

Sycamore House

Independent school progress monitoring inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Information about the school

Sycamore House is a very small residential special school located in a children's home in rural Norfolk. It opened in January 2009 and is registered for pupils with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are places for up to three pupils. Currently, there is just one Year 7 pupil on roll who joined the school in September 2010. A Year 9 pupil left at the beginning of this term, having been in the school for 6 months. The school aims to provide a safe and secure environment in which pupils can be stabilised, assessed and provided with an appropriate curriculum tailored to meet their individual needs. The home was inspected by a social care inspector in March 2010. A full report on the boarding provision is available in the social care section of the Ofsted website.

Context of the inspection

The school was last inspected in February 2010 and the resulting report covered the educational registration of the school. The inspection of education found that the school failed to meet a number of the regulations for the registration of independent schools. Consequently, the school was required to produce an action plan to show how it intended to meet these outstanding regulations. The action plan was evaluated in July 2010, based on the evidence provided by the school. The actions and timescales for all but one regulation were judged to be appropriate, although implementation was not seen. It was judged that inadequate progress had been made in improving the safeguarding policy to meet regulation 3(2)(b) under Standard 3, welfare. The action plan was accepted by the Department for Education in July 2010. This is the first visit to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the action plan. The school's single central record was also scrutinised to ensure that all procedures for staff appointed since the last education inspection are in place.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

The inspection in February 2010, found that the school provided a satisfactory curriculum. All subjects of the National Curriculum were provided in Key Stage 3, except for a modern foreign language. Physical education was not fully planned or assessed and not related to the scheme of work. Full account was not taken of the

provision specified in pupils' statements of special educational needs. In Key Stage 4 the school tailored the curriculum to pupils' strengths and abilities, but it did not provide opportunities to learn science. The school planned to review and improve its curriculum planning and documentation, and to provide for those subjects not currently taught. The school has made good progress in implementing its action plan and now meets all requirements of the curriculum. The curriculum policy has been reviewed and schemes of work are now in place for all subjects, including French in Key Stage 3 and science in Key Stage 4, where pupils now have opportunities to follow examination subjects. The programme for physical education is now in place and linked to the scheme of work. Personalised learning plans are in place for each pupil to match learning to individual needs throughout the school and in examination courses at Key Stage 4. In one information and communication technology (ICT) lesson observed during the inspection, planning for ICT reflected the scheme of work and was implemented appropriately, when a pupil used the internet safely to research information and data on skateboarding and then recorded the benefits of skateboarding as a sport. Literacy and numeracy skills were effectively promoted, reflecting the school's curricular aims of promoting literacy and numeracy across subjects. As a result the pupil made good progress in using ICT for research and in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Full account is now taken of information on a pupil's statement, together with other information from the annual review, test and examination results, in formulating individual education plans. These are then linked into the personalised learning plan. The pupil's work showed a strong emphasis in developing literacy and numeracy within the context of a modified National Curriculum which reflected the requirements of the statement of special educational needs.

The last inspection found that the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety was satisfactory overall. Child protection was sound and staff were appropriately trained, but the child protection policy was out of date. Pupils' health plans lacked effective measures to support the cessation of smoking. The school's admission register lacked all of the required information about the pupils' last school attended. The school planned to review and update its child protection policy, to introduce a smoking ban and provided intensive support for those pupils addicted to nicotine and to update its admissions register. The action plan has been implemented effectively. A newly revised child protection policy is in place, which fully meets requirements and includes the names of the designated child protection staff and clear adherence to the protocols and links to the Norfolk safeguarding board. It also makes clear references to other policies such as bullying, racism, health and safety, discipline and the use of physical intervention, and demonstrates the means by which safety is promoted through the curriculum, especially through personal, social and health education. The policy refers to an ethos where pupils are listened to and their concerns taken seriously and acted upon. There are clear protocols in place to refer to other agencies, particularly liaising with the Norfolk safeguarding board, liaising with feeder local authorities and with the Castlere senior management. There is a clear no smoking policy in place which covers no smoking in the buildings. A designated, supervised smoking area in the school grounds has been established. Care plans and behaviour plans now contain clear strategies to prevent smoking and

to manage nicotine addiction including targets, counselling and medical referral. The updated admissions register now records all previous schools attended by each pupil.

The inspection of February 2010 found that all regulations except one were met for the suitability of the proprietor and staff. References for a very small number of staff did not always contain all the information required, and on occasion gaps in a person's employment history were not always fully recorded. The school planned to rectify these anomalies and rigorously monitor the application process for all prospective employees. The school has made good progress in implementing its action plan and now meets all requirements for the recruitment of staff. All recently appointed staff have been carefully vetted as to their suitability and the school complies fully with the regulations. The letter from the school, requesting a reference includes questions on the applicant's suitability for the job as in the job description, and suitability to work with children. References returned from referees reflect these requirements. Where they do not, there are clear records of follow up by the proprietor in seeking further clarification and confirmation that the applicant meets these requirements. Scrutiny of completed application forms shows that gaps in employment are noted and followed up.

The last inspection found that the accommodation enabled pupils to learn effectively. Virtually all regulations were met, but the outside pond area did not have a secure perimeter fence. The school planned to erect new fencing and provide an entrance gate, capable of being locked, to improve the security of the pond area. The school has implemented its action plan effectively as a new two metre high fence with a securely locked entrance gate has been erected around the pond area.

The inspection of February 2010 found that nearly all the regulations were met for the provision of information to parents. Nevertheless, particulars of the name of the headteacher and educational and welfare provision for pupils learning English as an additional language, were not provided. The school planned to add these particulars to its school documentation for parents and carers. The school has implemented its action plan effectively by including the name of the headteacher and particulars of its educational and welfare provision for pupils, for whom English is an additional language, in the prospectus. This includes increased opportunities for speaking and listening, reading and writing across a range of subjects and the provision of translation services for annual reviews and reports.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school has made good progress and now meets all regulatory requirements.

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special: behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	January 2009		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (boarders)	£215,160		
Address of school	c/o Castlecare Group, The Manor House, Squires Hill, Kettering, NN14 6BQ		
Telephone number	01536 711111		
Email address	rburrows@castlehomes.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Marion Paige		
Proprietor	Castlecare Limited		