

URN 116589

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	850/6005
Unique Reference Number (URN)	116589
Inspection number	386862
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Thomas Fisher-Smith

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090070.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090070

© Crown copyright 2012



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

This is a residential special school that provides year-round education and care for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders compounded by extreme and challenging behaviour, who are aged eight to 19 years. Many have additional disabilities such as epilepsy and very severe communication disorder. Pupils' attainment is well below their chronological age. The school admits only those pupils who have the most severe learning difficulties and each has a statement of special educational needs. The school was established as a charitable trust in 1988 and currently has 29 pupils on roll, 26 boys and three girls. All pupils are funded by their home authority, though 25 are in the care of their local authority. The school is organised into seven smaller living and learning units, each for up to four young people. A flat for supported use by an individual pupil is also provided. The residential provision was inspected in 2011 but was not inspected at this time. The school's last education inspection was in 2008.

The aim of the school is to provide for the needs of the pupils through a multi-disciplinary approach that is applied consistently through the waking day so that pupils can achieve as much independence in adult life as possible.

Evaluation of the school

The school fully meets its aims; it has improved since its last inspection and now provides an outstanding quality of education. The curriculum, assessment and the quality of teaching are outstanding and enables the majority of pupils to make outstanding progress. Pupils flourish because of the outstanding provision for their welfare and outstanding opportunities for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; these successfully contribute to their personal development. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are meticulous and implemented rigorously. Parents, carers and placing authorities are justifiably appreciative of the school and its work. The school meets all of the regulations required for its continued registration.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Quality of education

The school provides an outstanding quality of education. It achieves this through a very specialised and outstanding curriculum that is focused on the specific learning and emotional needs of the pupils. The curriculum is particularly effective because it is applied consistently throughout the pupils' waking day. Learning takes place unrestricted by a formal school timetable, though the arrangements ensure that pupils undertake all the activities that form part of their planned day.

The curriculum, known as Personalised Learning for Life Using Supportive Strategies (PLLUSS), engages pupils in personalised activities that meet their needs and which they feel motivated to repeat because they enjoy them; this counteracts pupils' previous experiences where their very challenging behaviour compromised their opportunities to learn and make progress. The curriculum provides all the required areas of learning and comprises a structured process of assessment, analysis and planning of positive learning opportunities for individual pupils. Activities chosen to support the curriculum are selected so that pupils find them interesting and motivating. These activities are linked to assessments using P-levels that the school uses to determine progress.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment is outstanding in meeting the full range of pupils' needs. While there are no rigid timings for lessons, pupils follow a well-structured day in which every situation is used as an opportunity for learning. The planning and implementation of these opportunities is outstanding because it takes into account each pupil's prior learning and enables them to build on skills and understanding they have already achieved. Sessions are provided by highly skilled teams of staff. Learning begins from pupils' first waking and from that point on staff focus their effort on enabling the pupils to develop effective and functional academic, communication and social skills. These skills are carefully nurtured alongside openings for other learning, such as information and communication technology, and the best sessions include a range of these. Not all sessions, however, include opportunities to extend learning across the broadest range of skills; for example, learning in numeracy does not always feature as prominently as it might in practical lessons.

A school-based training programme enables teachers and others to become accomplished practitioners and they consequently understand fully the nature and type of pupils' learning difficulties and plan very well. Features of the very best lessons include high expectations, challenging tasks and well-matched activities. Sessions are characterised by clear demands for successful completion by the pupil. The consistency of this high quality teaching is instrumental in enabling pupils to make good and outstanding progress. The most notable progress is seen in those pupils who have been at the school for the longest time. A majority of parents and carers recognise that their children have made progress. The provision for personal, social and health education is outstanding and fully supports the personal development of pupils.

Assessment practice is outstanding and embedded within every activity; detailed records are made of each pupil's progress. Data show that, when compared to their starting points, the progress made by the majority of pupils is outstanding. By the time pupils are ready to leave, they have developed skills of communication that will enable them to make choices that affect them. All pupils move to further provisions of supported living. Parents and carers are justifiably positive in the views they have about the progress made by their children.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils develop their characters and social capabilities to levels which, at the outset, might not have been anticipated. A dedicated and skilled team of staff has created a caring community in which numerous opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their awareness and enjoyment of the world around them.

A very effective behaviour support scheme, allied to a consistent approach in its application, results in good behaviour by most pupils; for some pupils their behaviour is outstanding. This results from the respect shown to them by all staff who carry out their roles with warmth, perseverance and dedication. Many pupils, particularly those who are older, have a good understanding of right and wrong. This good behaviour is reflected in the daily routine where pupils' attitudes to learning are remarkable and positive. Their attendance is exceptionally high.

Pupils develop their self-esteem and self-confidence through their exposure to many challenging situations. Going to the shops and purchasing personal items or sitting in a cinema all add to their feelings of 'can do'. Weekend activities, such as that recently with a 'Harry Potter' theme, enable pupils to develop their talents and personal capabilities.

The school has substantial links with the community and these are used effectively to mutual benefit. Volunteers from local businesses work on projects at the school and pupils are avid users of community facilities. Pupils develop an awareness of the community in which they live through social and community gatherings as well as contributing to the daily organisation of their houses. At the time of the inspection, preparations were being made to take part in, and raise money for, the Sport Relief charity.

Pupils develop a good awareness of the multicultural nature of their world because they live within a similar on-site community. Staff and pupils represent many faiths and different ethnic groups. This awareness is further extended through topics carried out in art, for example, in making Chinese dragons and artefacts relating to Buddhism.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. Meticulous planning and anticipation by the school management, linked to consistent practice by all staff, has created a very safe environment for pupils. Full-time nursing cover assures the medical needs of all pupils. All appropriate policies are in place and rigorously implemented. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and all staff are trained fully in the application and awareness of these. The structure of the curriculum and its daily implementation has created a seamless and high quality of care for all pupils. Risk assessments are carried out for all aspects of the school's work and the range of these exceeds that which might be expected.

Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles because they are encouraged to take part in regular exercise, either by swimming, horse-riding, dog-walking or informal exercise in the play-barn. Pupils are empowered to select what they eat at all meals and menus are carefully constructed to provide nutritious meals that cater for all dietary requirements. Fresh fruit is constantly available.

Pupils feel safe at the school because of the constant vigilance of the staff and the levels of supervision they provide. Staff have detailed knowledge of the pupils in their charge and they are very sensitive to changes in each pupil's disposition. Policies, such as those for behaviour, anti-bullying, fire safety, and health and safety, all have regard to the national guidance and are reviewed regularly so that updating is carried out as necessary. The recruitment policy and procedures meet requirements in full. Where the school calls on volunteers and occasional staff, the procedures for checking and verifying their information are carried out rigorously. The school has appropriately addressed the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Before starting work at the school, all staff are checked rigorously for their suitability to work with children. The required single central register of checks is in place and the information listed on this is verifiable.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation of the school are maintained to a very high standard by the school's in-house team. This ensures that the school is a safe and effective place in which pupils can learn. Extensive use is made of the grounds to support pupils' learning, from the well-managed mini-farm (The Paddocks) to environmental walks that pupils have helped to construct. Other specialist accommodation, such as the swimming pool, therapy rooms, art room and cookery rooms, enhances and extends the curricular experience of pupils.

Provision of information

All of the required information is provided, or made available, to parents, carers and others. An informative web site, supplemented by a good quality prospectus, provides to parents, carers and others a complete range of information that is clear

and up to date. Reports given to parents and carers are detailed and provide accurate pictures of each pupil's progress. At review meetings, the school also puts this information into the form of a computer presentation so as to provide to parents and carers a complete, visual and evidenced summary of their children's progress. Parents and carers commented on how well the school provides support to families and how approachable it is. They are justified in their views.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly laid out and appropriate complaints policy. Parents and carers indicate they are aware of this policy.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- in lessons, ensure inclusion of the broadest range of skills possible

■
Inspection judgements

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
--	---	--	--	--

School details

School status	Independent residential school		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder		
Date school opened	1988		
Age range of pupils	8–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 26	Girls: 3	Total: 29
Number of boarders	Boys: 26	Girls: 3	Total: 29
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 26	Girls: 3	Total: 29
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 22	Girls: 3	Total: 25
Annual fees (boarders)	£197,531		
Headteacher	Karen Rookes		
Proprietor	Marion Cormick		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of URN 116589

You may remember that I came to visit your school a few weeks ago in order to see how you are getting along. I was the man who came with some of you to see how well you did in your different activities such as music, art and working with the animals in The Paddocks. You really seem to love the animals and were very kind to them. I also watched you at work, making your feelings and choices known to your teachers and others. I was very impressed at the way you use your pictures to tell people what you want to do next; I was even more impressed by the way in which you changed from one activity to the other. I think you are getting really good at your learning.

I think you all work very hard and you enjoy what you are doing. What this means to me is that you are all making outstanding progress and getting better at living together both in the school and in your houses. I was especially impressed with some of you older pupils; you were so well behaved and tried to help out wherever you could. Well done!

All of your staff, and I do mean all of them, work very hard to keep you safe. I was very impressed by how they really care for you – some of them said it wasn't like a job. They give you many exciting and fun things to do and it was good to see you taking part in these. I enjoyed watching some of you playing the game of 'hot potato'.

You live in an outstanding school where all of the adults are working hard for you. I have suggested that, in order to make things even better, some of your teachers might include things like 'counting' in your activities so that you will be able to make even more choices about the things you enjoy.

With every good wish and hope for your future
Yours sincerely

Tom Fisher-Smith
Lead inspector