

Forest School

Independent special school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mike Kell
Social care inspector	Kevin Whatley

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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

Forest School is housed in a converted conference centre sited in spacious grounds, set well back from a main road. The school is registered as an independent special school for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, and this is the first time that the school provision has been inspected since it opened in September 2009. It can admit up to 55 pupils in the age range seven to 19 years, although there are currently only eight on roll. These are aged 10 to 16 years and all but one have a statement of special educational needs. Seven of the pupils are looked after children and all but one of them live in the adjacent children's home. The children's home was subject to a full inspection in June 2010. This present visit to the home provision was therefore an interim inspection that focused on the actions taken to address the two national minimum standards that were not met in June.

The school has no particular religious affiliation. It summarises its aims as: 'To help each young person to learn and make positive choices leading to positive outcomes.'

Evaluation of the school

Forest School complies with all the regulations for independent schools and the satisfactory residential provision in the children's home meets all national minimum standards. The quality of education is satisfactory. There are very good relationships and interactions between adults and pupils. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. While the curriculum is well planned for each age group, some subjects are at an early stage of implementation. Pupils make satisfactory academic progress, but good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behave well. Robust safeguarding procedures and other measures ensure a good level of welfare, health and safety for pupils. The school meets its aims satisfactorily.

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 school provides a satisfactory curriculum. Much thought has gone into planning a broad and balanced curriculum that is relevant to pupils' ages and needs. Detailed schemes of work identify what pupils are expected to learn, and effective short-term plans show how this will be achieved in a progressive way. Consequently, the curriculum encourages learning in a range of subjects based upon a good core curriculum of literacy, numeracy, science and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Information and communication technology skills are promoted through all subjects. Breadth is provided through subjects such as design and technology (resistant materials and food), drama, art and the humanities. Other subjects, like music, have been taught in the past although a temporary staffing difficulty is currently reducing the extent of this. Citizenship is studied by all year groups, and a modern foreign language is taught in blocks, although this curriculum area is still evolving. Careers education and work experience enable pupils to apply what they have learned in the classroom in real-life situations. Accredited courses give them qualifications that have currency when applying for a college course or employment. The residential provision extends the curriculum well by providing many opportunities for boarders to pursue their hobbies in the community, and by encouraging them to develop new interests.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Very good relationships and encouraging, supportive interactions feature in all lessons. As a result, pupils generally behave well and display positive attitudes. When their attention wanders, or when minor disruption occurs, staff calm the situation and manage the behaviour well. Staff know pupils very well and they are sensitive to situations when an individual's emotional status may be an obstacle to learning. Teachers use good quality resources appropriately and their good subject knowledge encourages pupils' learning. They promote pupils' speaking and listening skills particularly well through a good use of targeted, challenging questions. Teaching is satisfactory overall despite these stronger features of all lessons and some pockets of consistently good classroom practice. On a few occasions, activities do not achieve the balance of challenging pupils with enabling them to work independently. Staff assess learning during and at the end of lessons. Most of them then usually use this information to plan future activities, although this is not done routinely. As a result, there is an inconsistent practice in the way in which staff plan what they expect pupils to have learned by the end of the lesson. On these occasions, teachers cannot readily measure the success of the learning activities in promoting the anticipated learning.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons and the majority of parents and carers agree that their children make progress in the school. The school has satisfactory assessment procedures for measuring this progress, based on the attainment levels that are determined when pupils enter the school. However, few pupils have been on roll for a sufficient period to enable reliable judgements on progress over time to be made. Teaching and residential staff liaise closely to support pupils' learning in the children's home. Residential staff add momentum to class-based learning through

their positive attitudes and through supporting boarders to enjoy what school has to offer.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils make good progress in their personal development. The culture of the school is geared to promoting pupils' social awareness and respect for others. Individual behaviour management plans help pupils to appreciate the needs of others, to understand the consequences of their actions, and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Their behaviour is good. Pupils' self-esteem and confidence increase as they experience academic and social success. Consistent behaviour management and elements of the PSHE programme encourage pupils' awareness of the need for rules and laws, and their appreciation of right and wrong. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider communities. They express their views and suggestions through the school council, and they participate in national fund raising as well as contributing locally through, for instance, their work at a local wildlife centre. Boarders have many opportunities to express their feelings and they are encouraged to have an input into discussions about their lives, such as drawing up care plans.

The residential provision also makes a good contribution to preparing pupils for leaving school. Boarders participate in individual life-skills programmes that involve activities such as shopping and budgeting. They develop a good understanding of what living successfully in a small community entails. All pupils learn about much bigger communities through their studies of current affairs and via citizenship, for example by examining rules for living together and sources of conflict. This awareness of their own culture is developed by other subjects too. English introduces them to a very good variety of literature, and work in art raises their awareness of different periods and styles, such as pop art. Art also contributes to broadening pupils' understanding of other cultures, for example when they examine Aboriginal art and African textiles. Off-site learning adds to pupils' cultural and multicultural understanding. Visits to the Imperial War Museum and the Holocaust exhibition extended their learning in history, and a trip to a synagogue gave insight into a different set of beliefs.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school has good provision to meet the welfare, health and safety needs of pupils. All parents agree that the school keeps their children safe, which it does through effective safeguarding practice based on well-constructed policies and procedures. Prospective members of staff are vetted very carefully prior to taking up appointment. All staff receive appropriate training in child protection and first aid. Selected staff have higher-level training in child protection, or additional training, for example to act as fire marshals. Due regard is paid to all aspects of health and safety and to the necessity of maintaining a safe and secure environment. Risk assessments and checks of electrical and fire-fighting equipment are carried out routinely.

A high staff presence results in close supervision of pupils at all times. Pupils are encouraged to behave safely and considerately, and appropriate sanctions are applied fairly if needed. These are logged and monitored, as are all serious incidents. Anti-bullying measures are well known to staff and pupils but, if such an incident occurs, it is recorded and dealt with. The school promotes in pupils a growing understanding of how to live a safe and healthy lifestyle and how to deal with situations that might make them vulnerable. Work on healthy diets, substance abuse, the importance of exercise and internet safety make significant contributions to developing pupils' awareness of their physical and emotional well-being. Health and safety practice in the residential facility is good. Pupils' protection and welfare are addressed well.

The school's three-year accessibility plan ensures that it complies fully with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.³

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school carries out the full range of required checks on the proprietor and staff to ensure that people who are allowed into the school are suitable to work with children. Records are maintained meticulously and the appropriate details of these checks are recorded on a single central register. The residential provision meets all the standards associated with confirming the suitability of prospective staff members.

Premises and accommodation at the school

All requirements are met as the premises and accommodation are of a high standard. The spacious building has been adapted sensitively to meet the demands of a school. Classrooms are of a good size and new conversions, such as the food technology area, provide high-class facilities. All areas are maintained very well. Brightly decorated rooms and communal areas, and well-presented wall displays, make the school an inviting place for pupils to enter. Outside areas are equally well maintained. They provide a very safe environment for pupils to learn and play.

Provision of information

The school gives to parents and carers all of the required information. A detailed, up-to-date prospectus provides a range of useful information, and it also points out details of other information that is available on request. The residential provision has good policies and procedures for admitting boarders, including a clear statement of purpose that outlines its aims and objectives and the services it offers. A young person's guide summarises all key aspects in an easy-to-understand format.

Parents and carers receive copies of reports that show their children's progress, and local authorities agree unanimously that the school keeps them well informed about

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

the progress made by the pupils that they place there. The school achieves this via contributions to looked after children reviews and reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs. The school has not been open long enough to have provided local authorities with an annual account of income and expenditure for each pupil placed by them, although it is aware of the need to do this and has the plans to do so.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure fulfils all requirements and makes it very easy for parents, carers or pupils to register a complaint. The procedures for boarders meet the national minimum standards for children's homes.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision was judged to be satisfactory, and national minimum standards are 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 all of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').⁴

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:

- develop more consistent practice among the staff in their use of assessment information when identifying precisely what they anticipate pupils will learn in future lessons
- further develop the curriculum by implementing all schemes of work effectively and through ensuring that all planned subjects are taught.

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

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 special school for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties		
Type of school	Children's home with education		
Date school opened	September 2009		
Age range of pupils	7–19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 2	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 1	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,000		
Email address	enquiries@thecrossroadsgroup.co.uk		
Headteacher	Simon Reynolds		
Proprietor	Charu Kashyap		