

March House

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	David Young

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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

March House is a children's home which provides education for looked after young people who have severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school, situated in the grounds of the home, opened in August 2005. It has capacity for five boys aged between 11 and 17 years, and four boys are currently being educated at the school. Two boys have statements of special educational needs. The school seeks to re-engage students with education and develop their interpersonal and study skills. The school's key aims include building students' self-esteem, ensuring that they realise their full educational potential and enabling them to continue in mainstream education or training after the age of 16. All students receive therapeutic help and the school believes in an individual and holistic approach to addressing their needs. The school's last inspection of education was in July 2007. The last inspection of the residential provision was in January 2010.

Evaluation of the school

March House provides a good quality of education and is effective in meeting its aims. The high quality of relationships between students and staff contribute very effectively to the progress and good personal development of the students. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are secure, as are all aspects of welfare, health and safety. The school now meets all the regulations for registration, including the small number related to the provision of information and the complaints policy which were not met at the time of the last inspection. Students report that they enjoy school, and responses from parents and placing local authorities state that they make good progress.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4, enabling students to make good progress in their learning, even after a short time at the school. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and the provision responds effectively to the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs. Music and religious education have been introduced to the curriculum since the last inspection and now make a good contribution to students' spiritual and cultural development. Students, typically, enter the school with a history of disrupted education, and

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

attainment which is below average for their age. The curriculum content, while reflecting the continuity and progression of learning in the National Curriculum, is appropriately adapted to meet the individual needs of students. Literacy and numeracy are given suitable emphasis and good links are made between subjects to reinforce basic skills. Students enjoy a range of practical activities, including art, cooking, design and technology, and the use of computers. Information and communication technology is used effectively as a tool for teaching and as a means of learning and recording by all students. The curriculum, linking experiences in the home and the school, places a good emphasis on independent living skills. Lunch on one day of the inspection was cooked successfully by a student. Students have good experience of growing fruit and vegetables in the garden. Budgeting, banking and personal care feature as part of the school's preparation of students for life in the community. Students enjoy their education and generally make a positive contribution to their own learning, whether reading 'Animal Farm' or practising their French vocabulary through an 'X Factor' style simulation. Citizenship is taught as part of the personal, social and health education programme, and includes appropriate careers guidance, specifically focused on the future opportunities available to each individual student. One student contributed to the 'Care Parliament' at the House of Commons, during the inspection, and was able to provide a reflective account of his experience. Students have good opportunities to take part in shared events with other schools managed by the parent company, including a recent careers convention in Birmingham. The role of the therapist, involving individual student sessions, is crucial in developing a consistent approach to students' behaviour and to relationships across the whole community of the home and school. There is a comprehensive and consistent integration of all aspects of the work of the home and of the school which benefits the students.

Teaching and assessment are good. Imaginative strategies are used to involve students in their learning and lessons are appropriately organised in well-paced, varied activities. Lesson objectives are clear and shared with students, and good planning ensures that objectives are achieved. Students follow individual learning programmes with good opportunities to work together on appropriate activities. During the inspection, all hands were turned to producing a 'get well card' for a member of staff who had experienced a recent accident. Learning support assistants work together with the teacher to provide effective one-to-one tuition throughout lessons. Their role is invaluable in challenging students to persevere, confirming their achievements, coaxing them to greater commitment when required, and deepening their understanding through careful questioning. The range of subject responsibilities undertaken by support assistants is demanding and requires more opportunities for professional development than currently given to enhance their teaching expertise. A significant strength of the educational provision for students arises from strong relationships with staff, most of whom work in the residential environment as well as the school.

Comprehensive records are maintained of the achievements of each student in all subjects covered. This provides suitable evidence of the good progress they are making. Baseline tests on entry provide a measure of students' performance,

recorded as National Curriculum levels. The school is beginning to research the use of National Curriculum levels to enable the assessment data recorded to be compared with national benchmarks, which is a good development. A variety of accreditation is available for students who complete Year 11 of their education at the school, and there are examples of pleasing success in a limited number of GCSE subjects. Annual reports are provided for parents and carers; while these include reference to progress in all subjects studied, the information provided is not always closely related to content and skills of the individual subjects. These reports also provide a clear assessment of students' personal development, taking account of their experiences in both the school and the home.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The strong integration of support and expectations between the home and school provides a consistent set of standards for students' behaviour and attitudes. Students have their individual moments of reluctance and refusal to cooperate, but overall their attitudes and behaviour in school are good. There are plentiful opportunities for them to reflect and consider the impact of their words and actions, including the important contribution made by the therapeutic provision. Attendance by the current cohort of students is good and shows an improvement from last year's figures. The school is largely a harmonious community in which students learn to respect themselves and others. Students report, through their questionnaires, that they enjoy school and that it helps them prepare for the future. They have good opportunities to contribute their ideas on all aspects of organisation and activity in the home and school; they recognise that the school takes account of their views.

Students report that the school helps them understand and respect people from different backgrounds. Multicultural evenings are provided in the home, where students experience aspects of the variety of cultures represented in the school and the wider community. Students have also had an opportunity to attend a regional multicultural day. Visits to a local wind farm and eco centre, together with membership of the local library, provide students with increasing awareness of facilities and services in the local community. Students' personal development benefits from supervised opportunities to engage in interests of their own choosing, including sports, fitness and attendance at a local mosque, in the evenings and at weekends.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are good and are implemented consistently. The parent company and the school combine effectively to ensure that staff recruitment procedures are implemented thoroughly. The school's child protection policy is comprehensive and kept up to date as new requirements arise. This is one of a number of suitable policies that underpin the safety and welfare of students. A combination of external agencies and company procedures ensure that all staff are appropriately trained in child protection and first aid.

Training for all staff and for the designated person for child protection is renewed at appropriate intervals. Risk assessments for external visits, for the premises and for fire safety are in place and routine checks on safety equipment are carried out and recorded within a framework of appropriate timescales. Students agree that the school helps them to be healthy and they report that they feel safe in school. The school has prepared a current three-year plan to improve accessibility in line with the requirements of the Disability discrimination Act.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required checks to ensure the suitability of staff and proprietors to work with children have been completed. Evidence of all checks is recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The main teaching room is a brick built construction in the grounds of the children's home. A room on the ground floor of the home provides an additional classroom. These rooms together provide safe and suitable accommodation for effective learning. The teaching rooms are appropriate in size for the number of students on roll, are suitably furnished, and contain adequate resources to support learning. The provision of computers in the main teaching room adds to its suitability. The accommodation is well maintained and decorated. Students also have access to the gardens where they grow vegetables and fruit as part of their curriculum experience. Toilet facilities, a kitchen and dining room in the adjacent home are easily accessible and complement the facilities of the classrooms.

Provision of information

The school prospectus which is distributed to all parents and carers contains clear and appropriate information. It states that all school policies may be obtained from the school, on request. The information has been extended since the last inspection and now makes it clear that details of the number of complaints may be obtained on request. In addition, the school now prepares an annual breakdown of expenditure as required by placing local authorities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure has been amended since the last inspection and now meets statutory requirements.

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:

- include National Curriculum levels in students' progress records to enable analysis of rates of progress in comparison with national averages
- ensure that learning support assistants have sufficient training to support their teaching in the range of subjects for which they have responsibility
- include subject-specific evidence of students' progress in annual reports to parents and carers.

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	Children's home providing education
Date school opened	August 2005
Age range of pupils	11–17
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4
Annual fees (boarders)	£247,661
Address of school	c/o CastleCare Group, The Manor House, High Street, Kettering, NN14 6BQ
Telephone number	01536 711111
Email address	rburrows@castlehomes.co.uk
Headteacher	Marion Paige
Proprietor	CastleCare Group