

LVS Hassocks

Independent special school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mike Kell
Social care inspector	Liz Driver

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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}

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and the government of the quality and standard of the service provided.³

Information about the school

LVS Hassocks is on a site that was a religious retreat and convent set in very extensive grounds in a rural area near Brighton. The proprietors have overseen a very extensive building and refurbishment programme that enables rapid expansion. The school was registered in April 2009 for a maximum of 50 students aged between 11 and 16 years. It has received interim approval from the Department for Education to allow Year 11 students to move up into post-16 education. It has applied for an extension of the age range to accommodate students from eight to nineteen years of age and to increase its maximum number on roll to 76 students. There are currently 27 students aged between 11 and 17 years; of these, 20 are boarders. There are 23 students of secondary school age, all but one of whom attends full time. The four post-16 students are not taught separately. Students are taught in two secondary classes for those up to the age of 13 years, and two vocational classes for those aged 14 years and over. All students have learning needs associated with autism, and 24 have a statement of special educational needs. Twelve local authorities currently place students in the school. The residential facility was inspected in March 2010 and this is the school's first inspection. This inspection also examined the suitability of the provision to accommodate the proposed material changes.

The school's aims are, 'to enable learners to realise their full potential and become independent individuals who are successful learners in charge of their learning; confident individuals in control of their feelings; responsible citizens in control of their actions'.

Evaluation of the school

LVS Hassocks provides a good quality of education underpinned by adults' detailed understanding of the nature of autism and its impact on learning, and meets its aims. Students make good progress in their learning because they are taught well

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

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

and they follow a good, creative and innovative curriculum that meets their needs. All elements of students' personal growth are promoted exceptionally well, and so their behaviour is outstanding and so is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Outstanding welfare, health and safety procedures maintain students' well-being and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust. The residential provision is an outstanding facility that meets all national minimum standards for residential special schools. The educational and residential provision meets the requirements of the proposed material changes and the school complies with nearly all of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

LVS Hassocks provides a good quality of education that enables students to make good progress in their learning. The good curriculum follows a well-considered model that takes as its starting point the difficulties experienced by students with autism. Broadly, these are associated with communication, socialisation and imagination. Therefore, the curriculum is constructed in a way that is best suited to meeting students' needs while maintaining an interesting range of learning activities that enables them to acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding. The key is that the school does this successfully by teaching skills in the context of practical, real-life situations as much as possible. Consequently, students develop skills, which they can transfer from one situation to another, and understanding that they sustain over time. The requirements of students' statements of special educational needs are met. Very careful planning and detailed documentation ensure that the school avoids the pitfall of focusing exclusively on literacy, numeracy, personal, social and health education (PSHE), and information and communication technology (ICT) that are key subjects, at the expense of subject-specific knowledge, for example in science or technology. The key subjects are taught discretely but they also link in directly with the termly subject themes in a way that makes students' learning more coherent. There is an appropriately planned curriculum for the proposed extended age range.

The curriculum prepares students well for leaving school by giving them confidence, self-esteem, communication skills, social awareness and self-help skills. The significant role of the residential facility in supporting the PSHE programme is a strength. Teaching and residential staff liaise very closely with each other to support students' learning in the residential provision. Extra-curricular activities such as trampolining and the use of a local youth club and membership of scouts are used very well to extend and broaden students' interests and horizons. Older students receive careers guidance, with the support of the Connexions service, and some accredited courses are available. Work experience and college links are not currently available, although discussions to provide both are at an advanced stage.

Teaching and assessment are good. Activities are motivating and interesting, and routines are very well established. Teachers generally use their in-depth understanding of the implications of autism on learning and their detailed knowledge of students' achievements to plan work that students can access independently or with limited adult support. Assessment procedures monitor and record students'

progress well. Occasionally, however, activities are not tailored sufficiently well to meet the needs of the more able or less able closely because the lesson plan does not sufficiently detail each student's precise learning objectives. At these times, the pace of learning drops. Staff are particularly skilled at promoting aspects of students' personal development in many ways. Reaffirmation of what each student needs to focus upon, their 'exceptional behaviour points', takes place routinely and students know what these are and can articulate them clearly. Each student's personal organiser is a vehicle for self-expression of feelings and emotions; it also acts as a prop for self-management of behaviour as it contains individual calm plans and behaviour plans. Staff are very effective in encouraging students to use their organisers. Consequently, lessons generally proceed smoothly. Paired and group work is planned well to promote collaborative work and to encourage communication skills. Students are encouraged to practise speaking and listening skills in more challenging situations through the planned use of the local community and its facilities. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the provision; however, a few say that they cannot support their children's learning because the school does not set appropriate homework.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They take great strides along the path of becoming more mature and responsible young people. Their behaviour and attitudes are outstanding. The few day students attend regularly. The school is particularly successful in getting students to recognise, and then appreciate, the needs of others. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Students are polite, respectful, courteous and supportive of each other. Students of diverse ethnic backgrounds play and work together harmoniously. They deal with strangers very well. Staff use praise and encouragement appropriately and judiciously, and they are very adept at acknowledging and celebrating students' successes. This contributes a great deal to students' feeling of self-worth and their enjoyment of school life.

Students are routinely expected to make choices, learning that different choices have different consequences. Such expectation supports their decision making very well and so they show an increased understanding of right and wrong and a growing awareness of how their actions impact on others, as well as having repercussions for themselves. This process helps them to become full members of a community, such as their class or their residential area, to which they contribute by making suggestions and taking on jobs and responsibilities. Residential care workers and education staff provide an integrated and consistent approach to supporting and guiding students and to promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Citizenship, media studies and visits into the local area give students a valuable insight into a wider community and into what being a responsible citizen entails. These occasions are also used very productively to give students some appreciation of beliefs, values and customs that form part of cultural groups that are different from their own.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school's meticulous attention to detail, reflected in its child protection and safeguarding policies, ensures that students work and live in a very safe and secure environment. Procedures to minimise risks in all circumstances are followed rigorously. Whole-school vetting procedures for prospective staff are thorough and include verification of applicants' references and employment history. Staff have a detailed knowledge of child protection issues and procedures. The arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of boarders are fully aligned with the national minimum standards for residential special schools. Parents, students and local authorities agree that students are kept safe both on and off-site. A high adult presence ensures this. Detailed policies, such as those to prevent bullying and to promote good behaviour, are implemented consistently. Students learn to manage their own behaviour, thereby reducing the frequency of disruption and the need for physical intervention. When sanctions or restraint are required, they are logged in detail and monitored by senior staff. The admission book is incomplete as it does not include an alphabetical index of all students, the address of the school last attended and an emergency telephone number of the parent(s) with whom the student normally resides.

The curriculum strongly encourages students to appreciate and live a healthy lifestyle through physical education, food studies and PSHE, and therapists make an important contribution to students' physical and emotional health.

The school has a detailed plan that complies fully with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended.⁴

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school carries out the full range of required checks on the proprietors and staff to ensure that the only people who are allowed into the school are suitable to work with children. Appropriate details of these checks are maintained on a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation are of a very high standard. The extensive grounds are maintained extremely well and they provide very many opportunities for students to learn, play and relax safely. The buildings have been very sensitively developed in anticipation of the increased number of students and wider age range. They meet the learning and residential needs of students extremely well while retaining many original features, such as the oast house for whole-school gatherings.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

Provision of information

Parents and prospective parents receive a good range of information which is accurate, clear and up to date. However, the school does not publish on its website, or send, a copy of its safeguarding children policy. Sponsoring local authorities confirm that they are kept well informed of students' progress and that they are included as full partners in monitoring their achievements, for example through annual reviews of statements of special educational needs. Parents are equally positive that they are kept fully in the picture about their children's progress. Both groups are confident because the school produces and shares a wide range of high quality, detailed reports written by teachers, residential care staff and therapists. The school does not, however, provide local authorities with an annual account of income and expenditure for each student placed by them.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedures fulfil all requirements and make it very easy for parents, carers or students to register a complaint. The procedures for boarders meet the national minimum standard for residential special schools and are also user-friendly.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The boarding provision is of outstanding quality. All of the key national minimum standards for residential special schools are met. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Everyone is treated as having equal worth and policies and procedures give every boarder equal access to everything that the setting provides. Religious and cultural needs are met. The school has taken appropriate action to address the six recommendations made at the last inspection.

Boarders make excellent progress in their understanding of a healthy lifestyle. They live in an environment where individual health requirements, including intimate care needs, are identified and addressed. Their needs are determined following a comprehensive multi-professional assessment prior to admission to the school, and monitored to a high standard throughout their stay. Medication practice is sound, with robust systems in place. Excellent healthy and nutritious meals are provided. Menus are well balanced, varied, appealing and meet individual dietary needs. An experienced and enthusiastic chef uses fresh local produce delivered daily. Meal times are sociable and calm, with both staff and young people eating together.

There is outstanding provision to maintain boarders' safety. Young people live in a setting that has robust health and safety procedures. Fire drills occur regularly and boarders know the evacuation procedures. Recruitment procedures are safe and provide protection for the young people. Boarders receive a high level of protection from trained staff who follow sound practices in accordance with the child protection and safeguarding policies. Intervention training is given to all new staff but they do not subsequently confirm, in writing, that they have received it. Individuals' privacy is

respected, and confidential information is stored safely and securely. Consistently high levels of supervision do not intrude inappropriately or in a way that unnecessarily embarrasses young people. There is an effective procedure to be followed if a young person goes missing, or is absent without authority. Staff have outstanding in-depth knowledge of the young people and their difficulties, especially around their understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Staff deal with situations patiently, sensitively and calmly. The young people sometimes find it very difficult to appreciate how their behaviour affects other boarders and how it may be perceived as bullying. Staff are very aware of this and they skilfully defuse situations that may be seen as potential bullying. When sanctions do have to be applied, this is done fairly although boarders are not asked about their views of the imposed sanction.

The residential provision makes an excellent contribution to boarders' achievement and enjoyment. It supports young people's educational progress very well. The skills learnt during school time are rehearsed in the residential provision. Here, staff continue to promote life and self-help skills with a priority on the practical application of these skills and the development of independence. Boarders are offered a very good range of leisure activities both on and off the school site.

Boarders have excellent opportunities to contribute to the community and they are encouraged to do so. Numerous avenues give them the opportunity to voice their views and opinions, based on the principle that all of them have the right and the means to communicate. Child-friendly versions of the plans that are drawn up to address individual needs following initial assessment are in their very well-maintained personal organisers, covering aspects such as health needs, contact with home and methods of communication. The individual nature of the organisers facilitates each young person's full participation and involvement in the life of the residence.

The boarding facility makes an outstanding contribution to preparing students for leaving school. The accommodation meets their living needs very well. Well-designed, comfortable accommodation benefits from high quality furnishings and fittings. Boarders like their living environment and respect it. Minor maintenance work is carried out promptly to keep up the excellent appearance of the decor.

Excellent organisation maintains the quality of provision. Management of the setting is very strong, and experienced senior staff lead and support a team that is committed to ensuring that boarders enjoy their time at the school. Senior staff are excellent role models. The residential staff team is sufficient in number to meet the current needs of the young people. Good information about the school and what boarders can expect is made available to parents and young people in paper form and electronically on the website.

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.⁵

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure that the admission register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 by including an alphabetical index of all students, the address of the school last attended and an emergency telephone number of the parent(s) with whom the student normally resides (paragraph 17).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- publish on its website or send to parents of its students (and of prospective students on request) a copy of their safeguarding policy (paragraph 24(1)(c))
- submit to each local authority that wholly or partly funds a student an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that student (paragraph 21(4)(h)).

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated 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.

- Explore ways of involving parents and carers more closely in supporting their children's learning at home.
- Encourage boarders to express their views about the fairness of sanctions applied to them and to sign to say that they have been given this opportunity (NMS 10.9).

⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

- Require new residential care staff to sign a copy of the school's policies on measures of control, discipline and physical intervention and ensure that evidence of this is retained on their personnel file (NMS 10.19).

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	Residential special school (autism)		
Date school opened	April 2009		
Age range of pupils	11–17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 22	Girls: 4	Total: 26
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 16	Girls: 4	Total: 20
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 22	Girls: 2	Total: 24
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,000		
Annual fees (boarders)	£45,000		
Address of school	London Road Sayers Common Hassocks West Sussex BN6 9HT		
Telephone number	01273 832901		
Email address	sherwoods@lvs-hassocks.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Sherwood		
Proprietor	The Licensed Trade Charity		