

The Holmewood School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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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

The Holmewood School is a day special school located in a former school in Finchley in north London. It admits boys and girls, aged between seven and 18 years, with Asperger's Syndrome, high-functioning autism and associated language and communication difficulties. The vast majority of pupils have a statement of special educational needs related to these difficulties and some have a fragmented educational history including significant periods out of full-time education.

The school is registered for up to 64 pupils and there are currently 14 on roll, of whom 13 are boys. Half are from a White British ethnic background and other represented groups include White European, Asian and Black Caribbean. All but one pupil are funded by local authorities in the Greater London area. The proprietor is also headteacher of the North London International School, which works in partnership with The Holmewood School. The Holmewood School was registered in December 2010 and this is its first inspection.

The school's stated aims are 'to combine broad academic learning and a range of therapies to offer pupils a rewarding alternative to mainstream education ... by recognising pupils' strengths and successes and providing strategies for them to overcome their learning challenges'.

Evaluation of the school

The Holmewood School provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils and meets its aims. The curriculum and the quality of teaching and assessment are satisfactory, and this enables the pupils to make satisfactory academic progress. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is the school's attention to welfare, health and safety. The school's safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and meet requirements. The school meets the vast majority of regulations required for continued registration as an independent special school.

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

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

Quality of education

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. All subjects of the National Curriculum are offered and are supported by subject policies and schemes of work drawn from national guidance for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. In Key Stage 2, the curriculum is designed using a half-termly topic approach with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The secondary approach is more subject-based and is increasingly related to the requirements of examination boards, including ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), Edexcel, BTEC and GCSE. Where appropriate, some pupils attend International GCSE (IGCSE) courses part time at the North London International School with supplementary studies back at The Holmewood School. There are suitable plans for post-16 students, although none has so far been admitted.

Although all subjects are taught, some aspects of science and design and technology planning cannot be fully implemented at the school due to a lack of resources. For example, in science, pupils have too few opportunities to plan and carry out practical and investigative activities. Furthermore, the pupils lack opportunities to compare the effectiveness of hand tools compared to machine tools when seeking to apply their knowledge of resistant materials.

There are well-designed plans for personal development through the personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme. This provision is also supported by the use of national guidance for social and emotional education. The school has established contact with a local college of further education to enable the pupils to experience taster days. Links have also been established through a local education and business partnership to secure bespoke work experience and careers education.

All pupils have individual education plans which reflect each pupil's special educational needs as identified in their statement of special educational needs. Some pupils also have personalised behaviour management plans. These different sets of plans are well written and reviewed regularly. All pupils receive significant amounts of therapy as part of their curriculum. Pupils also have specific programmes related to their needs; these include sensory integration, which is designed by an occupational therapist to assist the pupils in managing their emotions and improving their focus in lessons. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities at lunch-time and after school, including a walking club, Italian, Japanese, art, drama and cookery clubs.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Teachers have adequate subject knowledge to teach the curriculum, and there are specialists in some subjects, for example, art and drama. Good use is made of the expertise at the North London International School where courses at IGSCSE are taught by specialists. The wide range of therapists devise programmes for teachers to deliver in the classroom and their deployment in classrooms is very effective. Most teachers show a good

appreciation of the pupils' prior attainment and capabilities when planning lessons. Teachers encourage independent learning; for example, the pupils were invited to create individual computer presentations on countries of their choice following internet-based research. Following the presentations, all pupils engaged in a critical appraisal of their peers' work and suggested improvements. Effective learning is also evident where the pupils engage in practical activities, for example, in drama and art. Occasionally, expectations are too low, and lessons do not have sufficient challenge for the most able and the tasks do not match the range of ability in the class. Resources for learning are adequate for most subjects, including the recently acquired web-based resources for literacy and mathematics. However, there is a lack of practical science equipment to support investigations and experiments. There are also too few tools for pupils to make things in design and technology. During the inspection, many teachers used computers; none had links to the interactive facility on the whiteboards, which reduced the impact on learning.

The school's assessment system is based on appropriate national guidance and the teachers have responded well to in-house training. The close monitoring of pupils' progress in meeting the objectives of the individual education plans makes a significant contribution to the quality of assessment. The marking of pupils' work is good and typically includes comments that are encouraging and informative as to how improvements may be made. When available, staff make use of data regarding pupils' progress as provided by previous schools. Typically, the pupils enter the school with levels of attainment below that expected for their age. There is not yet a complete academic year's progress data; however, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the pupils make satisfactory progress and no evidence that any group of pupils makes more or less progress than most.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils' behaviour is good. They respond well to the positive role models provided by staff within the school. The recognition of success and the importance of working with others are embedded features of the school day. Pupils understand and respond to the school's system of age-appropriate rewards and sanctions. All aspects of positive behaviour are acknowledged. Younger pupils respond well to short-term rewards which can be a favourite activity that is timed using an egg-timer for three minutes. Older pupils earn rewards with monetary values that can be exchanged for longer-term treats, such as a visit to a local coffee shop. Throughout, there is a strong emphasis on promoting the pupils' abilities to manage their own behaviour. These tailored rewards are also effective in promoting good attitudes to learning.

The pupils report themselves as feeling safe and enjoying school. This view is reflected in their responses to the inspection questionnaire. As one student stated, 'I wish I could come here seven days a week.' Others in informal discussions observed that the school's approach to their particular special need was an improvement on

the provision at their previous school. The pupils' attendance is good overall and for some, that is a significant improvement on their prior placements.

Lunchtimes and breaks are generally social occasions, and the recent introduction of all-seated mealtimes is a positive development and provides a genuine opportunity to develop social skills such as table manners and learning to take turns. Pupils are supported at break times to play together and a high staff-student ratio supports this through encouragement and modelling. Through the curriculum, they learn about other faiths, cultures and the roles played by public services, including the local community police team. During the inspection, pupils joined staff in raising funds for charity in the 'Jeans for Genes Day.'

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Safeguarding procedures are good and comply fully with requirements. There are appropriate policies for child protection and the safe recruitment of staff. All staff, including the designated officer, are regularly trained at the appropriate levels in matters relating to child protection. In addition, national guidance informs the school's routine health and safety checks, including those in relation to fire safety and electrical equipment. There are appropriate policies and procedures, including risk assessments, to promote the safety of pupils on and off-site: pupils are appropriately supervised at all times. In PSHCE, the pupils are encouraged to stay healthy and know the importance of diet and exercise in a healthy lifestyle. The pupils are made aware that bullying is not tolerated and relationships between pupils are typically cordial. Although the school's behaviour policy states that sanctions are not used when pupils' behaviour is unacceptable, in practice, sanctions, such as warnings, catching up on work missed and 'cooling off periods' are used and recorded.

The school provides good access to a wide range of relevant therapies, for example psychotherapy, reflexology, speech and language, music and drama therapy. The school offers some of these services to pupils' families and goes to great lengths to inform parents and carers about the purpose and potential benefits of their children's therapeutic programmes. There are also close working links with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The school has recently revised its procedures for maintaining registers of attendance and admissions, which are appropriately kept, as are records of first aid incidents and accidents. The school fulfils its responsibilities in respect of the Equality Act, 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school makes comprehensive checks to ensure the suitability of all staff, including supply staff. Senior staff have undertaken suitable training to ensure

rigorous recruitment procedures are adopted. The school maintains relevant evidence of these checks and ensures all of the required information is held in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation are adequate for effective learning. The classrooms and all other parts of the building are well maintained. The classrooms, including the specialist art and therapy provision, are suitable in size for the maximum number of pupils who may be on roll at any one time. There are suitable facilities should a pupil become ill during the school day, although there is no provision for secondary-aged pupils to shower following physical education. The limited outdoor area provides adequate opportunities for safe play. The school makes regular use of a local park for pupils' recreation on grassed areas. Good use is also made of the local community and the facilities of the North London International School to support the school's curriculum provision.

Provision of information

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is clear, accurate and up-to-date, and all receive the required information. The school's website allows all parties to download relevant information, and parents and carers are also updated by social media via the website. The school is aware of the need to send annual financial information to referring local authorities in respect of each funded pupil. All parents' and carers' responses to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school's work. One parent commented, 'Our son hasn't been at the school long, but for us, it is an oasis in a desert.' The school provides reports of good quality, including comprehensive assessments from the speech and language therapist and other specialists. These reports contribute effectively to annual reviews of the pupils' statements of special educational needs.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for the management of complaints meet requirements and are followed rigorously.

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:

- ensure the written schemes of work for science and design and technology are implemented effectively (paragraph 2(1))
- ensure the curriculum gives pupils experience in science and technology (paragraph 2(2)(a))
- ensure all teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 3(d))
- ensure classroom resources for science and design and technology are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and that they are used effectively (paragraph 3(f)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- write a policy to promote good behaviour which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving and ensure it is implemented effectively (paragraph 9).

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

- ensure there are sufficient shower facilities for pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs and disabilities, which take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph (23(j))).

³ 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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special School		
Date school opened	December 2010		
Age range of pupils	7–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:13	Girls: 1	Total: 14
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 12	Girls: 1	Total: 13
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£25,560		
Address of school	88 Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SH		
Telephone number	020 8920 0660		
Email address	enquiries@thsl.org.uk		
Headteacher	L Santi		
Proprietor	D Rose		

10 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Holmewood School, London N12 8SH

You may remember my visit to your school last week. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and I did appreciate being invited to join you for lunch.

You told me that you enjoy school and I could see that you do. Your behaviour was good and it is clear that you know the school rules and like the rewards for doing good work. The staff encourage you to behave well but I am asking the school to be clearer about what should happen when, occasionally, some pupils do not behave well.

The teaching you receive and the progress you are making is satisfactory. I know that some of you have missed a lot of school in the past and that you are keen to make up time. In most lessons, the teachers plan lessons well so that the work you do is not too easy or too hard. Sometimes, the work is too easy for some of you and I have asked your school to improve this. I am also asking them to improve the equipment and tools in school, so you can do more experiments in science and make products in wood and metal in design and technology. Your school should also have showers so that you can keep yourself clean and fresh after exercise.

The school provides well for your welfare, health and safety, and the therapies you receive help you to focus in lessons and make friends with your peers. You make good progress in your personal development and your continued good attendance will help you to make good progress in your future studies. It was good to find you all joining in on the 'Jeans for Genes Day' and I hope you raised lots of money for this worthy cause.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell
Lead Inspector