

The Continuum School, Wisbech

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	873/6033
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134179
Inspection number	388413
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090070.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

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

No. 090070

© Crown copyright 2012



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 Continuum School (Wisbech) is an independent day school for students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Over half of all students live in foster homes or children's homes. Students are admitted at any time during the academic year and vary widely in their academic abilities. All have been excluded from or are unable to attend mainstream education. The school opened under its current name in September 2008, after moving from its previous site, and became part of the Continuum Care and Education Group. It was last inspected in January 2009 and, as a result of two recent material change visits, it is now registered for up to 40 students aged from nine to 17 years, educated on two sites. Currently there are 29 students between 14 and 17 years of age on roll, 26 of whom have a statement of special educational needs and 15 are in the care of local authorities. Some students have additional needs, for example hearing impairment and language delay. Students are taught in the main school, housed in a Grade I listed building located in the centre of Wisbech, and in a vocational centre situated nearby.

The school aims to equip all young people to contribute to society by developing their social maturity, academic excellence, moral values and respect for the community.

Evaluation of the school

The Continuum School (Wisbech) provides a good quality of education and meets its aims. Parents, carers and placing authorities express a high level of satisfaction with the school. With the opening of the vocational centre, the curriculum has significantly widened, successfully re-engages students in education and serves the needs of all students well. Good teaching and strong pastoral care help students to make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, in their behaviour and in a wide range of skills that prepare them well for their future. Robust safeguarding arrangements contribute to making good provision for students' welfare, health and safety. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and now meets all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

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

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

The curriculum is good. In Key Stage 2, the breadth of the curriculum encompasses all the National Curriculum subjects with good balance between the various areas of learning. From Key Stage 3 to post-16, a personalised foundation learning programme enables students to progress through bite-size learning. As their confidence grows, students move from Level 1 to 3 of the national qualifications framework and choose a combination of pathways including foundation and higher diplomas, GCSE courses and work-related certification. The particular strengths of the personalised curriculum are its flexibility, breadth and relevance to students' specific needs. For most students, it is constructed around English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT), along with humanities and food technology, with the rest of the timetable tailor-made to reflect students' individual interests and needs. A few students follow a work-related programme with functional skills. The provision of a dedicated vocational centre, allied to close partnerships with local agencies, considerably widens the options of students who focus on work-related learning. For example, while the workshop space at the vocational centre enables students to develop skills in construction and mechanics, the use of local cricket grounds and a plot of land enables them to develop the skills required for land-based work.

Each student's learning is supported very effectively by detailed educational plans that are based on schemes of work and take into account the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs, where applicable, together with the information contained in students' care plans. The provision for basic, key and functional skills is good throughout the school. However, students' literacy skills are not promoted consistently well in all subjects. Students' physical skills are developed well through a wide range of physical activities throughout the school. The provision for the creative areas of learning is satisfactory and the school recognises that this is an area for further development. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is central to the school's work to support students' personal development. The programme of careers education appropriately meets students' needs and good transition arrangements help them to move on to their next stage of learning. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of educational visits and students' physical and social skills, and team work, are enhanced well by weekly activities that include canoeing, climbing, archery and mountain biking.

Teaching and assessment are good. Teaching groups are small and teachers know their students well. Teachers show a high level of commitment and care, and this is noted by parents, carers and placing authorities. They prepare lessons meticulously and have high expectations of students' organisation and work. They demonstrate good knowledge of the subjects they teach. Lesson planning is thorough and informed by details provided in students' individual educational plans. Consequently, teachers plan tasks that match individual students' needs and preferred learning styles closely. However, occasionally students' individual educational plans do not express literacy and numeracy targets in specific and measurable terms, and so teachers are not sufficiently well guided to promote these skills consistently. Students are challenged well through open-ended questioning, interesting tasks and methods that engage them actively in learning. Very effective use of drama

techniques such as role play and hot seating develops students' communication skills well. Teachers frequently check on students' learning and give them good support where needed. Teaching assistants and teachers generally work closely together to manage students' behaviour well and maintain an orderly atmosphere. Students gain a growing understanding of how to improve their work through constructive feedback, helpful marking and learning targets. However, the learning targets are not always sufficiently precise to give students a clear picture of what to do next to improve. Where the teaching is outstanding, lessons are conducted at a fast pace, ICT and other resources are used very effectively to move on students' learning and students are thoroughly involved in the assessment of their learning. In such cases, they make exceptional progress. Occasionally, teaching is satisfactory when the available resources are not used effectively and the teaching assistant is not sufficiently well briefed to support students' learning consistently. The school has improved its assessment framework since the last inspection and has good systems to monitor students' progress rigorously in their learning and personal development.

As a result of a good curriculum and good teaching, students make good progress in their learning in relation to their starting points, including students who have a statement of special educational needs. They develop a wide range of skills that prepares them well for their future.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, which supports their personal development well. The staff work closely together to create a welcoming environment within clear boundaries in which students feel secure. Students learn to understand their emotions and to develop self-knowledge through the PSHE programme. They have many opportunities to reflect on the impact of their actions on others and on the best strategies to manage their emotions as a result of PSHE lessons and one-to-one restorative sessions. The staff are very attentive to students' emotional state and encourage them to talk about what upsets or worries them to defuse potentially volatile situations. Students' moral development is reflected in their strong sense of right and wrong even though some students push the boundaries. Students' behaviour is good overall and contributes to an orderly atmosphere in lessons. Most behave very well in and out of lessons. A few students, who struggle to achieve high levels of self-control and have occasional outbursts, make positive progress in managing their anger or frustration. Students' self-esteem and self-confidence is raised through feedback from teachers, celebration assemblies and drama lessons. Participation in a wide range of physical activities and outdoor pursuits promotes their well-being very effectively.

Students' social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum and through the good role models presented by the staff. Students form positive relationships with staff and peers of diverse heritages. They learn to respect the fact that different people may hold diverse beliefs. When learning about the Holocaust, they were taught to challenge assumptions and prejudice by discussing photographic evidence that lent itself to several interpretations. Through the active student

council, they contribute to improving their education and their school life. For example, they have requested that all teachers follow best practice models to begin and end lessons, which demonstrates good attitudes to learning. They contribute to the wider community through a wide range of activities. They maintain the grounds of the local cricket club as part of their vocational learning. They participate in local initiatives such as 'the Kids are Alright Awards' to challenge public perception of young people in Fenland. They organised a sponsored walk to support a young local girl who needed treatment abroad. Students are good ambassadors for the school, as noted in very positive feedback from the local community. Students develop a good awareness of British institutions through the citizenship programme, the student council and through educational visits. Although their cultural development is fostered well through the curriculum and enrichment activities, their first hand creative experiences are limited. Understandably, most students enjoy school and some attend regularly. Where students have a history of poor or non attendance, their willingness to attend lessons has improved significantly but remains low.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for students' welfare, health and safety and students feel safe and well cared for. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and staff are trained in child protection at appropriate levels and frequent intervals. Checks on staff and volunteers have regard to the latest guidance. All the required policies and procedures including those for child protection, behaviour, anti-bullying, first aid and health and safety are up to date, detailed and implemented rigorously. Students' behaviour is managed well and monitored closely through daily staff meetings and close liaison with parents and carers. Students' attendance is monitored robustly and there are 'catch up' sessions for students who miss lessons. Risks are assessed and minimised thoroughly before any outing and activity. All staff and students have first aid training. Staff are deployed very effectively to safeguard students throughout the day. Students trust the staff to deal with any issues very effectively. While most fire safety requirements are met, in the last academic year, the school carried out two emergency evacuation drills only instead of three. An up-to-date accessibility plan shows how the school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Students develop an awareness of healthy lifestyles through the curriculum and through their participation in sports activities.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Robust recruitment procedures ensure that all the checks are carried out on proprietors and staff in a timely manner to ascertain their suitability to work with children and meticulously recorded in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises on both sites provide a bright and welcoming atmosphere in which students feel secure and teaching accommodation that enables safe and effective

learning. The school makes very effective use of local facilities for sports and some vocational programmes.

Provision of information

Parents, carers, placing authorities and others receive up-to-date, clear and accurate information. All parties concerned say they are well informed of students' progress. The school submits all the required information to funding authorities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedures meet all requirements for handling complaints fairly and promptly.

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 students' literacy skills are developed consistently in all subjects
- further develop the provision for creative learning
- help students to gain a clearer picture of what to do to improve by ensuring that learning targets are always sufficiently clear, specific and measurable.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

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		✓		
--	--	---	--	--

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties		
Date school opened	September 2008		
Age range of pupils	9–17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 8	Total: 29
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 20	Girls: 6	Total: 26
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 12	Girls: 3	Total: 15
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,950		
Address of school	Sessions House, 32 Somers Road, Wisbech, PE13 1JF		
Telephone number	01945 427276		
Email address	mick.coleman@continuumgroup.org.uk		
Headteacher	Michael Coleman		
Proprietor	Robert Hall		

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.



23 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Continuum School, Wisbech, PE13 1JF

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly when I visited your school recently. I greatly enjoyed meeting you, seeing you learn and talking to you. You told me that you are happy at the school and that the staff care about you. You feel that the school helps you to gain self-confidence and self-esteem and to develop the skills you need for your future. I agree with you.

You go to a good school where adults look after you well and work hard to help you to learn things that interest you. You make good progress in your personal development, particularly in managing your emotions and your behaviour, which prepares you well to face future challenges. I was really impressed by the contributions you make to school life and to the wider community. Your attendance levels have improved. You get on very well with each other. You feel safe and understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and taking exercise. You make good progress in gaining the knowledge and skills which will help you to move on to the next stage of your education. In order to make your school even better, I have asked the school to:

- ensure that your literacy skills are developed consistently in all subjects
- widen your opportunities for creative work
- help you to gain a clearer picture of what to do to improve by ensuring that learning targets are always sufficiently clear, specific and measurable.

You will help your teachers to achieve this if you strive to attend regularly, continue to work hard and maintain the highest standards of behaviour.

Yours sincerely

Michèle Messaoudi
Lead inspector