

Hartlepool School Education and Vocational Training Centre

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Michael Glickman

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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

Hartlepool School Education and Vocational Training Centre is an independent special school for students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Owned and operated by the Continuum Group, it was opened in October 2007 in a building located on an industrial estate on the outskirts of Hartlepool. It currently provides for nine full-time students aged between 12 and 16 years of age, all of whom exhibit extremely challenging behaviours. Four of the students are residents in Continuum homes and are looked after by a local authority. Seven students have a statement of special educational needs and all have experienced disrupted education and poor attendance at other schools. The school aims 'to provide the highest quality education within an environment in which students feel safe, secured and valued' and to create 'a positive culture which celebrates and rewards success.' The school was last inspected in April 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Hartlepool School Education and Vocational Training Centre provides a good standard of education and meets its aims. Teaching and learning are good and students make good progress, starting from a low level on entry. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and behaviour is good as a result of the considerable efforts that the school has invested in this area. The provision for the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of students is good. The school has improved since its last inspection and now meets all the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The small size of the school enables it to tailor its curriculum to the needs of individual students. Although all students follow the same basic curriculum, including literacy, numeracy, science and practical skills, some additional subjects, such as modern foreign languages, are offered according to student demand. Because most students only attend for one or two years, the school places an emphasis on modular units and vocational qualifications, although GCSEs are also available. This approach not only offers students potential

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

employment opportunities in the future but also gives them a sense of success – in some cases, the first educational success they have experienced. Although the school basically follows the National Curriculum, the nature of the student body requires staff to modify course content and teaching method. In most cases, students are working below the level which might be expected of their age group.

There are schemes of work for all subjects being taught. While resources have been purchased for the practical teaching of science, these have not been deployed and teaching remains largely worksheet based, although some experiments have been introduced. The school is currently developing schemes of work to utilise these new resources to full effect. A successful personal, social and health education (PSHE) course is in place.

The Continuum Group has developed an electronic resource bank to which all staff have access. This contains schemes of work and lesson materials for a range of subjects at different levels and gives teachers access to a wide variety of teaching resources. The company also operates a virtual learning environment which is available to staff and students and which allows students to access online learning either in their own time or with teacher support.

Appropriate careers guidance is offered in conjunction with Connexions and students are supported if they wish to proceed to further education. A range of work experience placements are available through local schemes.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers enjoy excellent, if informal, relationships with students and are committed to helping them succeed. They teach in the common room if students refuse to enter the classroom and visit residential homes to work with any students who cannot be educated in school. Considerable planning and ingenuity goes into delivering lessons which will interest reluctant learners and staff are prepared to adjust their lessons to the often volatile moods of the students. Lessons are well paced and a variety of methods is used to engage students. The marking of work points out its positive qualities and advice on how to improve is usually conveyed verbally.

Students are given a baseline assessment on entry to the school and their progress is tracked through continued assessments, teachers' records and awards achieved. The school produces a comprehensive range of statistics and is able to identify where further development is necessary. All students have individual education plans based, where required, on their statement of special educational needs. The plans take account of their personal interests. In addition, they are encouraged to set their own learning and developmental targets for each term and to evaluate their progress towards them. The result is that students make good progress. They enter school with very low levels of achievement, often as a result of poor attendance in their previous schools. Although some have limited attention spans, they work with concentration and take visible pride in their accomplishments. By using a range of national unit awards and vocational qualifications, the school allows students to feel a sense of success and real progress. The school itself has developed a programme

of incentives whereby students can earn certificates and prize vouchers. The school is rightly proud of students who have gone on to further education or employment.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The school recognises the particular importance of developing a sense of social responsibility in its students. Students have been encouraged to feel a sense of ownership of the school through a school council where they are able to make suggestions which have been implemented. The result is that malicious damage, once prevalent, has ceased and students now take a pride in their building and in their work. They are developing good attitudes to learning.

For the first time last year, the school ran an off-timetable week devoted entirely to PSHE. Students met with members of the emergency services and other public bodies and visited museums and local areas of interest. The school now plans to make this a regular event. The school also participates in European Language Day which is marked not only by the use of other languages but also by sampling foods from other cultures. Visits have been made to local places of worship and religious festivals from all faiths are celebrated by displays and activities. Students learn about local institutions through visits to the local library and citizens' advice bureau and have had visits from the police and fire service. They have experience of democracy in action through their school council meetings. Students and staff raised funds for charity on Red Nose Day and have sponsored the restoration of a sailing ship in a local museum.

The behaviour of students is good, given the context of the school. Staff are aware that, for some students, attendance at school is itself an achievement and they set appropriate behaviour targets with rewards and certificates if they are met. If students feel unable to remain in a classroom environment, they are allowed to have 'time out' in the common room, returning to the lesson when they feel ready or continuing to work there if they prefer.

The staff reviewed and completely revised the school's approach to behaviour management earlier this year to promote a more positive attitude among the students. Since then, they have documented a marked improvement in student attendance and behaviour and there has been a significant and sustained fall in incidents when physical intervention has been necessary. Staff unfailingly treat students with respect, but always challenge inappropriate behaviour or language. This respect is reciprocated with students saying that staff 'treat you better' than in other schools and that staff 'always try to sort things out'.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. The school has a child protection policy which meets the requirements and all staff have received

appropriate child protection training. All other required policies are in place and risk assessments have been carried out for activities within and outside school. The school shares attendance data on a weekly basis with the local authorities which place students in the school.

The school has a healthy eating policy and serves healthy lunches. Students learn about healthy eating in food technology and are aware of what they need to do to keep healthy. There are displays throughout the school on the risks of smoking and substance abuse and students receive lessons on personal health from visiting professionals.

Student safety is a priority within the school and all staff have received first aid training. Staff ensure that no student is ever without adult supervision. Students say that they feel safe in school.

The school has prepared a suitable plan to fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out all the required checks on staff and proprietors and maintains a single central register of checks which complies with the regulations. The school's policy is not to use supply staff.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation at the school comply with regulations and are suitable for promoting safe and effective teaching and learning. The school occupies a two-storey industrial unit which has been converted for schooling and training. The ground floor of the building comprises a large workshop area with facilities for car valeting and maintenance and construction skills such as plumbing, joinery and bricklaying as well as a hairdressing and beauty salon and an information and communication technology (ICT) suite. The upper floor houses appropriately-sized classrooms, a student common room, a kitchen which is also used for food technology lessons and administrative offices. The building has recently been redecorated in response to students' suggestions and there are many wall displays of students' work and motivational posters. The outside of the building is decorated with a striking mural, reflecting the local area, which was produced by students and staff. Although there are no facilities for physical education on the premises, the school makes regular use of a range of local sports facilities as well as accessing the nearby countryside.

A grassed area to the rear of the building is used as a play area. However, this has no seats or other garden furniture and the school has not taken the opportunity to develop it as a potential teaching area for outdoor studies and vocational training.

Provision of information

The school provides parents and carers with all the required information through its prospectus and its website. Parents, carers and local authorities which place students in the school receive detailed reports on students' progress through termly reports.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy complies fully with the regulations.

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:

- implement the school's plan to introduce further practical work into science
- develop the outside play area to provide a learning resource for outdoor studies and vocational training.

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	Secondary special		
Date school opened	October 2007		
Age range of pupils	10-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 2	Total: 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,000		
Address of school	Unit E Sovereign Way Brenda Road Hartlepool TS25 1NN		
Telephone number	01429 224965		
Email address	robert.edminson@continuumgroup.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Robert Edminson		
Proprietor	The Continuum Group		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 September 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Hartlepool School Education and Vocational Training Centre,
Hartlepool TS25 1NN**

Thank you for talking to me and allowing me to observe your lessons when I visited your school this week.

You will be pleased to know that I felt that Hartlepool School is a good school and provides you with a good standard of education. I was impressed by how much effort the staff put into helping you all to succeed in classroom work and in practical subjects, by teaching you the subjects that you want to learn, by giving varied and interesting lessons and by coming out to teach you in your homes. I was equally impressed by how much effort you put into your work and into developing yourselves. In particular, by setting your own targets every term, you are learning to take control of your own learning and behaviour, which is good preparation for the future.

You told me that you prefer Hartlepool to your previous schools and that you feel that the staff listen to you and really want to help you. I agree that the staff take good care of you and I also saw that your behaviour and attendance are good and continue to improve. I was interested to hear about your school council and how the school has made the changes you suggested, including redecorating the building. The staff tell me that you look after the building and I was impressed by the displays of your work and particularly by mural outside. I have suggested to the school that they carry through their plan to give you more practical work in science and also think about using the grassed area behind the building for outdoor studies such as gardening.

Thank you once again for your co-operation during the inspection. It was a pleasure to meet you all and I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Glickman
Lead Inspector