

Wessex College

Independent school standard inspection report

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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

Wessex College is an independent special school for students who have a range of behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. It provides up to 52 weeks schooling for a maximum of 10 young people aged between 11 and 18 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 10 students on roll; eight have statements of special educational needs. All students have been placed by local authorities and live in children's homes run by the same company as the school. All students have a history of family crisis, fragmented lives, multiple placements, along with challenging and risk-taking behaviours. During the inspection, there were no students attending in Key Stage 3.

The school opened in 2001. It was last inspected by Ofsted in 2008 and received a progress monitoring visit in the same year to judge the extent of improvement in implementing its action plan. There have been significant staff changes over the last year, including restructuring the management and leadership. The headteacher left during the summer term of 2011 and it is intended that a replacement will be recruited. There is a teacher-in-charge to lead and manage the day-to-day running of the school. There is also an external consultant who is sharing some of the duties and responsibilities for school leadership and management.

The school's aims are to work holistically with young people by supporting them to learn about themselves, to assess their life experiences, examine their behaviours and to address their educational needs.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is inadequate and the school has made inadequate progress since the last inspection because teaching, assessment, and the implementation of the planned curriculum are not good enough. As a result of these weaknesses, students make inadequate progress. Students' behaviour, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory and provision to ensure students'

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

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

welfare, health and safety is good. The school's safeguarding and safety arrangements are thorough and robust. The school does not meet a number of regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate. This is because, although the curriculum provided in college is satisfactory in terms of planning and schemes of work, it is not implemented effectively to enable students to make the progress they should.

The curriculum covers the subjects of the National Curriculum and is suitably supported by subject policies and schemes of work drawn from national guidance for Key Stages 3 and 4. In Key Stage 4, schemes of work mainly relate directly to the requirements of examination boards or external award schemes. A weekly timetable is used to ensure that all students have experience of all the required areas of learning. There is a planned course for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and there are behaviour review sessions aimed at ensuring students have sufficient opportunities to improve their behaviour, increase their social skills, and develop their emotional well-being. Careers education is provided through a link with Connexions and there is provision for community service. Where students have particular interests that cannot be met within the school, time is made for them to attend appropriate courses elsewhere, for example at the local college.

The quality of teaching and assessment is inadequate. During the inspection, teachers had adequate subject knowledge to teach the courses that the students were following. However, they were not sufficiently adept at making sure that the curriculum overall and the planned lesson activities were adapted to meet students' individual academic needs. Tasks were not sufficiently challenging and this severely limited the progress that students could make. Sometimes the pace of the learning in the lesson was too slow and not much work was done. The work in students' exercise books and elsewhere clearly shows that very little academic progress has been made by the vast majority of students over the last year. This limits students' future life chances and economic well-being. One element of this is that not enough students who are intellectually capable are entered for GCSE or equivalent examinations. The exceptions to this negative picture are PSHE and behaviour review which are delivered successfully. In addition, in most lessons, staff focus successfully on developing students' emotional and social skills along with helping them to improve their behaviour. In particular, they successfully meet the emotional and social requirements of those students with statements of special educational needs. In most of the lessons seen during the inspection, students were kept occupied and staff always worked hard to encourage them to complete their set tasks. However, while this enabled students to be ready to learn, not enough attention was given to ensuring that students were either learning something new or consolidating prior learning. Too often, more-able students were asked to complete work that they already understood. In large part, this is because the school does not have a good enough appreciation of students' prior and developing academic attainment and

capabilities. Academic learning targets are not used to help students know how well they are doing, what they need to do next, and how to improve their work. Consequently, they are excessively reliant on adults to help them to learn and improve.

As noted in the last inspection, there is a continued reliance on text book activities. Most students are not motivated through using these text books either on their own or with an adult helper. While some prefer working on their own, there are not enough opportunities for students, who are at the same level, to work together. The lack of practical activities relating to real-life situations causes students to disengage with their learning and, on these occasions, behaviour frequently slips.

Starting at the end of last term, the school has been working with a well-qualified and experienced external consultant. From this support, with the full involvement of permanent staff, several new key policies and procedures have been developed and implemented since the autumn term of 2011. This includes an up-to-date benchmarking of students' attainment, along with new progress and assessment tracking systems. While these are now in place, it is too soon to judge the impact on students' progress and attainment.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The students' behaviour is satisfactory overall, although it remains unpredictable. There is a strong emphasis on promoting the students' abilities to manage their own behaviour through a reward system that is known and followed by all staff. Likewise, the current policy for imposing sanctions, although relatively new, is ensuring that there has been a decrease in the proportion of occasions when students are sent home for poor behaviour. Overall, the students' attendance is satisfactory and, for some, this is a significant improvement on their prior placements. However, the school does not monitor the amount of time that students stay on-task or are engaged in meaningful learning activities during lessons. Consequently, the amount of learning is not being measured accurately and there are missed opportunities to notice any patterns of behavioural changes during the school day.

Opportunities to develop students' social and emotional skills are woven effectively into the school day. Lunchtimes and breaks are generally congenial occasions, with staff and students eating, drinking and socialising together. The student common room has just been repainted by the school community to a colour scheme chosen by the students. Students are now in the process of choosing new furnishings and furniture, which is developing their negotiating skills and levels of tolerance through meaningful activity.

Through the curriculum, students learn about other faiths, cultures and the roles played by public services, including the local community police team. They learn to respect differences and increase their levels of tolerance. The school has a good number of displays and photographs that show students taking part in a good range

of activities to develop their knowledge and understanding about the world around them. However, there is little recording about what the students learned, which hinders the celebration and sharing of the students' achievements with those who were not directly involved.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the students' welfare, health and safety is good. Permanent staff effectively use restorative justice and de-escalation techniques in order to reduce friction. When physical interventions are needed by staff, these are appropriately recorded and shared with other adults. Rewards and sanctions are relevant and have an increasingly positive impact on improving behaviour. A key feature of this is the increasingly successful use of the Steps programme that makes it clear to students the consequences of their actions, while also providing a structure for them to improve their behaviour.

Students are provided with healthy meals, snacks and drinks. They are encouraged to take regular exercise and are supported effectively to develop mental and emotional stability. All aspects of how to live healthily, including sexual health, are covered through the PSHE curriculum. Nevertheless, as at the last inspection, while smoking is prohibited in the school buildings, there are some students who persist in smoking outside.

All safeguarding policies and procedures, including regular risk assessments, are extremely robust and all comply with requirements. Policies are annually reviewed to ensure that relevant changes are made to the school procedures. Fire and other safety arrangements meet requirements. The frequency of the review, the quality of recording and the swiftness to resolve issues relating to these arrangements are exemplary. The school meets the requirements 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 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 classrooms and all other parts of the buildings are well maintained. The classrooms, including the specialist art room and computer suite, are suitable in size for the maximum number of students who may be on roll at any one time. There is an attractive outdoor garden area for students to stroll and play in. The school also makes appropriate arrangements for students to use specialist sports facilities. Facilities for students who are ill meet requirements.

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. Very close liaison exists between the school, the central company office and the students' residences. The school sends annual financial information to referring local authorities in respect of each funded student.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets all the requirements. It is set out clearly and can be easily followed by parents, carers and others.

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:

- implement effectively the curriculum policy, appropriate plans and schemes of work (paragraph 2(1))
- ensure the curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to learn and make progress (paragraph 2(2)(i))
- ensure that teaching enables students to acquire new knowledge and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 3(a))
- ensure that the teaching encourages pupils to apply intellectual, physical or creative effort and to show interest in their work and to think and learn for themselves (paragraph 3(b))
- ensure teaching involves well-planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and appropriate management of class time (paragraph 3(c))
- ensure all teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, and ensure that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 3(d))
- ensure there is a framework in place to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, and the information from such assessment is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 3(g)).

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 for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 8	Total: 10
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2	Girls: 4	Total: 8
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,440 - £50,500		
Email address	Josams@wessexcollege.co.uk		
Teacher in Charge	David Campbell		
Proprietor	Jo Sams		

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.

7 November 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Wessex College

I came to your school recently to see how well students were learning and how well adults help them. I watched some of you in lessons and listened to students talking about their work. I would like to say thank you to all the students I met for making me feel welcome when I made my visit. I enjoyed talking with you. This letter is to tell all of you what I found out.

- Most of you are not making enough progress in your learning.
- More of you should be taking GCSE or equivalent examinations.
- When lessons are exciting and practical, you enjoy learning, make good progress and behave very well.
- Some of you need more help to stop smoking.
- The way poor behaviour is managed is improving and is more consistent using the new Steps programme.
- I saw that you generally have good relationships with the permanent staff.
- All the staff care about you and want you to do your best.
- Some of you told me that you are beginning to enjoy learning and attending school, but others of you said you were unhappy and wanted some things to change.

Senior leaders and managers of your school have already made a start on improving things. However, it is obvious that there is still quite a lot of work to do. All of you can help by attending school regularly and by working with all the staff to make sure that the education and the teaching at the school help you realise your dreams.

If you would like to read my full report, it can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

With my very best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector