

Pace Education Ltd

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

Inspection dates

1–3 May 2018

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met. All staff are deeply committed to pupils. Staff want the very best for every pupil.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is securely good. There are high levels of trust between leaders and teachers.
- Teachers devise effective schemes of work and planning. There are many strengths in teaching but there are currently limited opportunities for teachers to see and share their best practice.
- Given their starting points, pupils make strong progress. This is as a result of teachers' excellent use of assessment and tracking information. However, there is scope for some pupils to receive a greater level of challenge and make more sustained and substantial progress.
- New strategies have been put into place to further improve pupils' grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting. This work is new and the impact of it must now be monitored and evaluated over time.
- Leaders are passionate and committed people. The two headteachers complement one another well. They share different skills and have high expectations. They lead by example and foster very positive relationships with all stakeholders.
- Despite these strengths, leaders acknowledge that there is room for the school's monitoring systems and strategic plans to improve further. There is capacity for teaching and learning to be even stronger at Pace.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Staff understand pupils' individual needs and tailor a curriculum that will support them to re-engage with learning and make progress.
- Pupils' behaviour and positive attitudes to all that they do are outstanding. Pupils exhibit high levels of cooperation. They make significant gains in their self-confidence and learning due to the well-thought-out support that they receive.
- Pupils are nurtured and encouraged to gain accreditation in a wide range of subjects. All pupils go onto successful destinations in employment, education and training.

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?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby pupils' outcomes, by ensuring that:
 - teachers routinely adapt learning if pupils find activities either too easy or too hard
 - teachers fully address any basic errors in pupils' grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting skills
 - teachers have more opportunities to share their best practice with one another.
- Further improve leadership and management by making sure that:
 - development plans are more precise about the outcomes that the school hopes to achieve, the level of resources required to achieve them and how impact will be monitored and evaluated over time
 - strategic plans build in opportunities for leaders to reflect fully on the impact of their work and establish any necessary new aims for the future
 - the school's development plans are shared fully with stakeholders
 - systems to improve pupils' basic skills are monitored for impact and adapted as required.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met. Pace offers effective pastoral and academic support to the pupils that attend.
- The two headteachers are committed and driven people. They have created an organisation that supports pupils to re-engage with learning, develop personally and achieve academic success. Provision at Pace is underpinned by a '10 Point Plan'. The cornerstone of this plan is that 'everyone is treated with respect, kindness and understanding'.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have appointed some highly capable and skilled staff. This has addressed any instability in staffing. Leaders work alongside staff to develop schemes of work that will engage pupils and offer opportunities for them to gain accreditation in a wide range of subjects.
- The school is situated in a large Victorian house. Learning spaces are bright and clean. Pupils' learning is celebrated through displays in classrooms and communal areas. There is a strong sense of trust and cooperation between staff and pupils.
- The headteachers share a broad set of skills. Above all, they are focused on helping pupils re-integrate into education, feel safe and become citizens. They do this very effectively. Pupils with a history of exclusions in other schools, and in challenging personal circumstances, are supported to feel confident returning to school. The headteachers model high expectations to their team.
- Given the limited age range of pupils, the curriculum is tailored to ensuring that pupils acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding to undertake entry level and GCSE qualifications. Schemes of work detail the study that pupils will undertake through different terms. Schemes provide the over-arching detail of what pupils will study and teachers then tailor learning to meet individual needs on a day-to-day basis.
- Leaders have a broadly accurate view of the school's effectiveness. However, they acknowledge that some of their systems rely on informal day-to-day discussions with staff and limited record-keeping. Some of the priorities related to improving the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment have not been brought together into a plan that leaders can monitor over time and check for impact.
- Staff are clear about the vision of the school and are deeply committed to pupils. However, they have not had a formal opportunity to contribute to the school's strategic plans. As a result, they lack some clarity about when priorities will be addressed, who will be responsible for them and how they will know if they have achieved their aims. Leaders recognise that by involving staff more fully in their planning process, they have the potential to take teaching and learning to the next level.
- Staff are very proud to work at Pace. There is a strong sense of trust and openness throughout the organisation. Everyone that responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire stated that they enjoy working at the school and that learners are safe. One member of staff stated, 'I am proud to be a teacher in this school which has an ethos that offers life chances to students'.

- Parents and carers are also full of praise for the school. Parents are particularly pleased with the rapid improvements that pupils make in their attendance and behaviour. They state that these positive changes are a result of the fantastic relationships that staff foster with their children. One parent commented via free-text: 'My son has thrived in school both academically and in his behaviour and well-being.' This view was typical of other feedback.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body or proprietorial board.
- The two headteachers hold one another to account for standards in their school. Their approach works. They have high expectations and constant discussions about what is working and what they want to develop.
- High expectations have resulted in secure teaching, learning and assessment and strong outcomes for pupils. However, standards have not yet moved to the next level because leaders' work lacks some clarity. In some aspects of their work, they are not precise about the impact that they are having. This is because their development plans are not detailed enough. Leaders have not established milestones where they can regularly check for improvements and adapt their work as required.
- Leaders have the capacity to address these shortcomings and are committed to further improvement. They rightly prioritise the care and welfare of their vulnerable pupils. Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are now outstanding. There are therefore the foundations in place for other areas of the school's work to improve even more rapidly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school's website and takes account of the guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- Robust safeguarding is the cornerstone of the school's work. The school's headteachers have highly organised systems and procedures to ensure that any concerns are appropriately acted upon. These systems are well known to staff. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they know how to respond to any concerns and what risk factors to look out for.
- The school works effectively with a wide range of agencies. This work provides pupils with access to charities and organisations who can offer a further layer of support. Support can include physical well-being, mental health support and access to exciting outdoor activities and opportunities.
- Above all, pupils say that they feel safe. They know exactly who to go to if they have a worry. They are confident that adults will listen to their thoughts and feelings. Pupils are able to describe in detail how they can stay safe online. Learning how to stay safe in the community is a routine part of their day-to-day studies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers foster exceptional relationships with pupils. Pupils trust staff. These strong relationships support pupils to re-engage with learning.
- Teachers have a wide range of skills and expertise. Teachers' subject knowledge is a particular strength. Previous variability in the teaching of subjects like mathematics and science has been eradicated. Leaders have recruited many skilled practitioners.
- Staff have developed effective tracking and assessment tools so that they can keep a close eye on the progress that pupils make. Pupils' skills are carefully assessed when they first arrive at Pace. Teachers analyse this information and produce plans and activities to address any gaps in learning.
- Teachers ensure that pupils are given opportunities to catch up and feel well prepared to undertake accredited tests and examinations. Given their starting points, pupils make, broadly, very strong rates of progress across a range of subjects.
- Leaders have recently identified that there is more work to do in ensuring that teachers fully develop pupils' basic writing skills. In some lessons, pupils' basic spelling and punctuation errors can go unchallenged. In some instances, teachers do not plan activities that adequately allow pupils to write at length and practise these basic skills. This hampers the progress that pupils are able to make. Not enough progress is substantial or sustained.
- Leaders have devised strategies to develop pupils' spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting skills. However, as with some whole-school development plans, there is insufficient detail about how these strategies will be monitored and evaluated for impact. Leaders acknowledge that there is more work to do in ensuring that pupils' basic skills are more widely promoted by staff.
- Teachers' questioning is highly effective. This excellent questioning supports pupils to engage in insightful and challenging discussions. However, some of the activities that teachers prepare can lack challenge. Teachers are not always quick to change or adapt an activity if learning is either too easy or too hard.
- Teachers discuss their practice in daily briefings. This allows them to explore what strategies are most effective in supporting pupils to learn. However, teachers do not have opportunities to see one another teach or more formally share their collective strengths. As a result, there is some variability in the extent to which pupils are challenged or required to fully develop their writing skills from lesson to lesson.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils thrive at Pace. As a result of outstanding support, they are often able to make significant changes to their day-to-day behaviour and the choices that they make about learning. Pupils make rapid improvement in their self-confidence. They begin to believe in themselves and want to do better.

- The school's curriculum supports pupils to focus on their well-being and feel valued. Pupils attend a wide range of workshops and activities to help them understand how they feel and make better choices. Pupils learn about the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse, they understand the risks of sharing personal information online and they have a well-developed sense of citizenship. Some pupils are able to explain how democracy works in different jurisdictions across the world. Pupils unanimously agree that it is 'OK' to be different at their school. They are tolerant and cooperative.
- Pupils say that bullying doesn't happen in their school. They are confident that teachers will deal with any concerns they may have. Pupils know that poor behaviour is not acceptable and that it will only hinder their learning and the progress that they are able to make.
- Pupils are supported to make well-informed decisions about their future education, employment and training. During the inspection, pupils were observed discussing the skills and qualities required for different careers and vocations. Pupils are able to intelligently explore the 'pros' and 'cons' of choosing different pathways. For example, they are able to compare the differences between going to college and undertaking an apprenticeship. In their work, pupils accurately identify the 'hands-on' benefits of an apprenticeship and compare this to the potential importance of being able to develop their key mathematics and English skills in a college.
- The school's classrooms, corridors and communal areas are clean, tidy and very well organised.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Leaders have developed a highly refined behaviour system that is tried and tested. It works for almost all pupils. Pupils are able to explain how it works in detail. Pupils value the rewards that they are able to secure (particularly the highly sought after group pizza prizes).
- The foundation of the school's behaviour policy is the much valued and respected 'star charts'. Pupils gain stars for achieving the targets that they have agreed with staff. These stars equate to prizes and rewards. Pupils are clear about how, why and when they may lose a star. They are also quick to remind you how stars can be won back if they put things right. One pupil commented, 'You get lots of help to make the right choices, do the right thing for your life.' Another pupil produced a 'thank you' poster for staff that stated, 'You have taken me in as one of your own.'
- Pupils' attendance is variable at Pace. This is partly due to a number of pupils' individual circumstances. Much of pupils' absence is unavoidable and not a reflection of leaders' efforts to secure improvements. Nevertheless, leaders are not complacent about the importance of good attendance. They work with a range of agencies, including an education welfare officer, to respond to any concerns quickly and ensure that learning is not adversely affected. Leaders can evidence many examples of rapid improvements that have been secured for individual pupils. Some pupils with very low attendance at their previous schools secure sharp improvements once at Pace because they are motivated to learn and feel valued. Leaders are aware that their effective monitoring of attendance must be maintained.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make strong progress across the curriculum. This progress is underpinned by teachers' effective planning. Planning and activities are personalised to pupils' individual needs.
- By the end of Year 11, many pupils secure accreditation. Since the last inspection, pupils have gained GCSEs in a wide range of subjects. Accreditation also includes functional skills tests. Given the starting points of some pupils, this marks a significant achievement. Staff are highly focused on supporting pupils to achieve exam success. Pupils share this enthusiasm and want to leave school with a portfolio of skills that will prepare them for life.
- Pupils' books evidence that teachers introduce concepts and ideas in a sensible and structured way. Pupils respond well to these structures and demonstrate clear development in their knowledge, skills and understanding over time.
- On occasion, the level of challenge drops for some pupils. This hampers the progress that they are able to make. This is often because activities do not require pupils to write at length or have enough time to practise and apply their skills.
- Some pupils do not sustain improvements in their basic skills. Progress is not yet substantial because pupils' misconceptions and errors are not addressed quickly enough by teachers. The shortcomings in some pupils' basic skills are also evident in other aspects of the curriculum. Leaders acknowledge that this area requires further development and a sharper strategic plan for improvement.
- Despite the developments required, pupils do make progress from their starting points. Given their initial needs and the gaps in their schooling, they are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Teachers are passionate about preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. They rightly identify that outcomes for pupils currently on roll are as much about personal development and the right attitude for learning as they are about academic success. Nonetheless, many pupils do achieve considerable success in their studies.

School details

Unique reference number	136245
DfE registration number	860/6443
Inspection number	10026109

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	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Amelia Clare Harper and Cherri Felton
Headteacher	Amelia Clare Harper and Cherri Felton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,066
Telephone number	01782 616660
Website	www.pace-education.co.uk
Email address	info@pace-education.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 March 2015

Information about this school

- Pace Education is registered to admit up to 30 pupils between the ages of 13 and 16. The school operates from a large Victorian house close to Stoke-on-Trent. There are currently 26 pupils on roll. The last full inspection of the school was in March 2015.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Some pupils are in the care of the local authority. Pupils have a range of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have been previously excluded from mainstream schools.
- The school has no chair of governors or proprietorial board. The school is jointly led by two headteachers who are also the proprietors.
- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector conducted a range of observations of teaching. Some observations were undertaken jointly with one of the school's headteachers. Pupils' work was scrutinised during observations and in separate meetings with the school's leaders.
- The inspector met with staff throughout the inspection, held a meeting with the teachers of English, mathematics and science, and with a long-standing, part-time member of staff who teaches GCSE English.
- Two parents and carers shared their views about the school via Ofsted's free-text service. There were too few responses to Parent View to generate any results. The inspector contacted two families via telephone during the inspection and met one family at the start of the school day.
- A range of documents was reviewed to ensure the school's compliance with the independent school standards. Documents included: the safeguarding policy, the single central record, health and safety policy, schemes of work, teachers' planning, information relating to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, risk assessments and the behaviour policy.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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