

Mountwood Academy

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Peter Toft
Social care inspector	Graham Robinson

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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}

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

Mountwood Academy is a special school and a children's home owned by ROC North West Limited. It based in a modern, detached three-storey building which was a retirement home until 2009; it has since been refurbished and decorated. It is set in its own grounds in an urban residential area and has car parking and garden areas. The school is registered for 25 students, aged between 10 and 17 years, with severe learning difficulties, including physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders. In conjunction with the children's home, it aims: 'to provide a safe, structured and nurturing experience in school, where the young person is valued and respected even when feeling anti-social, yet treated in a consistent, firm and fair manner.'

Four students are currently on roll; all have a statement of special educational needs and two live in the interlinked children's home. All students speak English as their primary language. The school opened in February 2010 and this is its first education inspection. The last social care inspection took place in April 2010.

The school has recently applied to the Department for Education to make a material change to its registration. It seeks to add behavioural, emotional and social difficulties to the categories of special educational needs and/or disabilities in which it specialises, as well as to change the age range from 10 to 17 years to eight to 19 years. This application was considered by the inspectors and the judgement and evidence are contained in the report.

Evaluation of the school

Mountwood Academy provides a satisfactory quality of education and meets its aims. A satisfactory curriculum has been developed to meet the complex needs of the students on roll and sound outline plans have been drawn up for courses for a wider

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

age range. Teaching is satisfactory. Staff manage lessons effectively, promote good attitudes to learning and transform challenging behaviour when it arises into productive learning; as a result, students make satisfactory progress. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Procedures to secure their safeguarding and welfare are good, and those who live in the attached care home benefit from outstanding boarding provision. All the regulations for continued registration as an independent school are met. The request for a material change is recommended.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The newly-developed curriculum satisfactorily meets the complex needs of the students. Curricular documentation is good and plans for further development are well conceived. For the upper primary age range, a specialist consultant has overseen the development of a long-term plan covering the subjects of the National Curriculum in outline. It uses themes to link subjects together for pupils. However, the plan has not sufficiently covered the progressive learning of specific subjects within these themes. Staff training is imminent to develop this work and to adapt it to meet the needs of the learners. Curricular planning is well developed for students in the 11-16 age range, reflecting the expertise of the staff and the needs of the students taught so far. It covers a satisfactory spread of subjects and emphasises methods to encourage the sometimes reluctant learners to engage wholeheartedly in study. The school recognises that it is not appropriate to attempt to teach a wide range of academic subjects up to GCSE level given the small size of the teaching staff and the limited capabilities of most students; the recent decision to arrange for an academically capable student to transfer to another school, which is able to provide such teaching, was sound. An outline curriculum for the 16 to 19 age range has been developed, aiming at external accreditation; it balances academic, personal and vocational development effectively, using external college and business providers to increase vocational relevance.

Each student has a statement of special educational needs, an individual education plan and an action plan showing his or her specific curriculum. Planning is grounded in detailed and frequent assessments of progress which lead to the regular updating of learning targets. Staff make effective use of the excellent planning for child development carried out by the staff in the attached care home. This contributes well to the '24 hour curriculum' being developed in the academy. The curriculum is enriched by a range of activities; for example, students visit a library, post office and shops as part of their preparation for adulthood and understanding of public institutions.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall. Lessons are given to individual students with either a teacher or teaching assistant. These are well planned and staff go to some lengths to promote engagement, showing considerable patience and understanding of the specific characteristics and communication difficulties of each learner. Lessons are planned to be well sequenced but plans sometimes go awry when the student arrives unwilling to participate. Staff are

generally effective in persuading them to participate. Staff make much effort to find something for each student in which they can succeed; the work set is usually well matched to students' needs though at times it does not challenge them sufficiently. The students are positive about the teaching and participate well compared with their reported reluctance to learn when they were first admitted. Lesson evaluations are carried out and show clear judgements and useful recommendations for improvement. An excellent school development plan covers improving the staffing structure, performance management and staff development. A succinct policy for teaching and learning is well focused on meeting the diverse and complex needs of the students.

Assessment procedures are detailed and well coordinated throughout the school, based on established procedures used nationally for students with special educational need and/or disabilities. The progress of students is carefully monitored and recorded and the information is used soundly to adjust learning targets. The use of targets is satisfactorily precise. The school staff know the students very well. They make effective use of assessments forwarded from students' former schools in developing risk assessments and action plans for teaching. There is a very good degree of information exchange between staff in the school and in the home. Monthly reviews of welfare and progress are undertaken by care staff and include a useful section on educational progress; these are sent to parents and social workers. The school staff conduct half-termly reviews of progress, using the information collectively to modify teaching for each student; the information is collated into an annual report to parents and social workers, and copies are given to the home staff.

Students make satisfactory progress in relation to their diverse but usually very low starting points. The progress is particularly clear in their personal and social development, though the steps in this progress are often very small, reflecting their particular learning difficulties. The school has been effective in identifying the areas in which each individual student needs to develop and in promoting specific progress therein. As the school is new, there has been insufficient time for it to build up a track record of external accreditation or in helping students into further education.

In developing this quality of education, the school has demonstrated the capacity to extend its provision to meet the needs of students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, an essential requirement in its application for a material change to admit such students.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. A key strength is the social development of students with autistic spectrum disorder who enter the academy with undeveloped communication skills and a limited capacity to interact socially with others. In conjunction with the home, the school helps these students to make clear progress, not least because of careful planning for personal development and a suitably high level of staffing. A wide range of tailored opportunities to engage with others is provided for each student ranging from

teaching to make eye contact to making use of facilities in the community such as the library. Support to promote behaviour is effective throughout the school; behaviour is usually good, and reportedly significantly better than it was when each student was admitted.

The school is a harmonious community and staff work cooperatively for the benefit of students. They are adept at defusing conflicts between students which arise from time to time. Staff are positive role models, contributing to students' satisfactory understanding of right and wrong and moral development. This is helped by the school's clearly adhered to, but unobtrusive, requirements for students' conduct. Opportunities are taken in the curriculum, sometimes in cooperation with the care home, to promote cultural development, for example, by enabling the students to learn about Chinese New Year celebrations. This is supported in various parts of the curriculum by lessons and external visits, which also contribute satisfactorily to a growing understanding and use of public services and institutions. Opportunities for spiritual development are discernible in activities when staff encourage students to reflect on aesthetic and spiritual matters, but these are limited.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision to promote the welfare, health, safety and safeguarding of students. Staff have developed a full range of well-thought-out policies to secure this quality; they adhere to them assiduously. This is helped by frequent discussions about students' behaviour and progress, together with good quality training. Procedures to secure the safeguarding of students are up to date and comprehensive. Staff have had appropriate training in child protection and are aware of the medical conditions of the students. Procedures to minimise risks are good; they protect children from harm and deal with issues which might arise. There is no evidence of bullying and the school has clear procedures to deal with it if it were to arise. Staff supervision throughout the day, on and off site, is vigilant yet not overbearing. Students feel safe and have a high degree of confidence in the staff. The school has recourse to a large range of opportunities off-site for students to engage in physical exercise; however, the school's use of these has so far been limited. Healthy eating is encouraged both at lunch time and, for older students, during the cooking lessons. Fire protection and first aid procedures are robust. Attendance and admission registers are kept in accordance with the regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school complies fully with the requirements to check staff on their appointment and maintains a single central register of the checks as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The refurbished premises are of excellent quality. They provide ample space for current and planned activities. They are also appropriate to meet the needs of

students in the extended age range and of those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties for whom a material change to the registration has been requested. Classrooms and social areas provide a pleasant atmosphere for learning in a wide range of activities. All areas, including toilets and areas for eating, are clean and hygienic. The outdoor areas are well tended though their suitability for students to engage in outdoor play is limited.

Provision of information

The school provides information regularly and frequently on the welfare and progress of students in a variety of appropriate ways. Communications between education and care staff are very effective and the school has close contacts with parents and social workers. They are satisfied with these arrangements.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has clear and effective procedures for handling complaints which meet requirements.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision was judged to be outstanding and national minimum standards were met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home which should be read in conjunction with this report.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that in lessons students are set tasks which offer them sufficient challenge to reinforce continuing progress in learning
- when planning themes for the curriculum in Key Stage 2, pay particular attention to securing the progressively challenging coverage of the subjects to be taught

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

- encourage students to take more physical exercise by making wider use of external sporting facilities and by developing the outdoor area of the premises for play and games.

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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The quality of boarding provision

Effectiveness of boarding provision	√			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, including physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders		
Date school opened	February 2010		
Age range of pupils	10-17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,500 to £61,500		
Email address	headteacher@mountwoodacademy.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Paul Johnson		
Proprietor	ROC North West Ltd		