

URN 135278

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Steffi Penny HMI

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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}

Information about the school

The school is a small independent special day school for girls aged between 11 and 16 years who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are currently 11 students on roll, four of whom have a statement of special educational needs. All students are looked after by their respective local authority and live in one of the homes provided by the same proprietor, some of which are on the same site. The full reports for these provisions are available in the social care section of the Ofsted website.

The school opened in 2006 and moved to the current site in 2007. It was last inspected in June 2008. Some students attend vocational courses at local colleges as well as on the school site.

The school aims to raise students' self-esteem and 'motivate and support all pupils in their learning and raise their attainment levels, irrespective of ability, gender, cultural or social background' and to 'equip all learners with the skills needed for the future and particularly, the world of work'.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good education for its students and meets its aims. All aspects of the school's work and provision are good including a good curriculum and good teaching and assessment. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection when the curriculum was judged as satisfactory. Students continue to make good progress in their academic studies and in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The support for students' welfare, health and safety, including the safeguarding arrangements, is good. The school now also meets all the regulations, which was not the case at the last inspection.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered for each key stage. At the time of the last inspection the extent of curriculum planning in

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

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

Key Stage 3 was limited, as were the number and range of accredited courses at Key Stage 4. This has now been rectified. All students now have programmes that are personalised to meet individual needs, interests and appropriate requests. For example, several asked to study Polish because they wanted to be able to converse with a member of staff in her first language. As a result, Polish is now an option on the timetable and the school has ensured that students are externally accredited for their work. Another example is that some students are on accredited courses through a range of local colleges that have access to highly specialist provision, such as equine studies.

All students are expected to take GCSE examinations, alongside other externally accredited and nationally recognised courses. Students are given expert guidance from staff, and through the Connexions service, to ensure that the courses they choose to follow are the right ones for the career paths that they have in mind. Work-related learning is part of the curriculum for all students whether they have chosen a vocational qualification or not.

The school's good quality enrichment activities that take place in students' homes are highly effective at supporting work in school and extend the range of classroom resources. For example, the 'home learning' related to animal husbandry has been accredited through the school. They have increased students' self-esteem and have provided new pathways of learning. It has also meant that social care staff have clear, measureable inputs into the academic success of the students. The headteacher recognises, correctly, that the recording of students' achievements in home learning is an area that can be improved and further exploited to raise students' attainment further.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Students make good personal and academic progress. As they gain an understanding of the benefits of what a good education can offer, they demonstrate a determined effort to progress with some good examination results at GCSE or equivalent levels. In spite of previous failures in their education students now want to do their best. Teaching is good because staff ensure that work is interesting, set at an appropriate level for each student and that lessons are taught at a good pace. The school is rightly in the process of making new permanent appointments to strengthen teaching staff's specialist subject knowledge.

The marking of students' work is informative and constructive. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However National Curriculum and other course levels are not shared with students, parents and carers as frequently as they might be. As a consequence, parents and carers are not always able to see the small steps that the students are making so that they can contribute to improving students' progress.

Assessment procedures are thorough and purposefully used. The initial accurate benchmarking of students when they join the school is used effectively alongside other information about the student to set suitably challenging learning and

development targets. Students help to identify their own targets and their progress against them is regularly assessed by staff. While the reporting of students' achievement is clear and informative the headteacher has identified that it can be improved further by adding a comparison between students' initial starting points and their current attainment. Consequently, she is in the process of producing a graphical representation in order to share this information succinctly with parents, carers, staff, students and others in order to raise achievement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A major strength is students' good behaviour and the successful development of students' social skills, especially their self-esteem and levels of confidence. There is a strong emphasis on promoting the students' abilities to manage their own emotions and behaviour through a reward system that is known and followed by all staff. This helps students learn to respect differences and increase their levels of tolerance.

Teachers effectively challenge students to think about moral issues relating to equality and diversity. During the inspection this involved a good debate in a lesson about the implications of the Human Rights Act. All students made a good contribution to the discussion and stayed on task throughout the session because of the supportive learning relationship and trust that they had with the teacher and each other. Through their debate students displayed a good understanding of different faiths, cultural traditions and viewpoints.

Students make a good, positive contribution to their community in many ways, such as performing in the school pantomime. They also raise funds for charities they have chosen to support. For example, they worked together to make a quilt that was auctioned and this helped to fund a neonatal monitor for a local hospital. Spiritual and emotional development is further encouraged and supported by students taking responsibility for caring for a range of domestic and farm animals.

Students say they enjoy school and feel well cared for. These views are supported by school records and data that clearly demonstrate that students' attitudes to learning improve over time in the school. Attendance has continued to improve over the last year and is, overall, consistently high. Preparation for students' economic well-being is good. All students leave with externally accredited qualifications including mathematics and English that are in line with their capabilities.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Students' welfare, health and safety are good. The excellent working relationship between the social care and education staff provides a seamless provision of high quality guidance and care. The last social care inspection in 2011 for the children's homes continued to judge them to be outstanding. Through this nurturing, students learn how to keep themselves and each other safe. Trusting relationships with staff ensure that students feel well supported and cared for. Due to the shared high

expectations of all staff and the consistent application of policies and procedures, particularly those relating to anti-bullying and equalities, students demonstrate increasingly better behaviour and social awareness.

The school has close links with other partners and agencies to help ensure students are kept healthy. The curriculum helps students to have a good understanding of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. However, during the inspection the school's 'Healthy Living' policy was not always followed, for example several students ate 'junk food' snacks and drank fizzy drinks at breaks and lunchtimes, which they had brought into school from home.

All school policies and procedures including regular risk assessments are thorough, effectively cross-referenced and comply with the relevant regulations. Fire and other safety arrangements meet requirements, including those for small animal care and husbandry. The frequency of the review, the quality of recording and the swiftness to resolve issues relating to these arrangements are exemplary. The child protection policy is robust and is strictly followed. Procedures at the start and end of the school day ensure that students are properly supervised and that appropriate information is shared between education and the children's homes. The member of staff responsible for child protection is up to date with their training, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The admission and attendance registers also now contain the required information. The school complies fully with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the checks to confirm the suitability of staff and proprietors are carried out and meet requirements. Evidence of these checks and when they were made are clearly recorded in the school's single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The standard of the premises and accommodation is good. The buildings provide a pleasant and effective safe learning environment with comfortable recreational and social areas. The school also makes appropriate arrangements for students to use specialist sports facilities.

Provision of information

All of the required information is provided, or made available, to parents, carers, local authorities and others. Good daily communication exists between the school and the students' home with regular comprehensive reviews. Good quality contact is also maintained with the placing authority, parents, carers and social workers through the well-attended open days. The school also provides detailed written reports for the reviews of students, their care plans and statements of special educational needs.

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').

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 marking enables students, parents and carers to know what National Curriculum or course levels students are working at
- improve the quality and use of assessment of students' achievements through home learning
- ensure that all staff support and enforce the school's 'Healthy Living' policy.

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	2006		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Girls		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 11	Total: 11
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 4	Total: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 11	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,250		
Headteacher	Mrs L Sharpe		
Proprietor	Ms J Gould		

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.



8 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of your school

I came to your school in December to see how well you were learning and how well adults help you. I watched you in your lessons and listened to you talking about your work. Thank you for being so polite and helpful to me when I made my visit. This letter is to tell you what I found out.

You go to a good school and all aspects of it are good. The curriculum is designed to make sure that you have good opportunities to do GCSEs and vocational qualifications. It is adapted to suit your interests, needs and appropriate requests. Because of your good behaviour, determination to work hard and good teaching you are making good progress. You also learn to know the consequences of your actions and how to think about and care for others.

You work with caring, thoughtful adults who are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be. In order to help the school improve further I have suggested that staff make it clearer in their marking what level you are working at, that your achievements in home learning are recorded and these records are used to help teachers decide what to teach you. I have also asked teachers to stop you eating too many unhealthy snacks and drinks when in school.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best.

My very best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector