

Young Options College

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI

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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

Young Options College is a small independent purpose built day school for students aged nine to eighteen years. It is situated on a large campus in a semi-rural environment just outside Shifnal in Shropshire. The school moved to its current site in 2006. It is registered to provide comprehensive care, education and therapy services for up to 50 students who may be looked after and who have complex and severe behavioural, psychological and psychiatric difficulties. Students are admitted from a large number of local authorities across the United Kingdom. Currently there are 37 secondary-aged students on roll, 33 of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Three quarters live in residential provision within the wider Young Options organisation. The school aims to, 'equip students with the necessary skills and support to develop holistically, through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum and community based provision'. It was previously inspected in 2008.

Evaluation of the school

There have been clear improvements since the previous inspection, particularly in provision. Consequently, Young Options provides an outstanding education for its students and it continues to meet its stated aims exceptionally well. The school's curriculum is outstanding, teaching and assessment are good, and as result, students make good and often exceptional progress, particularly in their social and emotional development. The provision for students' welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding is outstanding. All of the regulatory requirements for independent schools are met.

Quality of education

The outstanding curriculum plays a significant part in securing students' excellent academic, social and emotional progress, given their original starting points. English and mathematics are given high priority in the academic curriculum. Science and information and communication technology (ICT) are also important features of the curriculum, with ICT frequently being used to support teaching and learning in other lessons as well as being taught separately. Exceptionally well-focused personal, social and health education (PSHE) underpins all of the teaching activities, and is taught separately almost every day in different ways. Highly effective vocational

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

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

programmes, such as motor vehicle maintenance, food technology, forest school activities and horticulture engage and interest students particularly well. Such subjects are important strengths, motivating students, so that many gain qualifications in these subject areas. Importantly, these courses raise students' aspirations with regard to future training and employment. Students are very well-prepared for leaving school and most progress successfully to courses of further study or employment. Consequently, during the previous two years, no school leavers have been identified as not being in education, employment or training. Extra-curricular provision is good, particularly for music, sport, team-building and outdoor adventurous activities. There are plenty of opportunities for students to visit places of local and national interest and to engage with the local community. However, there are fewer opportunities to receive visitors from different walks of life, to widen students' perspective on life in a culturally diverse society.

Teaching and assessment are good overall and improving. They are improving because senior leaders are prepared to challenge robustly the ways of working in the school and systematically monitor the quality of teaching and assessment practices. There is a clear framework in place to assess not only students' attainment at different points in their school life but also their personal, social and emotional development. This information is used effectively to ensure that support is well-targeted and no student falls behind in their learning. The school's current work to develop an electronic system to track the progress of each student is a sensible initiative.

Most lessons are typified by excellent relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth. Almost all staff use 'hands-on activities' well to support students' learning and they often inject a sense of fun into lessons. These features were exemplified particularly well in a Year 10 and 11 food technology lesson, on how to make short crust pastry. The students were highly engaged and worked in a mature and independent manner. Students were able to respond creatively to the practical nature of the task; they clearly enjoyed the activity, found it interesting and fun, and understood what it was they were learning. Students forge ahead in such lessons and make good and often excellent progress, because the work is challenging and the pace is brisk. Most teachers use questioning skills well to assess students' understanding, but they sometimes miss opportunities to extend this questioning further in order to challenge students' fully and extend their learning. Where teaching is comparatively less successful, for example in science, the small steps in learning are not always sequenced well enough and there are inconsistencies in planning and assessment resulting in work not always being matched closely enough to students' needs. Consequently, students struggle to understand what is required and the pace of the lesson slows. Marking of students' work is inconsistent. At its best, it provides students with an accurate assessment of their work. However, in some classes and subjects it is not sufficiently developmental. Therefore, opportunities for students to respond to feedback and marking are sometimes restricted so students do not always know what they need to do to improve their learning. Consequently, the quality of students' work, particularly presentation and handwriting deteriorates.

At whatever point that they join the school students' attainment is exceptionally low. Generally, students' behavioural and learning difficulties have resulted in a very uneven pattern of school attendance and learning prior to admission. Sustained and highly successful efforts to reduce the barriers to learning enable students to make excellent progress in developing their confidence and self-esteem and in securing significant improvements in their personal development and well-being. Staff know each student's individual needs exceptionally well and draw on a range of expertise, both from within the school, and from other agencies, to ensure that students' specific needs are met effectively. Consequently, all students, including those with the most complex needs make good and often outstanding progress from their varied starting points as shown by their GCSE results and other accreditations.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is based on the high expectations established by staff and the role models they present. Staff are exceptionally adept at encouraging students to reflect on their own feelings and they help them appreciate that we are all different. All students gain substantially from this approach. Behaviour is good with many students showing great improvement from when they enter the school. Students understand and are motivated by the reward system which they perceive as fair. They understand the link between their behaviour and gaining privileges. Staff spend a great deal of time listening to students, giving them advice and promoting their well-being very effectively. They help students to overcome any difficulties that they have in their lives and ensure good levels of attendance. Staff work extremely well with other professionals to provide tailor-made advice and support to meet individuals' specific needs. The school provides a strong emphasis on developing students' social skills through a very well-developed programme of activities relating to citizenship. Students make a good contribution to the life of the school, for example by taking responsibility for the school's vegetable garden and animals. Links with the local community are very well established with students supplying fresh produce to local shops as well as hand-crafted bird tables, dog kennels and rabbit hutches made during their vocational studies.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for welfare, health and safety of students is considered carefully and is outstanding across all phases of the school. Students flourish, because they are happy and are kept safe and secure. The school has succeeded in creating a community with a shared ethos in which individual students, including those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, feel safe, cared for and valued. The school's anti-bullying and behaviour policies are of high quality and are effectively implemented. Students were unequivocal in stating they are not bullied and if they have a concern it is dealt with effectively. Nonetheless, there are occasions when students use inappropriate or offensive terminology when talking to each other and staff do not always challenge the use of language quickly enough, for example, the term 'gay' is used as a pejorative term to mean stupid or to lack credibility.

Excellent relationships between staff and students contribute well to the sense of security and belonging which the students experience. There are very effective systems for risk assessing educational visits and the recording of accidents and incidents. There are, however, some elements of the school's procedures in this area that lack consistency such as checking the contents of the first-aid boxes and making sure that contents are up to date. Excellent attention is paid to teaching students about healthy living. This is supported by the increased opportunities for physical education and sporting activities, and the school's strong message about healthy eating. Students enjoy growing their own vegetables and eating these as part of their school lunches. The school's policy and procedures for child protection are highly effective and all members of staff have been trained to the required standard. Regular fire drills are carried out, and the inspection and testing of the fire alarm and emergency lighting are done within agreed timescales. A range of relevant policies has been implemented including reference to the new Equality Act 2010. A suitable plan is in place to address a range of disability, and access issues.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Employment and staff vetting procedures meet requirements. The single central register contains all of the required information. The school has effective procedures in place for the safe recruitment of staff.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is located in a building that is owned by the Young Options organisation. In addition to school accommodation, the building houses offices for Young Options administrative and fostering services. The school has been purpose built and provides excellent internal teaching and recreation areas. Specialist rooms for subjects and vocational courses are much improved and now fully meet the regulations.

Provision of information

The school has established strong links with parents, carers and outside agencies. Parents and carers are kept well informed through regular review meetings and comprehensive end of year reports. These reports are a helpful summary of each student's progress and attainment in the key areas of learning. The prospectus has been recently updated and all of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents and others.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which 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').

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 all teaching is outstanding by ensuring that the school's lesson planning and assessment strategies are consistently applied.
- Ensure that all students know what they need to do to improve their work particularly those capable of reaching the highest levels.
- Ensure that the quality of teachers' marking is completed regularly and is of the highest quality.

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	Primary and Secondary		
Date school opened	25 January 2001		
Age range of pupils	9–18 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 24	Girls: 13	Total: 37
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 23	Girls: 10	Total: 33
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 19	Girls: 8	Total: 27
Annual fees (day pupils)	£83,428.57		
Address of school	Lamledge Lane Shifnal TF11 8SD		
Telephone number	01952 468220		
Email address	school@youngoptions.co.uk		
Headteacher	Louise De-Hayes		
Proprietor	Young Options Group		

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.

9 December 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Young Options College, Shifnal, TF11 8SD

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed seeing you work so hard in lessons. You showed me how much you enjoy your school and how pleased you are with how well you are doing, particularly in how well you are learning to manage your own behaviour. You are right to be pleased, because it is an outstanding school. Here are some of the highlights.

- You really enjoy school and make good and very often outstanding progress in your learning.
- You behave well in class and you work hard to reduce the times you have time out of lessons.
- You have an interesting and exciting curriculum. I especially enjoyed finding out about your mini enterprise activities and your work-related learning, particularly your new art project.
- Your teachers are doing a good job. They plan interesting lessons and involve you in your own learning as much as possible.
- You understand very well how to stay safe and all staff take excellent care of you.

There are some things the school could do better and I have asked the headteacher to consider making some improvements by making sure that:

- all teaching is outstanding by ensuring that the school's lesson planning and assessment strategies are consistently applied
- all students know what they need to do to improve their work, particularly those capable of reaching the highest levels
- the quality of teacher's marking is completed regularly and is of the highest quality.

You can help by responding to your teachers ensuring that you tell them if you do not understand anything.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

