

NAS Church Lawton School

Cherry Tree Avenue, Church Lawton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST7 3EL

Inspection dates

29–30 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal, governors and trust have, in a short space of time, created an inclusive and caring ethos. The principal and staff are passionate about making a difference to the lives of pupils.
- Pupils, often having previously missed out on long periods of education, make good progress from their starting points across all key stages.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well when planning lessons. They explain ideas and concepts clearly and question pupils skilfully about their work.
- The quality of teaching and learning in key stages 3 and 4, although good, is not as high as standards in other areas of the school. The most able pupils are not challenged enough in their work.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and during social times. The school is a calm and positive place. Pupils are proud of their school.
- Governors are fully committed to the school. They use their wide range of skills to challenge leaders to improve the school even further.
- There have been significant improvements in pupils' overall rates of attendance.
- The personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils are outstanding. Pupils say that they feel safe, well cared for, and listened to. Pupils respect and learn from each other.
- Safeguarding is strong and all staff are vigilant and confident in the contribution they make to keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. The school's work to promote British values, and to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.
- Staff have excellent relationships with pupils. The staff are a dedicated team and they work hard to meet the complex needs of pupils. The team of therapists provides further effective support to pupils.
- Some middle leaders are new to post. The strengths and effectiveness in middle leadership are yet to be fully realised.
- The 16 to 19 provision is good. Teaching in the sixth form supports students to gain academic and vocational qualifications. Leaders are in the process of forging links with employers to ensure that all students have suitable work experience placements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in key stages 3 and 4 so that it matches best practice lower down the school and provides greater challenge for the most able pupils.
- Embed current initiatives to improve the knowledge and skills of middle leaders so that they are secure in their role in driving further improvement across all phases of the school.
- Continue to work with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and employers, so that students in the sixth form have suitable work experience to enrich their lives.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the school's opening in January 2015, the principal, senior leaders and governors have created a culture of high aspirations that is shared by all staff. All staff are committed to ensuring that pupils make at least good progress within a caring and nurturing environment.
- Leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They conduct a detailed check on each pupil's knowledge, skills and abilities when they join the school. Staff use this information carefully to plan the next steps in learning. Each pupil has an individual plan that enables them to build on their strengths and improve any weaker aspects.
- The procedures for managing the performance of teachers are rigorous. Targets for teaching staff are clear and closely linked to pupils' progress and to the school's plans for improvement. Staff are eligible for pay progression only if these targets are met.
- Leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and there is a range of training opportunities available to help staff improve their practice. Leaders are aware that the teaching, although good, is not as strong in key stages 3 and 4. Staff have recently completed training in a wide range of topics, including behaviour management, restrictive physical intervention and autistic spectrum disorder. This gives staff confidence to support pupils. Staff support each other and morale in the school is high.
- Leaders use additional funding effectively to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They provide extra help through, for example, one-to-one support or small group work.
- The curriculum is carefully planned and continues to develop as the school expands. Pupils follow individualised programmes of learning that are tailored to their specific needs. Therapeutic support, such as occupational therapy, is carefully integrated into the weekly curriculum.
- Pupils benefit from a rich array of extra-curricular activities which help to develop their leadership skills and promote their health and well-being. Recent activities include rock climbing and skiing. Pupils have the opportunity to complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and participate in trips and visits.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. The pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide extra teaching sessions to help disadvantaged pupils to make good progress.
- A very small number of pupils are eligible for support through the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding. Pupils make good progress, due to well-targeted spending of the funds.
- Leaders use the physical education (PE) and sport funding well. For example, pupils have opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports and activities, such as swimming and horse riding. Specialist coaches work with learning mentors to enhance their skills in delivering high-quality PE lessons. As a result, pupils develop their physical abilities effectively.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively. Pupils learn about British values, including tolerance, in assemblies and form time, as well as through the personal, social, health and education programme. Visits to various places of worship, including a synagogue and churches, give pupils an insight into the values and beliefs of others. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The vast majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school. One parent commented: 'My child is extremely happy at the school. I think the teachers genuinely care about the development of every single child in the school. My child has progressed very well. I cannot praise the school enough.'
- Leaders have received valuable advice and support from educational advisers who work for the National Autistic Society Academies Trust and from a school improvement adviser. This support has helped leaders and governors to evaluate the school's work and move forward apace.
- Some of the middle leaders are new to their roles, which they have taken to with energy and enthusiasm. They are developing their areas of responsibility, but there has not yet been enough time for these new strategies to embed and have full impact.

Governance of the school

- Governors are forward-thinking and have a wide range of skills. They want the best for the school. As one governor commented: 'We want the children to be happy, fulfil their potential and be part of society.'
- Governors provide effective support and challenge to leaders. They visit the school regularly and remain focused on ensuring the best outcomes for pupils. The minutes of governors' meetings demonstrate that over time governors ask probing questions and hold leaders to account. They have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement as the school continues to grow each year. Governors have attended a range of training courses to improve their skills.
- The safeguarding governor visits frequently to check the information that the school holds on keeping pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders make sure that the single central record is kept up to date and that all required checks are in place. All staff and governors have completed training in safeguarding. Staff have read the most up-to-date guidance on 'Keeping children safe in education'. They know what to do if they have any concern about a pupil's welfare or safety.
- The principal, who is the designated safeguarding leader, has a good knowledge of individual pupils and of their families. He works effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support and protection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is effective and secures good progress for pupils who are currently at the school.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong. Pupils speak positively about their experiences. One pupil commented: 'Teachers give us useful advice which helps us to do even better.'
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to explain things clearly to pupils. Many pupils arrive with gaps in their learning. Teachers are quick to identify these gaps and support pupils to catch up quickly.
- Teachers ask probing questions to deepen pupils' thinking and to check on understanding. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding and clarify any misconceptions.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are regularly reinforced as appropriate to each pupil's needs. Teaching writing skills is a whole-school focus for improvement. Teachers use a range of high-quality texts to stimulate pupils' ideas for their own writing.
- Pupils have opportunities to read independently and for pleasure. Their reading comprehension skills are well developed.
- Teachers focus on important life skills and ensure that pupils have lots of opportunities to practise them. Communication skills are actively promoted in every lesson using a variety of approaches which are specific to the needs of pupils.
- Learning mentors are used effectively to help pupils to engage with learning activities, maintain their interest and sustain concentration.
- Teachers follow the school's assessment policy, check pupils' work and ensure that they know how to improve it.
- The school's progress data shows that the quality of teaching and learning is never less than good. However, it varies between key stages. Most teachers use assessment information effectively to plan interesting and engaging activities. Leaders are aware that activities set for the most able pupils in key stages 3 and 4 do not offer enough challenge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They feel very well cared for. Pupils say that they feel safe and know who to speak to if they are concerned about anything. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and how to protect themselves from others.
- A strong programme of careers education starts in Year 8 and continues throughout the year groups. Pupils receive the advice that they need to make appropriate choices for their next steps.

- Pupils quickly gain self-confidence as a result of the encouragement and support that they receive from a dedicated team of education and therapy staff. The sensory rooms and occupational therapy sessions help pupils to release energy and ensure that they can settle and focus on learning. This makes a strong contribution to pupils' progress.
- There have been no recorded incidents of bullying to date. Pupils feel that bullying is rare, but if it did happen they are confident that matters would be dealt with quickly.
- Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures, including aspects such as equality and diversity through the personal, social, health and education programme. As a result, pupils accept differences readily and respect them.
- Pupils enjoy taking part in decision-making within the school. For example, as elected members of the school council, they take responsibility for organising events to raise money for charitable purposes.
- Leaders carefully check that the very small numbers of pupils in part-time alternative provision attend regularly and are fully supported.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils are able to self-regulate their behaviour. During social time, pupils behave very well and play cooperatively with each other. The school is calm during and between lessons, break and lunchtime.
- In lessons, pupils show excellent attitudes to learning. They demonstrate very high levels of concentration and resilience. Staff and pupils promote a culture of mutual respect.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of the school's behaviour management policy and of the standards of behaviour that are expected of them. The incidence of exclusion from school is very low.
- Rates of attendance for most pupils are high. Leaders know individual pupils and their families well and work closely with them, engaging the support of the family liaison coordinator. The pupil premium funding supports eligible pupils to attend the breakfast club. Leaders reward pupils for coming to school regularly. The impact of these initiatives is that the attendance of pupils has improved. However, leaders recognise that a very small minority of pupils do not attend school as often as they should. These pupils have often fallen into bad habits in their previous schools and their attendance was very poor. Since joining this school, their attendance has improved significantly but it is still not as high as it could be.
- Pupils respect their school environment. There is no evidence of litter or graffiti.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school at various ages after considerable difficulties or disruption to their education. Information from tests, coupled with available information from pupils' previous schools, is used as a baseline from which teachers plan personalised programmes of learning for pupils.

- Inspection evidence, including observation of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work, shows that pupils make consistently good progress from various starting points across subjects and key stages.
- All pupils study for GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science. Pupils are able to complete entry level 1 and functional skills qualifications when appropriate. Leaders are rightly focusing on increasing the range of accredited courses on offer in the future.
- Phonics is taught effectively. Pupils apply their phonic skills successfully and read fluently. Leaders have carefully chosen books and topics to capture pupils' interest, especially that of boys. Older pupils use their reading skills well to research information to support their learning. Pupils make good progress in reading.
- Pupils make good progress in writing because teachers support them well in refining their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills. Pupils use their mathematical skills to solve problems linked to real-life scenarios.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in all aspects of the curriculum, considering their different starting points. Each pupil's progress is tracked rigorously. Additional support enables pupils to catch up and rapidly develop their knowledge and skills.
- Staff encourage pupils to develop an appreciation of music. Pupils show high levels of concentration and make good progress in making and exploring sounds from instruments.
- Children who started in the early years have progressed into key stage 1 and are making good progress.
- The most able pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are not fully challenged in their work and therefore they do not always make the progress of which they are capable.
- Beyond academic outcomes, pupils are supported to gain essential practical and social skills. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is only in its first year. To date, five students are being educated in Year 12. Leaders know each student well. As a result, they can intervene and readily give support. The sixth-form coordinator is committed to developing provision that meets pupils' needs as well as possible.
- Students benefit from a highly personalised learning programme. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Pupils' work shows that they make good progress from their different starting points.
- Leaders ensure that a range of academic and vocational courses is available for students through partnerships with neighbouring schools and colleges. Students study for various qualifications, including entry-level qualifications, functional skills and A levels. Leaders ensure that, for those students for whom it is appropriate, they are well supported to resit GCSE examinations in English and mathematics.

- Staff build strong relationships with students. Students behave very well and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Students benefit from external, impartial careers advice, facilitated by leaders.
- Leaders are working hard to forge partnerships with employers to establish meaningful work experience placements, despite difficulties engaging parents and suitable providers.

School details

Unique reference number	141559
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10036759

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through special
School category	Free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Lucia Scally
Principal	Mr Paul Scales
Telephone number	01270 877601
Website	www.churchlawtonschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@naschurchlawton.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Church Lawton is a special school for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder.
- The school opened as a free school in January 2015 under the government's free school programme. The school is part of a multi-academy trust, called the National Autistic Society Academies Trust. This is the school's first full inspection.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized all-through school.

- There has been no enrolment in the early years provision for the last two years. Therefore, it was not possible to judge and grade this provision.
- The majority of the pupils at the school are White British and there are significantly more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above the national average.
- All pupils attending the school have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school uses alternative education provision off the school site at the following provider: The Fermain Academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a number of classes. Some of these observations were made with school leaders. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' books throughout the inspection to evaluate pupils' learning over time.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils formally and spoke with many more pupils informally. Inspectors heard some pupils read in Year 2 and Year 6.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, deputy principal, school business manager, a group of middle leaders and staff. Meetings were also held with members of the local governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the National Autistic Society Academies Trust and a representative of an alternative provider.
- The inspection team scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, safeguarding information, minutes of governing body meetings, information on the progress made by pupils, training arrangements for teachers and other staff, the school's checks on the quality of teaching, external reviews by a school improvement adviser and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 24 free-text responses received from parents.
- Inspectors also considered the 26 responses to the staff questionnaire and 10 responses to the questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Ahmed Marikar, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Iain Sim

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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