprehensive safeguarding policy on its website which takes into account current government guidelines.
- Safeguarding procedures are stringent and consistently applied by all members of staff. Seven on-site designated safeguarding leaders are trained to a high standard. Staff have an extensive understanding of internet safety and several are CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) trained. All staff are familiar with the latest government guidelines on how to keep children safe. In addition, staff are trained well to understand all forms of abuse and to spot pupils in need of help and support.
- All pupils, and students in the post-16 provision, are vulnerable. Staff have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the potential dangers that such pupils face. All are

familiar with the detailed risk assessments drawn up for each pupil, the school premises, educational visits and work placements.

- Thorough checks to ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified, and suitable to work with children, are comprehensive and up to date.
- Staff know exactly what to do should they have a concern about the safety of a pupil. Excellent communication between various school specialists ensures that pupils are always safe. Underley Garden School is a lead school for safeguarding within the Acorn group and drives the development of both policy and practice in relation to child protection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils benefit from outstanding teaching. Teachers work exceptionally well with teaching assistants, speech therapists, and a range of other specialised and dedicated adults, to meet the specific learning needs of each pupil. Pupils learn in bright, stimulating classrooms, which celebrate their achievements and support their learning.
- All adults have high ambitions for, and great expectations of, pupils. They work both tirelessly and painstakingly to support pupils to make exceedingly good progress. This is most evident with pupils who have complex learning needs, including autism and speech, language and communication difficulties. Staff use a variety of methods, including picture recognition and the non-verbal communication of signs and symbols, to help pupils express themselves.
- Teachers' and pupils' perseverance always pays off. For example, during the third day of the inspection, pupils were observed developing and refining new skills to perform functions, such as making sounds and repeating words and rhyming sentences, they were not capable of at the start of the inspection.
- Most pupils in the primary school department, Holly Trees, follow the national curriculum in various subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Some have proficient reading skills and high reading ages. Good one-to-one reading sessions are effective in helping those in the early stages of acquiring reading skills to sound out and read simple words.
- Phonics is taught well. This was evident in a session where pupils were learning sounds, including 'sh' and 'oi', and to read and recognise words. Pupils enjoyed learning because the teacher and teaching assistant made it interesting. Pupils just about contained their excitement as they played the 'splat' game and competed to identify and find words including 'main', 'rain' and 'wait'.
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge in mathematics helps to bring the subject to life and engage pupils. This was exemplified in a mixed-year group in the primary school department where pupils enthusiastically came to the front of the class to accurately match analogue and digital clocks. End-of-lesson quizzes in a mixed Years 10 and 11 class gave pupils the opportunity to show their understanding of the characteristics of various geometric shapes. Those whose learning needs prevented them from communicating their answers directly to the class teacher did so through the teaching assistant.

- Where possible, teachers explore cross-curricular links between subjects. This was evident in an English class where pupils were learning about the Great Fire of London. After drawing pictures of the fire, pupils were asked to use their tablets to find facts about it. At the end of a brief period of research, pupils told their teacher that 'the fire burnt down 84 churches', 'it started after the plague', 'it lasted for three days', 'it happened on a Sunday in 1666' and 'it started in Pudding Lane'. Quite rightly, pupils were proud of their achievements, for which they were highly praised.
- Key stages 3 and 4 pupils enjoy a good read. This was evident in a class where pupils of different abilities read a passage from John Wyndham's book, 'The day of the triffids'. Pupils read with enthusiasm and good intonation as they described how the triffids used their poisonous sting to kill their victims and feed on their rotting carcasses.
- That said, pupils' achievement in reading is not quite as strong as in other subjects because, as shown in their reading records, reading is not as frequent as it should be. Occasionally, opportunities are missed for pupils to practise and refine their reading skills across the curriculum.
- Teachers set individual targets for pupils. These focus on behaviour, engagement and academic progress. Where pupils can read and engage with their targets, they do. Similarly, pupils who have exercise books and can read teachers' comments frequently do, and improve their work because of such comments. Teachers make no excuse for untidy books. As a result, pupils take great care with the presentation of their work.
- All teachers keep detailed, meticulous records of pupils' progress and achievement. Pupils' work is regularly assessed and their progress closely monitored. This enables teachers, and other adults, to intervene when necessary to address any skills gaps and support pupils in danger of not achieving to their absolute best.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff are adept at developing pupils' self-confidence and self-awareness. 'Friendship' and 'chat' sessions with specialist staff, including speech and language therapists, support pupils in developing skills to cope with the challenges they face in school. Pupils are also helped to manage their emotions and their everyday interactions with others.
- Some pupils face difficulties in becoming resilient or independent. This is especially the case for those pupils who strive for perfection and those with obsessive, compulsive disorders. However, there are outstanding examples of pupils, against all odds, blossoming at Underley. This includes pupils high on the autistic spectrum, who have defied all odds to host local radio programmes and serve customers in cafés, shops and railway stations.
- Collectively, staff have a wealth of experience, which makes a significant contribution in helping pupils to become independent thinkers. Pupils learn coping strategies which help them to make the right decisions and understand the consequences of their actions.
- Excellent care and support are available to help pupils' transition across the school through the various stages of provision. Highly effective in-school support, and external

help from independent careers advisers, facilitates pupils' smooth transition into the school's post-16 provision, college, employment or supported living.

- A continually growing number of work-based learning opportunities are available for pupils, sourced through local business, charities and partners. Staff ensure that pupils know exactly what to expect from such experiences. Pupils benefit greatly from these opportunities.
- Pupils have an acute sense of environmental responsibility. They respect the countryside and engage in forest activities, such as logging, setting up camp and cooking, both on the school grounds and in the school's permanent campsite in the Lake District. These activities help to develop their teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to engage in semi-independent learning activities, some of which require them to use computers and access the internet. They fully understand what cyber bullying is. During the inspection, older pupils demonstrated their good knowledge of internet safety as they prepared their 'e-presentations' to be delivered to younger pupils in Holly Trees.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after in school. They enjoy the school's extensive grounds, rural life and nurturing, family atmosphere. Pupils learn about racism and homophobic bullying. They know not to judge others and that to discriminate against someone because of how they look, or where they are from, is wrong.
- Parents and staff who communicated with the inspector stated that the school is exceptionally safe. There were no concerns raised by parents or staff regarding pupils' safety.
- Pupils learn about dangers and risks through their lessons. They know how smoking, taking illegal drugs and drinking alcohol can be detrimental to their health. They understand the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils attend school very regularly and are punctual to lessons. This is because they enjoy school and know the relationship between good attendance and successful learning. In 2017, almost half of all pupils had 100% attendance. Most absence was due to planned medical appointments.
- Case studies and school records show that, over time, the behaviour of pupils with complex needs dramatically improves. Staff are expert at managing pupils' behaviour. They know pupils' 'triggers' and can identify potential 'flash points'. The pre-emptive action of staff makes a strong contribution to the calm and purposeful nature of the school.
- Pupils' considerate and thoughtful behaviour ensures that classes are studious places where learning is rarely interrupted. Pupils know the rules and recently helped to review and develop the school's good behaviour and discipline policy.
- The Underley school environment, including the gardens, fields, woods, classrooms and corridors, is pristine because pupils look after it. They move around the school safely and sensibly, and ensure that lunchtimes are orderly events where they can socialise and mingle with their peers and staff.

- Pupils are very welcoming towards visitors. They wear their uniforms with pride and act as outstanding ambassadors for the school. Pupils are well mannered and respectful. They enjoy talking about their learning and are exceptionally proud of their academic achievements.
- Pupils look forward to their regular assemblies, at which times their behaviour is exemplary. This was evident during the inspection when pupils volunteered to join staff in various activities to illustrate the importance of teamwork.
- The school's behaviour logs show that behaviour is typically outstanding over time. There have been no incidents of bullying in recent years.
- All parents, local authority representatives, pupils and the vast majority of staff are of the view that behaviour is at least good.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Most pupils learn in mixed-age group classes, some containing up to three different key stages. Others receive one to one, and more intensive, support as they follow their personalised learning programmes.
- Teachers and other adults are expert at measuring pupils' progress – from the tiny steps taken by pupils still in the process of acquiring verbal and non-verbal communication skills to the strides made by pupils whose ability in mathematics soars.
- The school's own baseline assessment data, progress files and clinical assessments, and work in pupils' books, all indicate that, irrespective of level of need or ability, most pupils make outstanding progress in most areas of learning from their different starting points.
- Pupils who experience severe and profound multiple learning difficulties make outstanding progress in relation to the developmental outcomes identified in their education, health and care plans. In 2016/17, almost all such pupils made outstanding progress, including in cognition and learning and personal and social development. Excellent speech and language therapy supports pupils' accelerated progress in areas such as communication and interaction in lessons.
- Severely autistic pupils, and others with limited ability to access learning in the primary school department, Holly Trees, receive therapeutic support and have access to a wide range of interventions and specialist resources. These measures help them to make the first steps in their learning. Little steps, but significant achievements, include making eye contact with adults, recognising pictures and being able to discriminate between colours and shapes.
- At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, a small number of Year 6 pupils took national tests in reading, writing and mathematics. Some exceeded age-related expectations, others fell short by a small margin. All pupils made outstanding progress to attain these outcomes.
- For the last three years, up until 2016, 90% of pupils attained GCSEs at grades A to G in various subjects including English, mathematics, science, physical education, and information and communication technology. No pupils took GCSEs in 2017. Those currently studying for GCSEs are making exceptional progress in all subjects.
- Pupils make excellent progress in mathematics. Older pupils know the importance of mathematics in everyday life. They regularly put their calculation skills into practice when

they go shopping and plan events. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 can make basic calculations, using different operations. The most able are challenged with various problem-solving activities.

- Mark making is encouraged for those pupils who have limited, or developing, writing skills. Others routinely write extended and thoughtful pieces about their many educational trips and visits. Pupils get excited by books, as demonstrated by their dressing up as characters from well-known stories and superheroes as part of World Book Day. However, their progress in reading is not quite as strong as in other subjects.
- A wide range of qualifications are available to ensure that, where possible, pupils in key stage 4 are accredited for their hard work. Typically, pupils study for qualifications, including NVQ and BTEC awards, functional skills and 'open' awards. Workbooks and folders show that most pupils make outstanding progress in their studies and attain well.
- All pupils receive additional funding due to their special educational needs. Many are in the care of different local authorities. As such, they attract financial support. Such funding is used exceptionally well, enabling staff to offer an array of enrichment opportunities which support pupils' academic development and enhance their life skills. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and development in post-16 provision.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- All aspects of post-16 provision are exceptionally well led and managed by the head of sixth form, who is also the school's special educational needs coordinator. Unless family, medical or local authority services and/or funding circumstances change, all students complete their individual courses of study. Outstanding, tailored provision helps to ensure that students enjoy their time in post-16 provision and make excellent progress.
- Students enjoy the autonomy that they are afforded in their sixth form common room. Here they can play games, read, relax and catch up with friends. Students behave outstandingly well and take responsibility for ensuring that their common room is tidy and orderly.
- All students who spoke with the inspector said that they feel safe and well looked after. They know that they can go to any member of staff with a concern and have it dealt with immediately. The same comprehensive safeguarding procedures in operation in the primary and secondary school departments are in operation in post-16 provision.
- Students make exceptional progress in a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics, design technology, art and music. This is because they benefit from outstanding teaching and additional clinical and nurture support.
- Students enjoy mathematics because they understand its relevance in the world outside school. This was demonstrated in a lesson where students were learning to decipher and follow bus timetables. Not only were students required to plan journeys, they were expected to catch buses to go shopping and visit the local village.
- Students are competitive. They enjoy participating, and winning, national photography competitions and flower and garden shows. During the inspection, students took delight in painting garden signs, made from recycled wood, for the forthcoming Cumbria in Bloom competition, which they won last year.

- Students are well prepared with the skills needed for adult life. They enjoy cooking their favourite meals, giving their views on the school council, celebrating national events, such as Remembrance Day and World Flag Day, and work experience placements.
- Many work placements are on offer to students in areas such as animal care, catering and hospitality, and horticulture. In addition, students can hone their DJ skills on the local radio. During the inspection, students were out on placement at furniture restoration and computer refurbishment workshops.
- Students are taught the benefits of healthy living and regularly purchase produce from the local market, which they did during the inspection. They had fun tasting various fruits in class, discussing their likes and dislikes and the health benefits of eating fruit, vegetables and salads.
- Students benefit from impartial careers advice and information on employment, education and training opportunities. They have supervised access to online employment information and are supported in writing personal statements and applications for various training and employment options.
- A limited number of students transition to employment and/or further education. Staff do all they can to support and enhance students' aspirations. This helps to ensure that students are exceptionally well prepared for their life after school.

School details

Unique reference number	112461
DfE registration number	909/6044
Inspection number	10008938

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 special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education
Chair	Graham McEwan
Headteacher	Ann Henderson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,000–£90,000
Telephone number	01524 271 569
Website	www.underleygarden.org
Email address	info@underleygarden.org
Date of previous inspection	3–4 July 2012

Information about this school

- Underley Garden School is a specialised independent special school in Lancashire which provides for pupils aged five to 19 years who have moderate to severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school opened in 1990 and is registered for 60 pupils. It is owned by Acorn Care and Education and was last inspected in July 2012. There are 47 pupils on roll, 10 of whom benefit from post-16 provision. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils are placed at the school from local authorities across the country.

- The school brochure states, 'We support children who have a primary diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. All the children at Underley Garden have difficulties with social communication, social imagination, and have restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities. Many of our children have complex learning difficulties and other sensory and medical needs, often associated with their ASD' (autism spectrum disorder).
- The school aims to 'prepare them (pupils) for whatever the future holds, be it living in shared, independent or assisted accommodation or returning to be with their family... and provide them with the relevant skills, so they can transition confidently to the next stage of their life'.
- Due to the complex nature of most pupils' learning needs, support from adults to meet their educational, emotional, social and medical needs is often intensive. All pupils learn in small groups. Some are educated on a one-to-one basis. Most classes include pupils from different age groups.
- Since the previous inspection, provision has been extended to include pupils aged between five and nine years. Some pupils follow the national curriculum for key stages 1 to 4. Others, for whom the national curriculum is not appropriate, have bespoke programmes of learning. All students in post-16 provision have personalised learning programmes. Some study for vocational qualifications and have various work experience opportunities.
- The senior leadership team has been reorganised. The principal is new to the school since the previous inspection. Two assistant headteachers are new to post. There have been significant staffing changes to match the expansion of school services, most notably those for pupils aged between five and nine years. New staff include teachers, teaching assistants, nurses, speech and language therapists, an occupational therapist, and a health and therapy assistant.
- The proprietor has acquired new buildings and premises. During the inspection, refurbishment work was taking place. In addition, play and recreational areas were being developed.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning across all key stages and in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Students in post-16 provision were also observed. All observations were made jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Pupils' work was scrutinised during observations and separately.
- One-to-one teaching sessions and small-group activities were observed. The inspector listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the principal, chair of the governing body, assistant head teachers and various senior leaders, including the head of post-16 provision and the head of the primary school department. Meetings were also held with the therapy team manager, educational psychologist and the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspector met with the school's independent careers adviser and various staff to discuss safeguarding.
- Questionnaires submitted by 19 members of staff were scrutinised, as well as the school's own surveys of staff views. Nine free-text responses sent in by parents during the inspection were read. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to be considered. The inspector held telephone conversations with parents and local authority representatives.
- The inspector held informal discussions with pupils throughout the course of the inspection. The school's own surveys of pupils' views were considered.
- The inspector examined a range of documentary evidence. This included development plans, checks on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documentation including risk assessments, various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour, and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. In addition, the inspector scrutinised the school's reviews of its own performance.

Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
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