

Meldreth Manor School – A Scope School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI

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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 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

The school, which opened in 1971, is a co-educational day and residential school for pupils aged between six and 19 years. It is now registered as a children's home and the boarding was last inspected 26 October 2009. All pupils have cerebral palsy, or similar conditions, and additional complex learning and support needs. Of the current pupil population 70% have a visual impairment. All pupils require high levels of staff support to access the curriculum and to meet their individual care and health support needs; 18 are funded at a level that provides for additional 1:1 support. All pupils have statements of special educational needs that are mostly funded by their home local authority. Currently there are 26 pupils on roll, of whom one has a day placement.

The school integrates its education and therapy provision in ways that meet its aim to 'promote the self esteem and personal autonomy of children and young people who have physical disabilities and complex learning difficulties.' Since the last inspection in January 2008, the school had a term without a head of education. The new head of education took up her post in April 2010. The school is owned by the national charity Scope. This was an inspection of the educational provision only.

Evaluation of the school

The school offers a good quality of education for its pupils with many outstanding features including the way it successfully promotes pupils' personal development. The school has made good improvements in aspects of teaching and assessment since the last inspection. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding as is pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding and all safeguarding procedures are very robust and meet requirements. The school meets all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum which is focused on the areas of learning required by the regulations. There are detailed policies and schemes of work that are

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

appropriate for the age and ability of the pupils. These are organised into themes which have medium-term plans with appropriate detail to show coverage of all curriculum areas including programmes of work for post-16 students. Short-term plans are detailed and link well to pupils' individual education and behaviour strategy plans. However there is too much information on the plans which means they are not always readily accessible by each pupil's individual learning support assistant. Learning communication skills are rightly a key priority for the school and pupils make good progress in using a wide range of communication devices. These enable pupils to take as full a part in all subject lessons as is possible given their profound and multiple learning difficulties. Music and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are strengths because they are used so well to support pupils' engagement with learning and enhance their participation and enjoyment of lessons. The recently acquired Theramin has enabled pupils to compose their own music similar to the Doctor Who theme music. Another strength is the pioneering work the school is undertaking in the creative and aesthetic areas of learning with the use of ultra-violet light and fluorescent colour to help pupils who are partially sighted to access colour effectively. Each pupil has a personal timetable that shows the provision they receive every week. These are regularly updated to match any changes to individual education plans and include all therapy sessions pupils receive as well as curriculum subject coverage.

There is excellent liaison between teaching, care and therapy staff. This has improved considerably since the last inspection as a result of the exceptional leadership and management of the new head of education who took up her post six months ago. She has successfully brought together all staff working with pupils to ensure everyone is aware of each pupil's daily needs. Every day in school starts with a multi-professional meeting for all staff where full updates are given. This enables teachers and individual support assistants to modify plans and support in order to match pupils' needs for that day. Support assistants are deployed extremely well in lessons and are well briefed by teachers as to what to do and how to support their pupil to be successful in the lesson by developing the key skills required. The school's work is underpinned by a comprehensive and sharply focused development plan. There is good transition between the school and the children's home because many care staff also work as support assistants in the classroom and know the pupils very well. The school is used in the evening if activities planned are best carried out in the classroom rather than in the flats.

Teaching and assessment are good and this has had an impact on pupils' progress which is good over time and in lessons. The school has robust evidence to show good progress from when pupils started at the school. This is supported by the extremely thorough multi-professional assessment which takes place on entry and is re-evaluated after pupils have spent six weeks at the school. Re-evaluations continue every six months unless there is a health episode which demands immediate re-assessment. These evaluations now include cognitive as well as physical and health assessments. Pupils' annual reviews for their statements of special educational needs include evidence of their progress through video and annotated photographs. All pupils are within the P level scale data, used to record attainment for pupils with

special educational needs and/or disabilities who are working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum; 73% of pupils are working at P levels 1-3. The Head of education has recently introduced a very detailed approach to assessing small steps of progress within the P levels and also a 'routes through learning' approach which assists teachers in planning for the next steps in pupils' learning. SCOPE holds moderation meetings for the heads of education for all their schools. These help ensure that attainment levels are carefully considered and documented to enable a consistent evaluation across all their schools.

Lessons are well planned and are designed through games, music and role play to excite pupils and motivate them to use their communication aids and skills. For example in a 'physical' lesson, pupils were playing a game which resulted in the reward of a piece of their favourite music. Pupils were inspired to make considerable effort to press their communicate switches and when the winner's music was played all the pupils 'danced' in their wheelchairs and so were getting additional exercise without realising it! Very good use is made of visits to enhance the curriculum; for example, through regular visits to a local supermarket to buy ingredients for food technology and weekly visits to the nearby riding stables for those pupils with sufficient core body strength.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as is their behaviour both in classrooms and around the school. There was no evidence of inappropriate behaviour during the inspection because pupils really enjoy attending the school and are fully engaged by all the activities provided. If it were not for pupils' special health needs, the school might well achieve 100% attendance. Children's home staff make an excellent contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because systems followed in the school are also implemented in the children's home. For example, pupils are able to use their communication devices to signal choices they are able to make.

Pupils' spiritual development is evident in the way they relate to each other and to their individual support person. There was a very special moment in a linguistic lesson when pupils had the confidence to have a very short dialogue using their communication aids or their voices to say which colour was the best. They were able to listen for the silence before they interjected their response. Cultural development is enhanced through themed days and through the involvement of parents from different faith communities.

Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for adult life because they are encouraged to be as independent as they possibly can be given their multiple and profound learning difficulties. The regular shopping trips where pupils have to select specific ingredients for food technology gives them good experience of being in an everyday life situation. This encourages exceptional cognitive and physical effort as well as illustrating the need to understand numbers and recognise items required. One pupil showed excellent use of his communication device by identifying the item he had

selected. This required scrolling through several pages of symbols; a skill developed in only a few weeks.

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. There is a very active school council which has had an impact on the local council, making improvements to pathways outside the school grounds. Pupils have joined school councils from other special schools and have a representative on the local Youth Parliament. A special election was held for this and all pupils were enabled to vote through a multi-sensory voting system that was devised by staff. As a result, they are gaining some understanding of the public institutions and services in England.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

There is outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety because of the excellent and trusting relationships between pupils and all staff and because of the exceptionally robust safeguarding and health and safety procedures and processes. For example, comprehensive risk assessments, an issue at the last inspection, are fully in place for all areas and activities, and to highlight potential hazards due to individual pupils' special needs. In the words of the head of care, 'Each student is treated as an individual; there is no one size fits all; each is managed according to their specific needs.'

Pupils have some choice about the foods they eat and where possible they are given this opportunity. However, many have special feeding requirements so cannot make healthy choices; these have to be made for them. Excellent multi-professional teamwork ensures that pupils are very carefully monitored and where an unexpected issue occurs, for example during the inspection with feeding equipment, this is managed exceptionally well by professional medical staff. The school has recently employed a children's paediatrician in order to avoid waiting time at hospitals. This is proving a very valuable investment. The school has good relationships with local hospitals and with the local hospice.

The school has a three year plan which fully meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Systems and procedures for appointing staff, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, are in place and meet the regulations.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively, safely and securely. The school occupies buildings that were purpose-built 40 years ago, and which have been extensively refurbished in the last three years. In the summer

of 2008, the education department of the site was totally re-decorated and significant changes made to room use. The rooms are of good size and the newly refurbished buildings have high quality decoration and furnishings. Heating is good in classrooms and around the building. The school provides a large range of facilities, including: specialist subject rooms; sensory studio; soft-play and therapy areas; a hydrotherapy pool; an outdoor sensory playground and access to an adjacent riding school. The school occupies extensive grounds that promote physical activities, such as the use of adapted tricycles and walking frames which are also used to support learning within the curriculum.

Provision of information

All regulations are met. An attractive prospectus includes all the information for parents required by the regulations and informs parents, prospective parents and local authorities about the work of the school. Annual inserts serve to update details such as staff and term dates. Parents are encouraged to visit the school as often as they wish and regular telephone contact is maintained. Thirteen questionnaires were received and all were strongly supportive of the school. In one parent's words, 'This school is a wonderful environment for my son and is the first and only place to meet and understand his complex needs.' Local authorities are informed through the annual review and accounts' process how pupils placed by them are progressing. Only one local authority questionnaire was received and this gave positive feedback about the school.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

There are good procedures for handling complaints and parents are informed about these through the school prospectus; the detailed policy is available from the school on request. All regulations are met.

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 point for development:

- to rationalise the approach to planning so that the range of current paperwork is pulled together into one user friendly document suitable for use by teachers and learning support assistants.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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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	✓			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special		
Date school opened	15 June 1971		
Age range of pupils	6–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 19	Girls: 7	Total: 26
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 19	Girls: 7	Total: 26
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 3	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,551		
Annual fees (boarding)	£205,186		
Email address	Meldreth.manor@scope.org.uk		
Headteacher	Roger Gale (Principal)		
Proprietor	SCOPE		