

Pace Education Ltd

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	860/6443
Unique Reference Number (URN)	136245
Inspection number	385129
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2011
Reporting inspector	David Rzeknik

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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

Pace Education is a small, independent special school located in Newcastle-under-Lyme. It is privately owned by two proprietors. One of the proprietors is the headteacher. The school opened in October 2010 to provide an alternative education for up to 30 students aged from 14 to 16 years. Students are referred by local authorities and schools. Currently, there are 17 students on roll. Ten attend full-time and seven part-time. All except one of the students have a statement of special educational needs and two are looked after. The vast majority have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and some have mental health problems. The school also admits, and is registered for, students with moderate and severe learning difficulties, including autism. Most students have had a disrupted education which has adversely affected their attainment and self-esteem.

The school is multi-racial and a small number of students speak English as an additional language, however, none is at the early stage of acquiring English. Around two thirds of the students have been in school for less than 12 months. This is the school's first Ofsted inspection since it was registered in August 2010.

The school's mission is to, 'provide young people with a brighter future'.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is good and the school fulfils its mission. Students enjoy school life and are achieving well because teaching is effective and the curriculum meets their individual needs effectively. The school is very successful in re-engaging students with learning, modifying their behaviour and improving their basic skills and attendance. Safeguarding procedures are robust and the school meets the vast majority of the regulations for independent schools. The school has quickly become established and the students, parents, carers and local authorities hold the school in high regard.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. A written curriculum policy is in place and it provides an accurate summary of the provision made. Suitable schemes of work exist for all subjects and all areas of learning are covered. They are primarily based on Award

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

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

Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) guidance and GCSE examination syllabi. Currently, GCSEs are taught, primarily at foundation level in English literature and English language, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). If a student is admitted to the school and is taking a GCSE in a different subject then the school will teach the subject. A good feature is that all accredited courses lead to qualifications that have currency in the adult world. An important strength is the tailoring of the curriculum to students' capabilities and the requirements of each student's statement. For example, the one-to-one tuition in mathematics is well matched to students' aptitudes and abilities ensuring that individuals learn at a good rate. This said, the school recognises that the provision made for the very small number of students who speak English as an additional language could be better targeted to further improve their linguistic skills.

Improving students' basic skills and their behaviour is at the heart of the school's work. Time is rightly spent on getting these pre-requisites for learning in place if students are to succeed and have self-worth. A good quality personal, social and health education programme is taught and the life skills work effectively covers topics such as sex and drugs education. Appropriate careers education is provided, including work experience for those that can cope with it. A suitable range of enrichment activities are provided, for example, trips to the local theatre, and visitors come into school to talk about animals and their welfare. No extra-curricular provision is made at the end of the school day as students go back home promptly.

Teaching and assessment are good. Provision enables students to make good progress academically and in their personal development. Assessment procedures are effective, particularly those that are used to determine students' basic skills proficiency on entry. Information gained from assessment is generally used well to suitably match work to students' capabilities. Examination courses are externally marked and this ensures that the standards achieved are valid. Work is marked regularly but staff are not consistently pinpointing spelling and punctuation errors so that mistakes are corrected in order that writing weaknesses are quickly remedied. Dictionaries exist in classrooms but were not being used often enough during the inspection. The work done to improve handwriting skills is paying dividends although students do not consistently write in a joined style.

The strengths in teaching lie in the very good relationships that exist between staff and students and this ensures learning is conducted in a very positive climate. Behaviour management is effective in ensuring that learning is not disrupted and students persevere with tasks and achieve lesson aims. In the most effective lessons activities are interesting and they motivate the students to learn at a good rate. Teachers use a variety of methods and use practical resources to increase students' enjoyment of learning. Where teaching is satisfactory it is because the lesson lacks pace and the teacher does not intervene enough to move learning on. Staff control the learning too much so there are insufficient opportunities for students to show initiative or to think and learn for themselves. There are occasions when the match of work to the specific needs of students who speak English as an additional language, is not sharp enough, particularly in developing their English. In general, teachers do not encourage these students to speak often enough, or model

grammatical structures, to further improve their communication and vocabulary skills. There are sufficient resources, including computers in school, however, the use of computer technology across all subjects could be better.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The very supportive environment and positive ethos are very effective in boosting students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Students enjoy school and their attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality and attendance rates are much improved and the proprietors have worked closely with parents, carers and others to ensure students attend regularly. Staff have developed very good relationships with students and new arrivals have settled in well because induction arrangements are good. Rules are clear and students know right from wrong. Students are developing self-respect and also show respect for others' feelings and for school property. They participate in all that the school offers and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. The various methods used to control and modify behaviour are effective and this results in good behaviour and a calm, supportive environment for learning. Beliefs and values work is enabling students to gain an understanding of religious and cultural diversity that promotes tolerance and harmony. Students make a positive contribution to the school and wider community by making suggestions about improvements to the school environment and raising money for good causes. Plans are well advanced for them to participate in a project to create a sensory garden locally. Opportunities to make a difference in the global community and to be involved in a coherent and structured way in the school's decision-making processes are more limited. Life skills, work experience, careers and enterprise education suitably prepare students for their next stage of education or employment.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Students are well cared for and the school is good at promoting a healthy lifestyle. The high staff to student ratio ensures that students are well supervised at all times. There are plenty of opportunities for them to take part in physical activities to improve their fitness levels. Sex and drugs education helps students gain an understanding of adult relationships and types of addiction. The school has zero tolerance of smoking and provides nutritious food and drinks at lunchtime.

All of the required health and safety policies are in place and they are effectively implemented. Child protection procedures are clear and all staff, including the designated person for child protection, have been appropriately trained to fulfil their duties. A satisfactory first aid policy exists and accident records are kept in good order. There are sufficient first aiders in school and on outside activities. Discipline and anti-bullying policies are of good quality and they are implemented effectively. Students say that they are free from intimidation and harassment. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out for individuals, the premises and activities in school and beyond. Portable electrical appliances are subject to regular inspection by a competent person. The school has a satisfactory level of fire safety. Regular checks

are undertaken of the fire fighting appliances; the fire and emergency lighting alarms; and fire evacuations are regularly practised.

The attendance register is kept in accordance with requirements but the admission register is not. The school has a written Equal Opportunity and Disability Equality policy but lacks a three-year plan to increase over time the accessibility of the premises and the curriculum to fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school undertakes all of the required recruitment and vetting checks on the proprietors and all staff, including supply teachers. The single central register is kept in accordance with requirements and can be reproduced in a legible form.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is housed in a large Georgian property that enables effective learning in a safe and secure environment. Provision is homely and staff have gone the extra mile to celebrate students' achievements and work through excellent displays. Decoration, flooring and furniture are of high quality and there are adequate facilities for those who are ill. The premises are very well maintained and are kept in a very clean, tidy and hygienic state. Classrooms vary in size but are appropriate for the numbers using them. There is sufficient outdoor space for play and recreation and good use is made of local sports facilities for physical education. There are sufficient washrooms and toilets for students but not for staff or visitors. This said, toileting arrangements ensure students are properly safeguarded as the toilets are self-contained and lockable for privacy, so students cannot use toilets at the same time as adults. There are no shower facilities on site as required.

Provision of information

The school provides, or makes available, through its prospectus and website, most, but not all, of the required information for parents, carers and others. The school does not submit to local authorities an annual account of the income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of the students wholly or partly funded by local authorities. Annual reports to parents and carers are of good quality. Evaluation provides a clear picture of an individual's attainment and progress in the main subjects taught, along with helpful information about their behaviour, attitudes to work and attendance. Detailed information is supplied by the school, to the responsible local authority, to inform the annual reviews of students' statements.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints procedure meets 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'), with the exception of those listed below.³

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

- ensure that the admission register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

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

- ensure that there are sufficient washroom and toilet facilities for staff and shower facilities for students which take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j)).

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

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁴

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Ensure that work is always matched to the needs of students who speak English as an additional language, particularly in English, and encourage learners to speak in sentences and staff to model grammatical structures to further improve students' communication and vocabulary skills.
- Improve students' spelling and punctuation skills and ensure marking pinpoints errors so that they are rectified quickly.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made.

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

- Increase the use of computer technology in all subjects to further develop students' ICT skills.

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 day school		
Date school opened	October 2010		
Age range of pupils	14–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 5	Total: 10
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,372 full-time or £138 a day part-time		
Address of school	Black Horse House 3 Porthill Bank Newcastle-Under-Lyme ST5 0LS		
Telephone number	01782 616660		
Email address	pace.education@mail.com		
Headteacher	Clare Harper		
Proprietor	Clare Harper and Cherri Felton		

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.

18 November 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Pace Education Ltd, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, ST5 0LS

Thank you for making me feel welcome and for sending back your questionnaire with your views about school life.

Your school provides you with a good education. It is, therefore, no surprise that you and your parents and carers hold the school in such high regard. Many of you are new to the school and have settled into school life very quickly. You enjoy school and it is good to see that most of you are attending regularly. Teaching is generally good and the activities that you do are usually well matched to your specific needs. You are making good progress and your behaviour is good too. When I was in class I noticed how well you get on with teachers and each other. This means that you learn in a very positive climate. I was also impressed with the excellent displays of your work and achievements.

You are well cared for and you told me that you feel safe and are free from harassment. The school is doing a good job boosting your self-confidence and self-esteem and improving your reading, writing and numeracy skills. I think that your school accommodation is impressive, homely and very clean and tidy. The reception and recreation areas are cool!

There are some things that I want the school to do to get better. The work given to those of you who speak English as an additional language could be better targeted, particularly in English, and these students should be encouraged to speak more in lessons. Your spelling and punctuation skills require further improvement and computer technology could be used more across the curriculum.

There are a few things that the school must do to meet government requirements. For example, there must be a separate toilet for staff and visitors and showers installed for you to use. The admission register must be kept in good order and a plan produced to increase accessibility to the premises and curriculum. Some financial information must also be sent to local councils.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Lead inspector