

Right Choice Project

Independent special school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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

Right Choice Project is a small special school for young people whose place in a mainstream school has broken down. It is registered to admit 42 students between the ages of 14 and 16 years and is located in Woolwich, in South East London. The number of students on roll fluctuates each year and currently 21 attend aged 15 and 16 years, the majority of whom are boys. All students come from the London boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley and almost half are from a minority ethnic background. The very large majority of students have special educational needs associated with learning and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. Three have a statement of special educational needs. Recently the school has admitted students with a broader range of needs, including those with a history of non-attendance at school.

The school was established in 2003 and is in the ownership of a not-for-profit limited company. It aims to give students 'a second chance to discover and realise their potential' by 'equipping them with independent living and life skills to lay firm foundations for future personal, professional and economic success as citizens and future leaders of our community.' The school was last inspected in April 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Right Choice Project provides a satisfactory quality of education. It provides an outstanding quality of care which is based on the excellent relationships staff have with students and with their families. This ensures that the school is successful in meeting its central aim of improving students' personal skills and it also helps many students re-engage with learning. Very good arrangements are in place for safeguarding students. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in adapting to meet the broader range of students' needs, although it has been unsuccessful in changing the pattern of non-attendance for a small number of students. It meets most of the regulations, but does not meet some key ones in relation to the quality of education.

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

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. It has a strong focus on promoting students' personal skills and raising their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). However, it does not meet all the requirements because there is insufficient opportunity for students to gain experience of the scientific area of learning and to complete practical and vocational courses. Physical education is provided through weekly visits to a sports centre and to a local park. In the summer term, students attend Charlton Athletic Football Club where they participate in sports training. ICT takes place in weekly sessions at a local community centre. The accredited personal skills programme is very relevant to students' personal development and covers personal, social, health and citizenship education. It includes topics on relationships and sexual health and the development of independent living skills through, for example, shopping and cooking meals.

The school has a curriculum policy and schemes of work for the subjects taught. Planning is based on the City and Guilds functional skills programme which is well suited to students who experience difficulties in the acquisition of basic skills, although this programme does not provide sufficient challenge for a few higher attaining students. The length of the taught week meets requirements and lessons are 30 minutes in length which helps students to maintain their concentration. The practice of focusing mainly on one subject for each day of the week does not allow students to apply skills being learnt regularly throughout the week and thereby maximise their learning.

The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to discuss their feelings and to improve their behaviour and social skills, for example through counselling and anger management sessions. It does not meet fully the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs because it does not provide the broad range of National Curriculum subjects as specified. Also, it does not meet the needs of a small number of students who do not attend regularly. Students receive a good level of careers advice which helps to prepare them for leaving school and to choose courses of further training or study.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Staff form trusting relationships with students and manage behaviour in a calm and non-confrontational manner. Learning support assistants play a significant role in helping to keep students on task by giving them praise and encouragement. This approach gives students a sense of security and helps them to settle to their work. Students generally display positive attitudes to learning and are keen to learn. Many are sensitive to tackling areas of weakness and staff are adept at listening to students and giving additional explanation. Staff have a satisfactory knowledge of the subjects they teach, although there are insufficient resources to support teaching and learning. There is a lack of books, practical equipment and computers and teachers rely too heavily on the use of worksheets when planning lessons. The lack of variety and stimulation sometimes results in students losing interest or in working at a slow pace. Students' learning is measured through the use of functional skills course

modules which give a broad picture of students' progress. Assessment information is not used consistently to inform planning and to ensure that students always receive the right level of challenge. The marking of students' work does not give sufficient guidance on how students might improve their work.

Students make satisfactory progress. All have experienced difficulty settling in their previous schools and those who attend Right Choice Project recognise that they have improved. One student commented, 'This school has put me back on track with my learning.' In summer 2010 almost all left having gained entry level or Level 1 qualifications in literacy, numeracy, ICT and life skills and the large majority progressed to destinations in further education or training. Overall progress in the current year is less marked due to the non-attendance of a small group of students and limitations of the courses on offer.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The school has a major impact on improving students' self-confidence and self-esteem. In the words of one student, 'The school gives you a second chance to prove you can do it.' Students are able to have their successes recognised and celebrated through the annual graduation ceremony which is attended by parents and carers and by former students. A few gain Do the Right Thing awards for overcoming exceptional difficulties and sustaining improvement in their personal development.

Students are helped to develop an understanding of acceptable behaviour because staff provide very good role models and treat students with respect. Most face considerable personal difficulties in their lives and as a result many of them come to school feeling anxious and unsettled. Students see the school as a safe haven where they are accepted and valued as individuals. Those who have a history of aggressive behaviour learn strategies to manage their anger safely. Staff are always on hand to discuss emotional problems and to help students choose appropriate ways of resolving their difficulties. Consequently, while there are occasional outbursts of challenging behaviour, students' behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. They are respectful of staff and sometimes give emotional support to each other.

Most students enjoy school and attend regularly. This was demonstrated during the inspection when two students walked considerable distances to attend school when bus services were disrupted due to a traffic accident. However, the school has on roll a small but significant number of persistent absentees who have a history of poor attendance. Despite its thorough procedures for monitoring and following up absences, this group is difficult to engage and is proving to be beyond the scope of the school's provision.

Students make good progress in developing their independence and social skills. Through the counselling and guidance sessions they develop a clearer insight into their emotional and behavioural difficulties. As a result many are able to function

more effectively in a group. Students contribute their views in surveys and by ongoing discussions with staff. They are very appreciative of the support they receive but a few would like the school to offer a wider range of subjects. Students take responsibility in school, for example by helping improve the facilities for music, organising the annual graduation ceremony and by regularly planning and cooking meals. Their contribution to the community is less developed, although the school has a high profile in the locality and students have put on an art display each year in a local gallery.

Students' economic well-being is satisfactory. Most students leave school with qualifications in personal skills, numeracy, literacy and ICT, although there are too few opportunities for students to participate in work experience or to complete vocational courses. The life skills curriculum enables students to learn about services in their local community and about public institutions. It also includes topics on racial equality and the study of different cultural traditions, although there are few trips or visits organised to strengthen this aspect of the school's work. Students respect each other's individuality and students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds are included equally in the life of the school.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The quality of welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school provides an extremely high level of pastoral care which allows students to tackle their emotional issues in an atmosphere of trust and understanding. In the words of one parent, 'Staff give them a lovely welcome when they come in.' The school's success is underpinned by a very close partnership with parents and carers. Staff have a high level of inter-personal skills which enable them to relate very well to both students and their families. Staff have a very good understanding of students' personal circumstances which underpins the robust arrangements for safeguarding. They have received relevant training and follow a suitable child protection policy. The school observes a secure safer recruitment policy and there are policies and risk assessments for all aspects of its work. Behavioural incidents are recorded in detail and clear procedures followed in the event of an exclusion. Regular fire drills take place and fire-fighting equipment is tested as required. The high level of staffing ensures that students are supervised closely throughout the school day.

Students develop an understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle through the life skills curriculum and the weekly sports activities. The school is particularly successful in promoting students' emotional health and well-being through the provision of therapy and counselling sessions. Strong links have been established with other agencies, for example the police and attendance officer. Some students smoke away from the premises at break time, despite the school's programme of health education which emphasises the dangers.

The school has improved access to the site, for example it has installed a toilet for disabled users, and 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

The school has thorough procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff. All staff have been subject to clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. As required, a single central register is held to record other checks that have taken place prior to a new appointment, for example on an applicant's identity and qualifications.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The accommodation occupies the ground floor of a building in a parade of shops and allows for safe and effective learning. It includes two classrooms, a small kitchen area, a room equipped for teaching beauty therapy and music and some offices. Rooms are of adequate size for the number of students using them, although there is a lack of facilities to support the teaching of practical subjects such as art, aspects of design and technology and science. Although students visit a local park for recreation, on the school site there is a lack of outdoor space where students can play and spend their leisure time safely.

Provision of information

The school provides almost all of the required information for parents, carers and others through its information pack and school website. It does not provide information on its exclusion policy or the examination results of students in the previous school year. Reports on students' progress are completed at the end of each term and annually and contain adequate detail. Parents and carers value the regular telephone contact with the school and the opportunity they are given to visit to discuss any issues or concerns. Students' statements of special educational needs and their personal education plans are reviewed as required.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for handling complaints meet all the regulations. The policy sets out how informal and formal complaints may be made to the school and parents and carers can receive a copy on request.

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

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

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

implement curriculum plans and schemes of work effectively in order that students can practise regularly the skills they are learning (paragraph 2(1))

extend the curriculum to include the scientific area of learning (paragraph 2(2)(a))

ensure that the education provided fulfils the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(e))

review the curriculum for those students who are persistent absentees to ensure that all have the opportunity to learn and make progress (paragraph 2(2)(i))

provide classroom resources that are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and use them effectively (paragraph 3(f))

assess students' work regularly and thoroughly and use such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 3(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space where students can play safely (paragraph 23(s)).

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

provide details of the school's policy on exclusions and particulars of students' academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

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 school		
Date school opened	16 April 2003		
Age range of pupils	14–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 3	Total: 19
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,200		
Annual fees (part time pupils)	£2,140 per day per week		
Address of school	132–134 Powis Street Woolwich, London SE18 9NL		
Telephone number	020 8854 6229		
Email address	rcpc@rcpc.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Banjo Aromolaran		
Proprietor	Mr Banjo Aromolaran and Ms Ursula Grant		