

Pace Education Ltd

Black Horse House, 3 Porthill Bank, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, ST5 0LS

Inspection dates 3–5 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Students who have had negative previous experiences of education are motivated well to work hard and achieve academic success. They demonstrate strong improvement in both their behaviour and attitudes.
- The proprietors and senior leaders have ensured that teaching is good and that students have access to a suitable range of subjects and experiences. This enables them to make good progress and achieve success in external examinations by the end of Year 11.
- Students enjoy school and respond positively to the high quality of relationships with each other and with the staff.
- The proprietors, one of whom is the headteacher, have high expectations for what students can achieve. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and they take effective action to address weaknesses.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are outstanding. The school provides a very safe and secure environment for learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' achievements in science are not as good as in the other core subjects.
- Recent instability in staffing arrangements has restricted the rate of students' progress in mathematics.
- The attendance of a small number of students is not good enough.
- Arrangements for the management of staff performance and their further training are not sufficiently systematic.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The school was inspected with one day's notice.
- The inspector visited a number of classrooms and observed students' learning and the quality of their work. A number of books and examples of students' marked work were scrutinised.
- The inspector held discussions with the proprietors, senior leaders, members of staff and a number of students. He considered written responses by placing authorities together with questionnaires submitted by a number of staff members.
- The inspector considered views of a small number of parents. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online Parent View questionnaire for these to be taken into account.
- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, the inspector examined a number of school policies together with records of attendance, incidents, checks on fire safety and the assessment of students' progress.
- At the request of the Department for Education, the inspector considered the school's request for a material change to extend the age range of the school to admit 13-year-old Year 9 students.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pace Education is registered to admit up to 30 students in the age range 14 to 16 years. Students admitted to the school have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and the majority have been permanently excluded from previous schools.
- There are currently 24 students on the school roll. Fourteen students have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. A small number are in the care of their local authority.
- A number of students attend part-time. They are dual registered with their base schools. Pace Education does not make use of any alternative provision.
- This small school is led and managed by a senior leadership team without any defined middle management roles.
- The last full inspection of the school was in November 2011. A progress monitoring inspection took place in January 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement in science by the end of Key Stage 4 by:
 - reviewing the content of the science curriculum and the quality of resources and facilities for teaching the subject
 - ensuring that the examinations available at the end of Year 11 are the most suitable to secure success for all students.
- Ensure that arrangements for the recruitment and retention of teachers of mathematics are robust and suitable to maintain the good standards regularly achieved in the subject.
- Improve the attendance of the small number of students who are persistent absentees.
- Develop a more systematic approach to the management of staff performance to ensure that all members of staff have equal access to regular review of their work and opportunities for further training.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good and have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Students make good academic progress from their various starting points and achieve examination successes which enable them to progress to suitable courses in further education at the end of Year 11.
- School leaders, including the proprietors and senior leadership team, set high expectations for what students can achieve. Their mission is 'to provide young people with a brighter future'; the school implements this effectively by raising students' aspirations to succeed academically and to achieve the confidence and self-discipline required to function successfully in the adult world.
- The two proprietors, one of whom is also the headteacher, play an active part in the daily life of the school. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They have recently engaged a school improvement partner to provide an accurate independent evaluation of the school's work and this appropriately informs the school development plan.
- The school provides equality of opportunity for all students through individual timetables which take account of their previous learning and which provide access to appropriate external examinations and awards. Staff work closely with part-time students' base schools to ensure that they have a full-time education which covers all the required areas of learning.
- The subjects and activities provided place a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills, together with regular experience of science and information and communication technology (ICT). Senior leaders are aware that science results in external examinations are not as good as in the other core subjects.
- Arrangements for the assessment of students' achievement are good. Staff have access to appropriate information about students' successes and areas for further improvement in their learning.
- The school prepares students well for life in modern Britain. Students have a good understanding of key points in British history, together with how these have shaped British values of democracy and the rule of law. Students are helped effectively to overcome the barriers to their learning and personal development which could prevent them from fulfilling their potential as active citizens.
- Students' attendance is monitored accurately and appropriate contact made with parents and placing authorities to address any absence. However, a small number of students are absent too often.
- Arrangements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students are good. They are provided with particularly effective opportunities to reflect on their personal attitudes and behaviour, and to strengthen their moral resolve to make the most of their academic opportunities.
- The school presents students with a good range of opportunities to develop respect and consideration for the variety of beliefs and cultures in the local and wider communities. Activities within the curriculum, including visits to places of worship, the celebration of major festivals and World Peace Day, are used effectively to widen students' appreciation of the variety of beliefs and cultures in the local and wider community.
- High quality, impartial advice is provided for students as they prepare for the transition to post-16 education or training. Students are encouraged to visit colleges both locally and wider afield, often accompanied by members of staff. As a result, a number of students have chosen highly appropriate careers or further study appropriately tailored to their personal interests and skills.
- The school gives excellent attention to the safeguarding of students and to ensuring that all statutory requirements are met. Successful workshops and activities related to homelessness, children's safety and

the potential sexual exploitation of young people illustrate how students' understanding of crucial issues is developed.

- Senior leaders have ensured that the school provides a safe and secure environment for students' learning and personal development. Policies and procedures to ensure the safeguarding of students are implemented consistently, including arrangements for staff recruitment, the management of behaviour and the prevention of bullying. Students are closely supervised throughout both on- and off-site activities.
- The school is likely to comply with the relevant independent school standards if the requested material change is implemented.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The proprietors gain information about the quality of teaching largely through relatively informal observation of teachers and students at work in the classrooms and around the school. The proprietors have taken appropriate steps to address the challenges of staff recruitment in mathematics.

The proprietors provide opportunities for pay advancement for staff related to performance. However, arrangements for the management of staff performance and their further training are not sufficiently systematic to guarantee equality of opportunity for all staff.

The proprietors have a good understanding of the school's arrangements for the assessment of students' progress, the qualifications achieved at the end of Year 11, and the routes for students into further education and training.

The proprietors have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. The school's documentation shows strong improvement in the behaviour of the majority of students compared with their previous placements.
- Established students demonstrate respect for the staff and trust their decisions and judgements. Students who have joined the school more recently take a little time to adjust to the expectations and relationships within the school. Newly appointed members of staff are supported appropriately as they develop their understanding of the behaviour and characteristics of individual students.
- Placing authorities state that the individual students' timetables have a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning and their engagement in the full range of activities provided. This is a significant reason why they place students at Pace Education.
- Students develop appropriate social skills effectively due to the good example of all members of staff. On a visit to a local ten-pin bowling venue, students demonstrated excellent respect for the facilities and for other people in attendance. They displayed appropriate competitive attitudes combined with good humour and respect for the other adults and students present.
- Behaviour around the school, including at breaks and lunchtimes, is good. Students cooperate well while playing online games, socialise appropriately with members of staff, and handle relationships with good humour and a relaxed attitude.
- Staff manage any incidents of misbehaviour appropriately in line with the requirements of school policies for behaviour management and the prevention of bullying. There is a decrease in incidents for virtually every student once they adjust to the standards required. Incidents are recorded appropriately and the sanctions applied are appropriate to the event.
- Overall attendance is below the national average but the majority of students improve their attendance

considerably compared with previous placements. A number achieve attendance figures close to or above the national average. The school tracks students' attendance rigorously and communicates this information daily to placing authorities. Staff work tirelessly to improve attendance but a small number of persistent absentees remains.

- Arrangements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students are good. Students develop self-confidence and become more aware of the importance of appropriate respect for each other and for others beyond the school. They are supported well to understand the importance of correct decisions and to distinguish right from wrong in the way they conduct themselves.
- Units of work, particularly in the personal and social education programme, including visits to the Imperial War Museum and celebration of a 'British Day', enable students to value important features of their life in modern Britain.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. All members of staff are trained to the appropriate levels in safeguarding and sufficient numbers of first aiders and fire marshals are on site at any time. All staff training is monitored to ensure that renewal dates are fulfilled.
- Arrangements for the recruitment of staff are robust; all appropriate checks are made to ensure that only suitable adults work with students. High levels of staff supervision and students' cooperation with the school's expectations of their behaviour combine to provide an environment in which students feel safe and secure.
- Carefully selected visitors to the school contribute to students' awareness of the risks of substance abuse, safe travel and good practice to ensure sexual health. Students are aware of the different forms of bullying, including the requirements of effective e-safety. There have been no recorded incidents of bullying in the last year.
- Arrangements to ensure the safety of the premises, including the suitable assessment of risk and robust routine internal checks on all aspects of fire safety, are evident in the school's records. Appropriate use is made of the services of external contractors, for example in the maintenance of fire safety equipment and the testing of portable electrical appliances.
- Students feel safe and are assisted effectively to understand how to stay safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good and enables students to make good progress with their learning. Most members of staff have a good understanding of students' current level of achievement and personal learning characteristics. As a result, students with special educational needs receive appropriate support and are able to make good progress.
- The school gives careful consideration to the grouping of students, taking good account of their previous learning and their social maturity.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on the achievement of key skills which are applied productively across the range of subjects studied. In a science lesson, students made accurate measurements of lengths and angles as they prepared a template for the construction of a house.
- The quality of teachers' questioning is often outstanding as they encourage students to deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding. Students in small group or one-to-one learning benefit from questioning which explores the key concepts learned, for example when comparing their own personal skills and qualities. As a result, students are encouraged to be reflective and to develop confidence in their ability to get things right.

- Teachers are quick to identify any potential distractions which may interfere with students' concentration. They intervene appropriately and introduce new activities which re-engage students' attention. Students are helped to recognise for themselves when their concentration is waning and are provided with good strategies to regain their focus, for example by taking a short time out before returning to effective learning.
- Students develop practical skills effectively, such as learning to cook a lemon meringue or cultivating effective team skills during a bowling lesson. The variety of activities and tasks provided for students is one of the strengths of teaching which enables them to retain their interest and motivation.
- Students make particularly good progress in English and ICT as a result of careful planning based on teachers' excellent knowledge of students' abilities and preferred learning styles. Students in an ICT lesson consolidated their understanding of the main features of spreadsheets through competitive engagement in a game which tested their knowledge of relevant vocabulary and concepts.
- Teachers place a strong and effective emphasis on the development of reading and writing skills in English lessons. Students are supported when their confidence is low and teachers challenge them to try increasingly complex writing as their skills improve. As a result, students in Key Stage 4 are well prepared to achieve success in functional skills examinations. A few students develop the confidence and skill to tackle successfully the demands of novels such as *War Horse* or *Of Mice and Men* as they prepare for GCSE examinations.
- Recent staff turnover has had a short-term impact on the pace and extent of students' achievement in mathematics. However, more established students continue to progress appropriately towards their planned examinations.
- Suitable resources are used well to stimulate students' engagement and to vary the activities completed in lessons. Good use is made of computers to support students' individual research or to present their findings, for example through the use of electronic presentations. These opportunities are occasionally overlooked. A few lessons depend too heavily on individual students working through a range of activities that are not stimulating and do not take sufficient consideration of their attention span and limited independent learning skills.
- In the great majority of lessons, teachers listen well to students' ideas, check their understanding regularly and intervene appropriately when advice or additional challenge are required. Teaching assistants work very effectively with teachers to ensure that each student maintains their concentration and to provide suitable encouragement when concentration begins to lapse.
- Teachers' marking of students' regular classwork mostly provides helpful advice about the next steps required to correct mistakes and address new challenges. Students respond well to the opportunity to redraft and improve their written tasks, for example in preparation for GCSE English.
- The school has recently introduced new and effective arrangements for the assessment of students' progress in the core subjects. Students are benefiting from the systematic development of their knowledge and skills, based on an accurate diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses in their current learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The achievement of students is good as a result of good teaching in a range of subjects at a suitable level to meet their individual needs.
- On entry to the school, students are working below or well below the standard expected for their age due to disruptions to their previous education, often including periods of exclusion from school. Once they have settled into the expectations of the school, students make good progress with their learning and

achieve valuable examinations and awards.

- There are no students assessed as performing above the national average on entry to the school.
- Students make good progress in English, mathematics and ICT, and all achieve a range of external examinations in functional skills or GCSE foundation level. The proportion of students exceeding national rates of progress is above national figures, particularly in English.
- In summer 2014, a small number of students made outstanding progress, gaining higher-level results in mathematics and ICT. A minority of students also achieved a national award in science.
- Disadvantaged students make good progress in comparison with other students nationally. They are successfully closing the gaps in their previous education. Similarly, students with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans make good progress towards the targets set in their personal education plans.
- Students are well prepared for the future after leaving Pace Education at the end of Year 11. All students who left the school in summer 2014 progressed to further education courses or vocational training in a range of subjects including media, performing arts, travel and tourism, construction and motor vehicle engineering.
- Approximately half the current students joined the school partway through the current academic year, including new arrivals in Year 9 for the first time. The school's assessment records and work observed during the inspection indicate that these students are making good progress, particularly in English and ICT. Progress in mathematics for these students has not been as strong due to recent turbulence in staffing arrangements.
- Students make good progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening as a result of good teaching and the reinforcement of these skills across the full range of subjects studied.
- All students achieve good results in a number of awards based on units of work in personal and social education including life skills and employability qualifications, together with sport and fitness and Foodwise awards.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	136245
Inspection number	454293
DfE registration number	860/6443

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	Secondary day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part time pupils	17
Proprietors	Clare Harper and Cherri Felton
Headteacher	Clare Harper
Date of previous standard school inspection	16 November 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,066 (part-time students £694 per week)
Telephone number	01782 616660
Email address	info@pace-education.co.uk

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