

Vranch House School

Pinhoe Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 8AD

Inspection dates

26–28 June 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
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Vranch House provides a highly effective education for its pupils. Pupils make excellent progress in their academic and personal development.
- The senior staff, the governing body and the trustees provide the challenge and support required to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Leaders, governors and trustees ensure that the school consistently meets the independent school standards (ISS). They ensure that the school provides the highest quality of education and care, through close monitoring, assessment and review of all that the school provides and pupils achieve.
- All staff receive high-quality training. They are committed to ensuring that pupils reach their potential. Regardless of their role or position, all staff see themselves as equal members of the Vranch House team. Staff morale is high.
- Staff use a comprehensive range of communication systems to 'talk' with pupils. As a result, pupils learn to be increasingly independent in expressing their views, needs and desires.
- The curriculum is exceptionally well planned. Leaders monitor teachers' work to check that pupils achieve highly and develop well. The integration of pupils' physical therapy needs with academic learning helps them to make outstanding progress in all aspects of their learning.
- All aspects of the early years foundation stage are outstanding. Children make an excellent start to their education.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the on-site provision of clinics to ensure that their medical needs are quickly attended to.
- The immaculately kept grounds and the high-quality hydrotherapy suite provide pupils with rich, stimulating sensory experiences.
- Parents and families are kept very well informed about their children's development and day-to-day activities. However, on occasion, communication between home and school does not enable staff to build on pupils' achievements which take place out of school time.

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 enhance the school's ability to build on pupils' achievements by continuing to implement ways that families can share their children's progress and the achievements that they make out of school time.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The proprietor, leaders and all staff are passionate about providing the very best for the pupils in their care. This is a harmonious community, where everyone works hard to ensure that pupils reach their potential in every facet of their lives. They have ensured that the school continues to meet all of the ISS.
- One parent, expressing the views of many, commented:

There is a fantastic atmosphere at Vbranch and staff are respectful of the children. Staff are creative in how they plan learning and are mindful of the variety and extent of pupils' additional needs, always encouraging the children to make choices and treating them with care and gentleness.
- Learning objectives and pupils' physical development needs are carefully matched with each other so that staff can intertwine them with the school's daily curriculum. Pupils benefit greatly from this because they are not missing out on education activities to complete therapy sessions.
- There is a strong commitment to the school by staff and families. Families whose children need to move to another provider do so with great reluctance because of the strong family nature of the school.
- The proprietor and leaders have a firm commitment to staff development that extends beyond the roles the staff fulfil or is necessary to meet statutory requirements. Training, support and encouragement are provided for staff to enhance their careers, aspirations and job prospects. For example, leaders have supported staff to move from the role of midday supervisors to teachers, and others to undertake post-graduate studies.
- Considerable thought and energy have been exerted to provide a rich and varied curriculum for all pupils. The 'Vbranch Individual Education and Wellbeing' (VIEW) curriculum is individualised for each pupil to fully meet their needs. It is being honed constantly and adapted to enable pupils to reach their potential.
- Developing pupils' independence from others and increasing their ability to communicate their wishes, desires and needs are at the heart of the school's success. There are no barriers to staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff and pupils use hand signing, symbols, gestures and electronic devices to communicate very effectively. Staff ensure that pupils have the right equipment so that they can express their choices.
- Staff have worked hard to ensure that pupils' individual learning goals are appropriately challenging and achievable. For example, pupils undertake accredited qualifications. Those that participate are successful in meeting the requirements of these qualifications. The curriculum provides opportunities for older pupils to develop skills that they will need for adult life.
- Staff swiftly record any 'wow' moments and pupils' achievements. These are shared with families via electronic media and show what children have achieved during the school day. Parents say that this helps them to fully understand their child's day and achievements. This is of the essence to them, as most pupils are not able to communicate for themselves to their families what they are doing or learning. However, the school does

not yet have an agreed approach to sharing pupils' achievements which take place outside of school time and at home to support their learning in school.

Governance

- Those responsible for governance, along with school leaders, ensure that this is a school that continues to improve. They are passionate about their involvement with the school at every level. They are assiduous, entrepreneurial, perceptive and generous with their time and expertise. The phrase 'not possible' is not in their vocabulary. As a result, the school evolves to meet the changing needs of the pupils it serves. Pupils' needs are increasingly complex. They ensure high-quality training is provided for all staff to ensure that they can support pupils in their care efficiently and effectively.
- The proprietor and governing body make sure that money is used wisely to maximise the impact on pupils' learning and personal development. They have invested in high-quality equipment and resources, such as the hydrotherapy pool. Through their wider charity work, external health professionals are based on the school's site. This is mutually beneficial to the National Health Service and the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a safeguarding policy published on its website. It also provides copies of this to parents and carers on request. The policy takes into account the current government requirements. It is known, understood and followed by staff.
- All staff have a high level of safeguarding training. They have regular refresher courses and have a comprehensive understanding about how to keep pupils safe. As a result, pupils feel safe and are kept safe.
- Excellent relationships with other agencies, providers and health professionals ensure that pupils and their families are fully supported at all times.
- Risk assessments are detailed and used well to minimise risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- All staff are highly knowledgeable about the pupils in their care. They ensure that pupils' medical needs are considered sensitively, but not at the expense of their learning. The wide range of on-site specialist clinics enable pupils to be seen quickly, safely and comfortably by external specialists. This considerably reduces the stress on pupils and their families. In addition, it provides teachers with expert guidance and on-site training to support the continued therapy work as part of general classroom routines.
- The school's curriculum takes account of recently published research to ensure that staff provide the very best provision for each pupil. All of this work is evidenced during the school day in detailed records. This reduces the workload of therapy staff and enables them to spend more time monitoring, evaluating and analysing the impact of their work.
- In addition to therapies being applied in classrooms, education continues in therapy sessions. For example, when undertaking hydrotherapy sessions pupils are encouraged to

read their own programme of exercises and to count the number of repetitions they achieve.

- The head of education formally reviews and checks the quality of pupils' learning. These checks also help him to monitor pupils' learning and evaluate how well they are responding to the curriculum. In addition, staff conduct peer observations to understand each other's skills and to learn from best practice. They find this an invaluable part of their high-quality and regular training and, as a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve.
- School leaders ensure that each pupil's personal curriculum is age appropriate, suitably challenging and covers all of the required areas of learning. Teachers and support staff are thorough in their monitoring and recording of each pupil's progress against their academic and physical development targets. This information is then used to refine the targets and to help plan the next activities for the pupil. The accurate and comprehensive approach ensures that all pupils are suitably challenged and so make outstanding progress.
- Staff share information about pupils' learning and progress that includes pictures and videos of what pupils have done. This information is shared at the end of lessons with pupils. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on what they have done, how they did it and why. This is a vital part of the pupils' learning and personal cognitive development. It increases their ability to think for themselves, to make choices and to learn rather than be 'done to'.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Excellent relationships between staff, pupils and parents are enhanced through informative daily communications. This includes a diary that reports what pupils have done during the school day. The diary also records the intimate care information that parents need or specifically request. This work supports pupils' personal development very effectively.
- Leaders and staff make highly effective use of electronic devices to record pupils' progress against their individual targets. They share this information with parents. This enables parents and extended families to see and keep in touch with the progress being made by their children through a secure website. This is particularly appreciated by those parents who work away from home and those extended families who live overseas. Parents would like to have a reciprocal arrangement to share their child's learning with the school, where their children have accomplished something special out of school. Leaders are actively working to develop an approach to support this request.
- Parents are kept informed about the work of the school through regular newsletters. Parents say this helps to develop a real sense of community spirit with a warm family feel. When bereavements occur, families, pupils and staff are cared for with consideration and supported well. The school's bereavement protocols are thoughtful, and based on expert advice and training from a local hospice. The protection of the mental health and well-being of all those involved with the school is a priority for the proprietor and school leaders.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The school meets all regulatory requirements in relation to behaviour and safety. The compassionate and caring staff make sure that pupils feel safe and are kept safe. Parents leave their children in the care of school staff with great confidence because they know they will be extremely well looked after. Relationships between pupils, staff and families are founded on mutual trust and respect.
- There is no bullying at the school. A few pupils find it hard to regulate their emotions due to their conditions. School leaders ensure that risk assessments are in place. These help staff know what triggers to look out for and help them to support pupils who become anxious or distressed.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and attend as often as they can. Some pupils have low levels of attendance due to their complex medical conditions.
- Pupil 'passports' enable all staff who are working with pupils to understand and know their needs and how best to meet them. These are particularly helpful to visitors, such as students and medical professionals attending the school as part of their training.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Those pupils who can, learn how to control and manipulate their wheelchairs as part of the living skills curriculum. The school grounds are extremely well designed and are immaculately kept. They provide a magical sensory experience for pupils. Pupils experience different smells, sounds and textures due to the careful planting of flowers and trees. This helps pupils to make sense of their surroundings and to engage with nature.
- Pupils learn to communicate very effectively. This can range from facial expressions and basic movements to using signs and symbols. For the few most able pupils, this includes reading for pleasure and learning how to write their name. Some pupils use Voice Output Communication Aids to make their needs and desires known. Again, as with all other aspects of the school's work, these are individualised, devised in conjunction with experts and constantly reviewed to provide the best possible resource.
- Pupils develop self-care skills wherever possible. They learn to follow routines such as cleaning their teeth, or how to tolerate having them cleaned by another person. They also learn how to say no. This supports pupils to develop independence and self-respect.
- Leaders and staff use a range of equipment to support pupils with their posture. This helps pupils to be more physically comfortable, ready and able to learn. Pupils with degenerative conditions are stabilised and their needs managed with great sensitivity.
- Pupils' academic progress continues to improve as more time is spent in class learning. This is due to the reduction in time lost by integrating learning and therapy sessions and minimising the need for pupils to attend off-site clinics. Interventions are swift, due to the availability of on-site specialists.
- The integration of therapy and education enables pupils to make rapid progress, because their needs are met very effectively. This work reduces the impact of their medical condition on their well-being and ability to learn in their academic work.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The school is fully compliant with the early years foundation stage statutory framework.
- Children make outstanding progress in their personal, social and emotional development, physical development, communication and language, and understanding of the world around them. Literacy, mathematics, expressive arts and design are more challenging, given the children's needs. However, these are not forgotten and so pupils make outstanding progress in all the required areas of their learning.
- As with the rest of the school, considerable thought and care have been taken to ensure that the school's curriculum follows national guidelines. It has been expertly mapped against the early years foundation stage requirements.
- Children's progress and achievement are monitored and measured, using the same interactive electronic system as in the main school. Furthermore, staff keep a physical record of children's achievements so that parents have a hard-copy 'keepsake' of their children's early years in school.
- Staff are highly qualified. Through skilful teaching, children learn to be aware of others around them. Staff help children to learn through a multi-sensory approach. Children experience natural phenomena, such as the heat from the sun, and then relate this to the temperature of everyday items, such as hot water. Children also develop their understanding of emotions by observing their classmates' reactions.
- In addition to whole-class activities where children learn to socialise, one-to-one support is provided. Through individually targeted sensory activities, children develop their curiosity, investigating and discovering new experiences. They are as ready as they can be for when they start Year 1.
- Children attend school as often as they can. They love coming to school. They foster interactions with their classmates. They trust and respond to the adults who skilfully and considerately care for them. Strong partnerships with parents, other providers and external agencies provide a secure start to the education of very vulnerable, and some extremely physically fragile, children.

School details

Unique reference number	113571
DfE registration number	878/6007
Inspection number	10047178

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Vranch House
Chair	Julia Toman-May
Head of education	Ian Norton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,300 to £34,800
Telephone number	01392 468333
Website	http://www.vranchhouse.org/
Email address	ian.norton@vranchhouse.org
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 July 2015

Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection was in July 2015, when it was judged to be good overall. Since then, the school opened a secondary department in September 2018, following a material change inspection in July 2017.
- The school opened in 1961 and is currently registered for 33 girls and boys aged from two to 18 years of age. The school does not use alternative providers.
- The school is funded by commissioned places for pupils with physical difficulties. The majority of them are wheelchair users, have learning difficulties and increasingly complex

medical needs, along with speech and language difficulties. In addition, some of them have visual and/or hearing impairments and life-limiting and/or deteriorating conditions.

- The current headteacher took up post in September 2016.
- The school is owned and operated by a registered charity, directed and managed by a board of trustees. There is a governing body that oversees the education and therapy provision at the school.
- On the same site, the charity provides a paediatric therapy centre for mainstream outpatient children. The therapies include physiotherapy, occupational therapy and hydrotherapy. Various outpatient clinics are also on-site, targeted for orthotics, dental, continence and wheelchair needs. The charity does not consider the school a 'therapy school'. It ensures that Vbranch House School offers no more therapy than at any other school for which the charity is commissioned to provide services.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector conducted observations of pupils learning, jointly with the head of education. She reviewed pupils' work and the records of their achievements. She met with senior leaders, teachers, parents, members of the governing body and board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of Vranth House.
- The inspector took account of the six responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, along with a letter from a parent and the notes of a telephone call to Ofsted by a parent. The 20 responses by staff to Ofsted's questionnaire were also considered.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence in the school, including records relating to safeguarding, the curriculum, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation and development plans. She checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards and early years requirements.

Inspection team

Steffi Penny, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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