

Essex Fresh Start

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

Essex Fresh Start is an independent special school which makes provision for up to 40 students aged between eight and 16 years across three sites in Essex. These sites are in Chelmsford, Colchester and Mersea Island. The school opened in September 2004. At present all the students are referred by Essex and Suffolk County Councils. There are currently 37 full-time students on roll and part-time education is provided for a further seven students. The main focus of the school's activity is the provision of learning opportunities for students in the age range 14 to 16 years, almost all of whom have statements of special educational needs to address their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. In addition, the school runs a separate assessment and inclusion centre, based in Colchester, for students aged from eight to 16 years. A significant proportion of the students are looked after by their local authority. All students have experienced a disrupted education and many have not attended school for a long time. The school aims to 'work in partnership with parents, carers, professionals and students to enable the young people to experience academic success, increase their self-esteem and social skills and help prepare them for further education or work.' There is currently an acting headteacher in post. The previous inspection of the school was in December 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Essex Fresh Start School provides a good quality of education and is successful in meeting its aims. The quality of the school's provision, underpinned by the passion and commitment of the proprietor and staff, ensures that students are well prepared for their future lives. The outstanding curriculum combined with good teaching and outstanding assessment procedures ensure that students make at least good progress in their learning. Despite the challenges experienced in their personal lives, students make outstanding progress in their personal development and demonstrate outstanding behaviour in school. Arrangements for their welfare, health and safety, together with safeguarding procedures, are also outstanding. The school meets all the regulations for registration as an independent school and has made good progress since the last inspection.

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 outstanding. Daily planning is derived from comprehensive medium-term plans which ensure that students' learning experiences are developmental and appropriate to their needs. There is a strong focus on the development of skills in literacy and numeracy, based on excellent analysis of students' individual learning needs when they enter the school. Classroom learning includes access to a wide range of subjects, including appropriate experiences in science, information and communication technology (ICT), humanities and creative subjects. Students have access to a range of external accreditations, including entry level awards and GCSE examinations, carefully chosen to match their prior attainment and current levels of confidence. Staff are skilled at identifying barriers to learning, often based on students' disrupted educational experiences, and ensure a good level of challenge in students' learning. A number of practical and vocational opportunities are available to increase the relevance and interest of the courses available. Students demonstrate success in ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) programmes and achieve external accreditation in courses of relevance to their future lives, such as first aid and food hygiene. The school has established a strong network of external providers who make a consistent and effective contribution to the vocational and practical elements of the enhanced curriculum. Providers include Mersea Outdoors Camp, the Prince's Trust xl programme and Butterfly Lodge Farm, together with a number of other agencies, whose contributions to the curriculum allow variety and flexibility in curriculum arrangements. Well-chosen opportunities are provided for individual students to take part in community-based learning where this is appropriate to their needs. There is limited access on the school's sites to specialist teaching facilities such as science laboratories and media studios, which restricts the range of learning opportunities available to students. The school's assessment and inclusion centre is situated alongside provision at the Colchester site. This provides excellent opportunities for students from the age of eight years to prepare for re-integration to mainstream schools.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall. There is a strong therapeutic dimension to support students' learning. Weekly counselling opportunities have been introduced recently, supplemented with a strong contribution by the school's educational psychologist. Students' learning programmes are highly individualised and a high level of personnel are available to tailor the educational provision to students' learning needs. Careful decisions are made and reviewed about the extent to which individuals are ready to benefit from group teaching or whether one-to-one arrangements are required. The careful analysis of individual needs results in good teaching. The targets in students' individual education and behaviour plans feature strongly in the planning for lessons and work is tailored to ensure each student is working towards these targets on a daily basis. Teachers use an effective variety of learning methods in carefully structured lessons to engage and motivate students. Students respond positively and almost all state that teaching is good and their teachers explain how they can improve. Teachers have generally good subject knowledge. The school has appropriate plans to increase the number of subject

specialist teachers to contribute to the teaching and management of subjects across the key stages. Students make particularly good contributions to class discussion and are willing to answer and raise questions. Attention to the quality of their written work is more variable and sometimes hindered by the challenges of handwriting and spelling. Students do not make enough use of information and communication technology in recording their work. Arrangements for the assessment of students' progress are outstanding. On-going assessment builds successfully on the baseline established when students enter the school. Information from assessment is used in a formative way to ensure that the progress made by individuals is appropriate. Students make good progress, with the majority improving by at least one National Curriculum level, and a number by two levels, over two years. A number of students make outstanding progress and prepare successfully for continuing education at local colleges. The proportion of students moving on to further education, training or employment is excellent given their low starting points and previous disengagement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students demonstrate outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Re-engagement in learning is a high priority for the school and this is achieved successfully for the majority of students. Students' responses to questionnaires show that most enjoy coming to school. Their attendance improves significantly: many have doubled their attendance since joining the school and several now have attendance of over 90%. There have been no permanent exclusions over the last three years and students show excellent attitudes to their work. Behaviour is outstanding and a dramatic improvement for the majority of students. They show respect for staff and visitors, and their behaviour on outside visits is exemplary. The school's therapeutic approach, together with effective assemblies and daily review sessions, enable students to develop a reflective approach to their behaviour and motivation.

There are excellent opportunities for students to develop their social skills. Displays of students' work and activities show a wide range of active group and teamwork including, for example martial arts, outdoor pursuits and problem-solving challenges. Students contribute effectively to the school and the local community: collecting for charities through making cakes and washing cars; planting trees, litter picking and putting up fences; participating in the 'Adopt a beach' programme at the Mersea site, improving wildlife and global awareness. The personal social and health education programme, including citizenship, ensures that students have a growing awareness of civic services and their opportunities to contribute positively. A number of dimensions of the curriculum, including a successful multicultural day during the inspection, improve students' understanding of cultural diversity. There are limited opportunities, however, for students to interact directly with members of minority ethnic groups.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for the welfare, health and safety of students. The assessment of risk is at the forefront of all procedures and of all activities undertaken. The training of staff, for example in safeguarding and first aid, is regular and comprehensive. Fire and premises risk assessments are updated regularly and any identified areas for improvement are remedied immediately. All checks on fire equipment, fire evacuations and safety records are maintained regularly and are universally up to date. Excellent attention is given to the development of safe and healthy lifestyles and students respond appropriately to the opportunities provided. Staff are alert to the potential risks associated with the wide range of activities which take place off-site and appropriate procedures are followed rigorously. The school has suitable plans, which are reviewed regularly, to meet its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school conducts appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff and the proprietor to work with children. All checks are recorded in a single central register in accordance with regulatory requirements

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is located on three sites in Chelmsford, Colchester and Mersea Island. Each site has appropriate accommodation for teaching and learning, together with suitable facilities to ensure the safety and welfare of students. The school is actively seeking alternative accommodation in two of these locations in order to provide a more extensive range of educational facilities in a more spacious environment. The accommodation at Mersea is located within the extensive grounds of an outdoor pursuits centre which provides students with access to a range of challenging and interesting activities.

Provision of information

The school provides extensive information for parents and carers through its comprehensive prospectus and website. Information is up to date and clearly presented. An induction meeting takes place for each student before admission to the school and this is followed by termly home visits. The school makes additional regular contact with parents and carers and ensures they receive a termly report on the progress of their children.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy and procedures meet regulatory 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:

- make consistent and regular use of electronic writing devices to enable students to maintain comprehensive written records of their work
- ensure staff have good subject knowledge in all subjects that they teach
- explore the development of links with local schools and colleges of further education in order to extend students' access to specialist facilities.

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 for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	8 January 2007		
Age range of pupils	8–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 31	Girls: 6	Total: 37
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 1	Total: 7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 36	Girls: 7	Total: 43
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 1	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000		
Address of school	1 Rectory Lane, Chelmsford, CM1 1RE		
Telephone number	01245 490008		
Email address	Katherine.fenton@tces.org.uk		
Headteacher	Su English		
Acting headteacher	Simon Hubbard		
Proprietor	Thomas Keaney		