

Sybil Elgar School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Stephen McShane HMI
Social care inspector	Sharon Lewis

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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}

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and the government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

The Sybil Elgar School is an independent special school providing day and boarding places for secondary and further education students with learning difficulties within the autistic spectrum. It is owned and managed by the National Autistic Society (NAS). It is situated on three sites. The boarding accommodation is provided off-campus in a large detached house in a leafy residential area. It is in close proximity to Ealing town centre, parks and other leisure facilities. The school for secondary-aged students is in Southall and 'Woodlands', for students over the age of 16 years, is on the campus of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College in Acton. The residential provision offers weekly boarding during term-time for up to 21 pupils. A residential short-break service operates during some of the school holidays to provide respite for parents and carers. The school was originally established in 1965 and gained approved status in 1984. It moved to the Southall site in 1994.

Sybil Elgar aims to be a caring and progressive school, which gives students every opportunity to learn and achieve, holding students in high esteem and working in partnership with families and professionals. Currently there are 79 students on roll aged 11 to 19 years. Seventeen students, from a range of different cultures and abilities, are residential. All the students have statements of special educational needs and come from 22 different local authorities.

The last inspection of the education provision took place in May 2008 and of the residential provision in June 2010. This integrated inspection examined both the education and residential provision.

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

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

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

⁴ www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Evaluation of the school

Sybil Elgar meets its aims and provides a good quality of education. It meets all but one of the regulations for independent schools. The residential element of the school is outstanding. Here, students thrive within a nurturing environment which centres on their uniqueness. Residential students learn exceptionally good life and social skills, which significantly increase their self-esteem and confidence. Strengths of the school include the good curriculum which is significantly enhanced by specialist approaches for students with autistic spectrum disorders and complex special educational needs. This makes a strong contribution to students making good progress, particularly in their willingness and receptiveness to engage and to learn. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the promotion of their welfare, health and safety are good. The school has effective safeguarding procedures.

Quality of education

The school's curriculum is good. For school-aged students it is based on the National Curriculum. It is currently under review to strengthen the planning for individual students. All subjects are taught by specialist teachers in designated classrooms giving students an important sense of the difference between subjects and the experiences or content they may encounter. Planning ensures there is appropriate coverage of subjects and progression. In the further education department there is an age-appropriate academic life-skills programme concentrating on improving independence and communication. Students each have an individual timetable of art, drama, dance, and music and movement. When appropriate, students are supported to attend Acton College to take up other opportunities such as gym sessions or digital photography. Accreditation is through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) or entry level qualifications.

The curriculum is underpinned by the SPELL (Structure, Positive approaches and expectations, Empathy, Low Arousal and Links) approach. This approach has been developed by NAS to reduce the effect of autism and support the development of communication. This means that a great deal of attention has been given to develop the environment. It is highly structured and predictable. It is calm and uncluttered. Expectations are clear. This approach means that students who have significant and complex needs perceive the school as a safe place to learn. It enables them to make significant progress in their ability to access learning. Transition times clarify the next activity for students. This means that the challenge in dealing with change is successfully managed. Distress is significantly less likely to occur and over time students become confident. They progress from requiring physical prompting to verbal prompting and some learn to move around the buildings or to different activities calmly and independently. TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped children) approaches are used to structure learning activities. The effective use of pictures and symbolic communication systems mean that the spoken word is enhanced by a visual prompt. Students develop their

own sense of order to the day by using a personal or class timetable. Through intensive support they learn what is expected of them, for example to 'be calm' or to 'be calm'. Together, all these approaches, supported by an effective multi-disciplinary approach and staff training, are a strong point of the school. Their successful and consistent implementation is a significant factor in the students' good progress.

Students have many rich opportunities to engage in the wider curriculum. Clubs in school include art, craft and activities requested by the students such as computer games. Carefully designed playgrounds mean that students engage energetically and safely in exercise, supplementing the good curriculum of physical education that is on offer. Students experience themed weeks exploring Black History or other cultures, and take part in activities such as horse riding, rock climbing, performances in a local theatre and trips abroad. Residential students enjoy going to youth clubs, out for meals, to the cinema, shopping and on a variety of excursions. Each of these different activities, as well as significantly enhancing the experience of the students, is a new challenge to the students, who respond very well and with growing confidence.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. All lessons are underpinned by strong relationships between staff and students. They are carefully structured so that students know what to expect and there are common expectations. This means that the majority of students engage and work cooperatively with staff in a variety of different activities. In the best lessons there is clear evidence of progression for each individual in the particular subject; for example in yoga, students are challenged to learn new poses or refine familiar ones. In hockey, students learn the new skills required to play the game. The teachers' language is clear and unambiguous. Support to guide students is focused on returning the student to learning as quickly as possible. Pace is maintained so that challenge remains high without stress or unnecessary pressure on students. Where objectives for lessons and plans for activities are not precise enough the teaching does not ensure consistently good learning for individuals. On these occasions, for example, a group activity, while encouraging cooperation and appropriate behaviour, does not challenge the individual student to acquire new knowledge or to develop a particular skill sufficiently. Pace in these lessons is sometimes irregular and engagement erratic.

Residential staff sensitively support students in a range of different activities. Students are encouraged to practice life and leisure skills very effectively and there is a high level of participation. They learn to communicate more effectively, to take turns and to share, as well as to cook meals and pursue hobbies and interests.

Students make good progress. Regular assessment using Performance (P) levels or Milestones (M) level descriptors means that the school has a good knowledge of each student's current attainment. Tracking indicates that students are making good progress across all subject areas. Checklists completed by the speech and language therapist track the good progress made by students in the acquisition of

communication skills. Annual review reports and students' work, for example samples of work to evidence accreditation by ASDAN, also show good progress.

The school is very aware of students' individual needs and works well to meet the requirements of their statements of special educational needs. Individual education plans, determined by multi-professional teams and parents, incorporate targets based on the 'triad of impairments' associated with autistic spectrum disorders and on other priorities. These targets are incorporated into teaching plans and monitored diligently by staff. In some instances the targets are too broad. In these cases, progress is difficult to measure and monitoring does not always give the teacher or senior management enough information to guide further interventions. Similarly, the information from P scales and Milestones is not used consistently well by teachers to plan their lessons and guide teaching.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students enjoy a large number of different opportunities. They learn to tolerate, to participate, to initiate and to lead. Students who have significant difficulties in understanding others learn to work together, for example in the school café or playing together in a band. Where they are able, students reflect on what they enjoy, for example a recent trip to Poland. Students learn to make choices. They learn to seek help and to solve problems. Students' communication and basic skills improve greatly. They develop skills to use information and communication technology so they become confident in using a mouse or using software to design and then save their work. The extensive experiences outside school mean that students learn to act appropriately in the community and gain knowledge of different services and institutions. Work experience enables students to be in adult environments, to generalise skills and to overcome new challenges in different situations, for example shadowing the local mayor or working in a shop.

Residential students learn excellent social and life skills. They learn how to take care of themselves, for example making their beds, attending to their personal hygiene and laundry. They also learn to help each other and have consideration for others, demonstrated in clearing tables at meal times. Students learn to shop together, which is evidence of exceptional team-working for these individuals.

There are many opportunities for students to learn and respect different cultures. A range of festivals are celebrated, international food is served and students have participated well in drama and dance events with an African, Spanish or Bollywood theme. Within school, students make their views known through questionnaires and committees. Their contribution is actively sought. Students' opinions on how to make things better, for example, providing hot food at Woodlands, are acted upon. Residential students are able to develop their leadership skills, for example being the health and safety representative within the home. Students assist in raising the

awareness of autism through their work with television companies or at national conferences. They contribute, with staff, towards research in work with universities.

Behaviour is good. While individuals may still become upset, their distress is appropriately managed and the strategies to calm students are effective. Students learn to accept the behaviour of others and do not become distressed themselves. Students who display the most challenging behaviour, including those with self-injurious behaviour, make good progress. Through careful interventions, managed by the school psychology team, the number and intensity of incidents significantly decrease. Many students learn to manage and regulate their own behaviour. The school recognises that the tracking of students' engagement in learning could be improved to ensure that this is regularly checked and analysed.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. The requirements for safeguarding are met. Safer recruitment procedures are conducted as required. The designated person has been trained to a standard set by the local children's safeguarding board and takes her responsibilities seriously. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection, first aid and fire safety as required. Risk assessments are implemented effectively for educational visits and fire safety. All health and safety checks are completed effectively. The school promotes healthy eating very well. Healthy meals and snacks are available. Students keep healthy through exercise and they very much enjoy their outside physical activities. Good hygiene rules and routines are promoted well.

There is a high staff-to-student ratio in the school and this enables close supervision to take place. Staff know students well and establish positive relationships with them. Residential and school staff work in an integrated manner to ensure an excellent continuity of care. This includes educational care workers and teaching assistants being able to work across sites. Individually tailored induction and transition programmes are prepared and carried out for students. This ensures a smooth transition for each student at different points in their education.

A multi-disciplinary team of psychologists, speech and language and occupational therapists informs the work of teachers, care and support staff. Students receive direct intervention from these therapists as required. There are clear policies for the promotion of good behaviour and anti-bullying in the school and residential settings. Staff are well trained using 'Studio 3', a non-aversive behaviour management approach, to manage behaviour and use physical intervention safely if required. Parents-in-partnership sessions, workshops and close communication mean that families receive support and that the approach to students is consistent between school, residence and home.

The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out the required checks on all staff and proprietors prior to their appointment to make sure there are no reasons why they should not be employed to work with children. The checks are recorded in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school and further education departments have appropriate classrooms, specialist and communal areas to ensure that the curriculum can be delivered effectively. On the school site the substantially refurbished playgrounds give very good opportunities for students to engage in physical exercise and to learn about safety and appropriate behaviour.

Residential students have their own modern bedrooms which they can personalise to reflect their individuality. Communal areas include a student kitchen, dining area, home entertainment lounge, a library with a computer suite and a rear lawn garden. Female students benefit from their own residential wing.

Provision of information

Both the education and residential staff maintain excellent links with parents. Parents' and carers' feedback regarding the school is overwhelmingly positive. All are happy with their children's experiences at the school. They comment on the 'huge strides' their children have made. The prospectus and website provide parents, prospective parents and others with comprehensive information about the school, its ethos and organisation. Residential students benefit from their own vibrant simplified handbook, which clearly outlines what they can expect from the service.

The school does not submit an annual account of income for each student to their local authority as required.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which meets the requirements of the regulations and national minimum standards. Residential and day students and their parents know how to raise a concern or make a complaint and say they are confident that the school would do its best to resolve it.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. There is a culture of celebrating and empowering each young person to achieve their potential. Residential students respond very well to the supportive, nurturing environment, which stimulates their personal development. Outstanding management ensures that students successfully engage in a wide range of activities which contribute to their learning.

Residential students benefit from a stable, committed and highly experienced senior leadership team. The multi-disciplinary approach to care planning puts students at the heart of the innovative person-centred planning, which fully reflects their individuality. The strong emphasis on choice and the comprehensive participation strategy ensure students direct their daily lives. Through the actions of excellent leaders and managers young people thrive within an environment which promotes their well-being and gives them stability, tranquillity and enjoyment. This means that staff rarely need to restrain students and do not use sanctions. Students instead receive an abundance of praise and encouragement.

There is exceptionally high staff retention. All staff are passionate about their role. There is a culture of continuous improvement and excellence. Staff receive specialist training which enables them to deliver a high quality service. There is an excellent promotion of equality and diversity. This is a strong thread throughout all care practices and documentation.

The service is continually evolving to meet the needs of students. This evolution is assisted by comprehensive quality assurance and monitoring. There is an excellent understanding and implementation of the new national minimum standards. The expectations regarding further improving staff vocational training, however, remain an appropriate priority for development.

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.⁵

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

where a student who is registered at the school is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, submit an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that student to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools' associated regulations.

⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/2010/1997/contents/made.

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 better and more consistent use of assessment information on individual students when planning lessons and learning opportunities so that activities consistently lead to the learning of new knowledge or acquisition of skills.

Improve the monitoring of students' engagement in purposeful learning so that adjustments to behaviour management and to interventions can be made if required.

Continue to prioritise Level 3 qualification training for residential staff.

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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Overall effectiveness of the residential experience

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	✓			
Outcomes for residential pupils	✓			
Quality of residential provision and care	✓			
Residential pupils' safety	✓			
Leadership and management of the residential provision	✓			

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special, catering for students with autistic spectrum disorders		
Date school opened	1965		
Age range of pupils	11–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 61	Girls: 17	Total: 79
Number of boarders	Boys: 12	Girls: 7	Total: 19
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 61	Girls: 17	Total: 79
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 4	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,284		
Annual fees (boarders)	£71,992		
Address of school	Havelock Road Southall Middlesex UB2 4NR		
Telephone number	02088139168		
Email address	sybil.elgar@nas.org.uk		
Headteacher	Chloe Phillips		
Proprietor	National Autistic Society		

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.



2 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Sybil Elgar School, Southall UB2 4NZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed watching all the different things you do.

We found out that:

- education is good at your school
- you are making good progress, particularly in the way the school helps you to learn and make sense of things
- the work the staff do to understand your autism helps a great deal
- adults care for you well and you feel safe
- you enjoy all the different activities the school provides
- your behaviour is good and some of you have made very good progress in this area
- Corfton Road is outstanding.

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and teachers to make sure the teaching is always good in every lesson and make sure you are engaged and challenged at just the right level.

It was a privilege to meet you all and see your work.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector