

Whinfell School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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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

Whinfell is a small school and children's home that provides education and care for up to 16 boys aged from 11 to 19 years. There are currently ten boys on roll and all have a statement of special educational needs. All are boarders. Eight are cared for by the local authorities that place them here. The boys have complex needs associated with autistic spectrum conditions and additional complex needs related to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The students have all experienced significant disruption to their schooling in the past. The school opened in 2003 and its last education inspection was in 2008. The most recent inspection of care provision took place in November 2011; care provision was not inspected on this occasion.

Whinfell aims to deliver educational, communication and structured daily living experiences that have been carefully moulded to suit the unique special needs of young people with autistic spectrum conditions. It promotes structured teaching through a therapeutic provision and an interdisciplinary approach. The school aims to provide individual programmes of learning for all students. It is currently working towards becoming fully accredited by the National Autistic Society.

Evaluation of the school

Whinfell provides an outstanding quality of education. It is outstanding in every respect and greatly valued by students, parents and carers and the placing local authorities. Whinfell fully meets its aims and complies with all regulations. It has greatly improved since the last inspection and the outstanding curriculum and quality of teaching along with the therapeutic input of staff helps students to reach their potential and make outstanding progress. Excellent relationships between staff and students support their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour. Arrangements for safeguarding and the provision for students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding.

Quality of education

The outstanding curriculum provides many routes for students to follow and covers all required areas of learning. GCSE courses are available and other accreditations

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

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

can be gained, for example in food studies. Younger students and those of lower ability access the Unit Award Scheme and gain Entry Level certificates. Some study in local colleges. Lessons have been arranged to meet the specific interests of students, such as courses in electronics. Many students have gaps in their learning but teachers skilfully add an increased focus on relevant curriculum areas to enable students to gain the missing knowledge and skills. The emphasis on developing communication skills, together with excellent therapeutic approaches helps students develop in all areas of learning. A 'person-centred development' course provides personal, social and health education through addressing the barriers to learning created by autism. This is instrumental in helping students develop their study skills. The curriculum is highly personalised for each student and staff successfully find the best ways of improving students' skills in literacy and numeracy according to their identified needs. Lessons are adjusted at short notice, if required, to take account of the degree of students' difficulties at any particular moment. The rapid developments in their communication skills enable students to successfully involve themselves in other areas of learning such as humanities and the arts. As a result, most make excellent progress in subjects where previously they might have demonstrated little interest.

Additional activities in and out of school hours complement the curriculum. All students undertake outdoor education. A variety of recreational activities is provided including fishing and golf. The recent social care inspection noted the high quality of the waking day curriculum, highlighting the way it provides support for students' learning in school.

Teaching and assessment is outstanding because teachers know students very well and utilise skilful therapeutic approaches to get the best from them. Teachers plan their lessons in great detail and provide very small steps of learning so that students can experience success in the early stages of their education at Whinfell. Later, teachers challenge students, where possible, with higher levels of thinking. For example, in a science lesson students related the abstract theory of atomic particles to the investigative work being undertaken with chemicals. Teachers have a quiet demeanour and provide 'autistic friendly' classrooms with low levels of noise and colour that would otherwise distract these students. Consequently, students relax into learning, tolerating periods of study that enable them to get the best from their lessons. Additional adults provide excellent support, often skilfully calming difficult situations when students demonstrate impatience with tasks because of their disabilities. Teachers make very good use of assessments to show that students make progress in their subjects. They provide records of achievement to demonstrate this. Tasks are extremely well matched to levels of ability and resources are well utilised so that students have every opportunity to succeed. Short- and long-term targets are set for students to challenge them. In lessons, students have a clear understanding of the progress they are expected to make. They contribute very well during lessons despite their communication difficulties, rapidly gaining confidence and engaging with learning, sometimes for the first time in their lives.

Students enjoy school. Records of students' work indicate that, from very low starting points on joining the school, they make outstanding progress, particularly in writing. This is confirmed by the observation of lessons. All gain accreditation and qualifications. Reading skills also improve well but a coherent scheme is not used in the school to aid the systematic development of skills in reading.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Whinfell equips them well for life in developing their self-confidence and self-esteem. It helps them to become successful in building relationships and progressing in their education. During the inspection a small number of students performed live music to the whole school. This was a remarkable achievement because, until very recently, most would have found this an almost impossible feat because of their communication and social difficulties. Similarly, the students in the audience demonstrated their appreciation of their peers' efforts, again using newly acquired social skills.

Students attend school regularly and arrive punctually. They welcome visitors and learn to be tolerant of differences so that their behaviour is outstanding. The school places great emphasis on gaining social skills. Successes are evident in students' attendance at daily gatherings and assemblies where they learn to praise each other's achievements. They form strong relationships with each other and with staff. They also support each other well during lessons and in extra-curricular activities such as by assisting each other to answer questions or complete tasks. Their growing mutual respect helps them to understand the needs of others and they begin to learn about right and wrong and the consequences of their actions. A great many trips and visits are devised so that students can observe and experience the wider world. Regular visitors to school include a local vicar and a probation officer. Through visits, such as to a local fire station, they learn more about English public institutions and services and come to respect the way that others work and live. These activities are further reinforced by additional activities such as outdoor education. Through gaining greater control of their behaviour and getting on with new people they meet, some are able to take part in college courses and undertake work experience placements. One parent very appropriately reported that, 'My son was lost until he started here. He now has a chance for a successful future.'

Relationships with neighbours and others in the wider community are good. For example, Whinfell makes good use of a hydrotherapy pool in another school. The extensive curriculum helps students gain an understanding of cultural issues of race and religion. Their maturity in handling some difficult ideas was evident during an assembly when they discussed these very sensibly with a visiting member of the clergy.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The arrangements for the students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. The safeguarding and child protection procedures for students are first class with high

quality policies and systems that go beyond those required by the regulations and national guidance. For example, all staff are trained to a higher level in safeguarding. There is clear safeguarding guidance for staff which is well understood so that all know what to do if any concerns relating to child protection arise. Students know who to go to if they have any concerns. The management of students' behaviour by staff is highly consistent in respect of rewards and sanctions. More importantly, the therapeutic approach adopted reduces the number of behavioural incidents with students and thus the need for active interventions by staff. School records rigorously track and record patterns of student behaviour. Students are very well cared for with a well-managed consistency between the care and education staff. High levels of stable staffing ensure students are well supervised and kept very safe.

Policies relating to health and safety meet requirements and are regularly reviewed. Risk assessments are thorough and up to date. Fire drills and evacuations of the building are rehearsed regularly and fire-fighting equipment is checked and maintained by a contractor. Students report, where they can, that they feel safe and this is reinforced by feedback from parents and carers. In lessons, students learn how to keep themselves safe and how to reduce risks when they are out and about. They keep themselves healthy by taking advantage of the extensive arrangements for physical exercise and by eating meals that are designed to provide healthy options. The school has produced a suitable plan to increase accessibility in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has thorough procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and others. All of the required checks on the suitability of the directors and staff have been suitably completed. The single central register of these checks is accurate and meets requirements.

Premises and accommodation at the school

Since the last inspection the school has incorporated the other half of its semi-detached building next door to its premises so that the school is now in one detached building. Two new classrooms, two lounges, a kitchen area, offices, toilets and storerooms have been established on the ground floor. The grounds have been extended and now include a large outside classroom. All of these new facilities are eminently suitable for use as school premises and have significantly improved the accommodation.

The school accommodation is of a very good quality and is maintained and decorated to a high standard. Teaching areas provide for practical work in science and food technology. Smaller, quiet spaces are available for individual work and private study. All rooms are suitable for students with autistic spectrum conditions as attention has been given to ensuring that the environment encourages low noise levels. Outside there is a garden classroom and space for recreation with good use made of open areas nearby.

Provision of information

The school brochure, supported by a website, provides the required information about the aims and organisation of the school for parents, carers and others. Reports are provided to parents and carers about the academic progress and personal development of their children through the annual review of each student's statement and by more regular academic reports. Where appropriate, the school makes every effort to maintain close contact with families while students are in residence. An annual account of income received and expenditure incurred is provided to each placing authority.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints policy meets all of the regulations.

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 point for development:

- develop and implement a whole-school reading policy using the latest government guidance to improve students' reading 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 school for students with autistic spectrum conditions		
Date school opened	April 2003		
Age range of pupils	11-19 years		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 0	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: 10	Girls: 0	Total: 10
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Annual fees (52 week pupils)	£198,000		
Email address	mail@whinfellschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Richard Tyson		
Proprietor	Whinfell School Limited		

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.



19 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Whinfell School

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited Whinfell recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you and observing your lessons and other activities. I was particularly impressed with the way that you look after each other and get on with the staff.

These are the main things that I discovered about the school.

- You receive an outstanding education at Whinfell.
- Teachers and other staff work very hard to provide you with excellent lessons and an outstanding curriculum.
- You successfully gain qualifications that will be helpful when you move on to the next stage of your lives.
- You enjoy coming to school, behave very well indeed and make outstanding progress in your education and personal development.
- The school keeps you safe and you feel very secure here. The welfare arrangements are first class.
- Your parents and carers, and the local authorities that place you here hold the school in very high regard.

The school meets all regulations but I think you would benefit from having a scheme in place that all of the staff can use to help you improve your reading skills even further. Once again, thank you for your interest in the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Terry McKenzie
Lead inspector