

Cornerstones Victoria Road

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	877/6001
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134186
URN for social care	SC026989
Inspection number	364282
Inspection dates	29-30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft
Social care inspector	Sarah Oldham

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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

Cornerstones is an independent special school for boys and girls, attached to one of the three children's homes owned by the proprietor. It is housed in a large building in a residential urban area. It opened in August 2000 and is registered for up to 12 pupils aged from seven to 18 years. There are currently seven pupils on roll, all of whom are boys and one of whom is aged above 16 years. All of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs related to autism, severe learning difficulties, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All pupils are placed at Cornerstones by local authorities and are looked after under the care of the proprietor. Before attending this school some pupils have been out of formal education for lengthy periods. The school has no specific religious affiliation. It aims to 'provide a positive, calm, structured and nurturing environment in which the pupils can fulfil their academic and social potential.' The headteacher was absent due to ill health during the inspection. The school has appointed an education consultant to support management and curriculum development. The school was last inspected in February 2008; the care provision was last inspected in November 2010.

Evaluation of the school

Cornerstones provides a good quality of education and achieves its aims well. A good curriculum meets pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Teaching and assessment are good and pupils make good progress. Behaviour and attitudes are good reflecting the painstaking work of staff in the school and care home and the good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Reflecting improvement since the previous inspection, procedures to secure pupils' welfare, health, safety and safeguarding are outstanding; the impact of the

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

residential care on pupils' personal development is also outstanding. All the regulations for continued registration as an independent school are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, balancing basic skills, the subjects of the National Curriculum and programmes to promote pupils' personal development. The curriculum is personalised for each pupil. It is particularly well focused on meeting the special educational needs and/or disabilities of pupils through: careful assessment of needs; learning broken into small units with which pupils can cope; consistency in teaching and the rewarding of effort and success; and a range of methods to develop the communication skills of pupils with autism. The well-staffed lessons promote a very good level of individual attention, further reinforced by the excellent understanding which teachers and teaching assistants have of the needs of each pupil. Provision is well delineated in individual education plans which are regularly reviewed and which cover the pupils' statements of special educational needs. These plans are well interpreted in good long-, medium- and short-term curriculum planning. Such planning has improved in recent times and now gives breadth and balance, drawing well on published curricular schemes.

The curriculum for independent living skills developed in the care home makes outstanding provision for: health and personal hygiene; domestic skills; being out in the community; finance; further education and employment; housing; and relationships. This is incorporated into the care home's precisely individualised personal plan for each young person. Staff in the school support this programme; however, the school curriculum is not sufficiently finely tuned and well-coordinated with this care programme to be judged equally outstanding. A range of external accreditation schemes helps pupils to gain qualifications with currency beyond the school. Older pupils have access to work experience and vocational courses provided in colleges of further education. The formal curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of activities, many carried out in the community, and for which the participation rate is good.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers and teaching assistants are well qualified and experienced in teaching pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially those with autism. They work together professionally and have responded very positively to guidance provided by the school's education consultant. Morale among staff is high and there is a pervasive sense of striving collectively to create excellent provision. Staff motivate pupils who have very different needs and previous experiences of schooling. They go to considerable lengths to tailor their teaching to meet pupils' assessed needs. This is reflected in well-focused lesson planning, and learning objectives and targets made clear to the pupils. Given the small size of the staff, they cope well with the demands made in teaching a full range of subjects; however, the teaching of some aspects of the subjects of the National Curriculum lacks specialist expertise. Staff manage pupils' behaviour very well and use a very good range of effective methods to do so while maintaining their warm and supportive relationships with the pupils. Staff have good

access to training courses. The education consultant has brought professional rigour to curriculum and assessment development and has built on the school's previous strengths.

The school keeps meticulous records of pupils' progress across a good spectrum of subjects and areas of personal development. There is a particularly good focus on measuring and developing independence and communication skills. Assessments are carried out frequently and staff make good use of these to adjust their teaching and reset targets. A commercial scheme is used to assess progress but this does not cover long-term progress as well as short-term progress, nor does it give a precise enough picture of how pupils' attainment compares with that of pupils nationally. The school is aware of this matter and is poised to introduce a new scheme selected to deal with these issues.

Pupils make good progress, albeit in very small steps which reflect their past attainments, communication and behavioural difficulties and medical conditions. Pupils are often in need of a period of stabilisation when admitted to Cornerstones residential care. Progress is carefully measured in this respect and pupils are only admitted to the school once they are judged ready to make progress in formal schooling. Most pupils enter the school working towards level 1 of the National Curriculum. Records show progress from this baseline; they also show that progress measured varies between pupils. Some pupils achieve external accreditation at entry level, while those with the most severe conditions work to develop verbalisation and their communication improves using pictorial and sensory means.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. The school is assiduous in helping pupils to develop their personal identities and reflect on their views and feelings, rights and responsibilities. This contributes significantly to their growing self-esteem. Alongside opportunities to consider a range of belief systems, the school contributes well to pupils' spiritual development. The outstanding provision for individual development in the care home strongly supports the work of school staff in promoting personal development. Cooperation between staff in the care home and the school is good on a day-to-day basis, including in the sharing of assessment information on pupils. However, the coordination between this care home programme and the curriculum planning carried out in the school is not systematic; as a result, the planning of the '24 hour curriculum' does not reflect the significant lengths to which staff go to promote pupils' personal development.

Pupils like being in school and this is helped by the skilful way in which staff detect changes in their moods and adapt lessons and tasks to ensure that they remain motivated. It is also helped by the considerable lengths to which staff go in encouraging pupils to participate in lessons, including the use of oral, pictorial and sensory communication methods. Pupils develop well socially, within the limitations imposed by their medical conditions. They respond well to the ample opportunities to take part in group work, in activities in the community when they can interact with

people outside school, and to develop an understanding of public institutions such as libraries, museums and medical facilities. Cultural development is also well promoted within lessons and by a good range of external visits for example to Liverpool's China Town. The curriculum covers the variety of cultures which exist within contemporary British society and overseas. Staff take every opportunity to promote good behaviour and to encourage pupils to make decisions with a moral basis. Pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong and they usually cooperate with staff. Where behaviour deteriorates the staff make effective use of the school's well-thought-out procedures to calm them down and restore cooperation. Pupils are supported in their moral development by the opportunities they have to raise funds for charities such as Samaritan's Purse, and also by involvement in environmental activities such as organised 'litter picks'.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes outstanding provision to promote the welfare, health, safety and safeguarding of pupils. Managers assiduously monitor the effectiveness with which this provision is maintained. Training for safeguarding, first aid, fire procedures and food hygiene has been extensive and it supports the exceptionally skilled way in which staff meet the specific needs of each pupil. It reflects the robust and very high-quality written policies, for example those relating to health, safety and security, which are well implemented by staff. Behaviour is good and the school and care home are highly effective in promoting the increasing capacity of the pupils for self-control. This is aided by professional and responsive staff with a clear competence in sensitive behaviour management.

The school is a busy, harmonious and inclusive community and relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils give no indication of bullying and this reflects a consistent staff approach to prevent its occurrence. Parents and carers, together with staff in local authorities which place pupils in Cornerstones, are highly satisfied with the care provided. Supervision of the wide range of external enrichment activities is vigilant. Risk assessments are detailed, up to date, and give precise and helpful guidance to staff in, for example, cycling and food technology. Where appropriate they are tailored to the specific needs of each pupil. Opportunities for physical exercise are extensive and popular. School dinners are of very high quality and daytime snacks are healthy. Pupils enjoy the food a great deal. Admissions and attendance registers are kept as required. The school fulfils its obligations with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The suitability of all staff, including the proprietor and directors, to work with pupils has been checked. The information is held on a single central register of staff as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The accommodation is maintained and decorated to a very high standard. Provision and resources for the specialist subjects taught are very good. The school is very effective in using external facilities for recreational, vocational and cultural activities.

Provision of information

Parents, carers and staff in the placing local authorities receive an excellent range of information about the school through the website, prospectus, meetings and regular written communications. They are exceptionally well informed about the progress of pupils through regular meetings and detailed reports.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

Procedures for handling complaints meet the regulations.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision in the children's home 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').³

What the school could do to improve further

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

- strengthen procedures for tracking the progress of pupils over the long term and comparing it with the progress made by pupils nationally
- develop the curriculum further so that learning within all subjects of the National Curriculum is brought up to the levels reached in the subjects of English, mathematics and science
- ensure that recent curriculum developments, and the coordination of the school curriculum with the residential home curriculum for independent living skills, are fully embedded for long-term sustainability in the school.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/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
Type of school	Special, for pupils with ASD, SLD and BESD
Date school opened	August 2000
Age range of pupils	7-18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7
Annual fees (boarders)	£234,335 to £280,709
Email address	admin@cstones.co.uk
Headteacher	Caron Bethell
Proprietor	Cornerstones