

Highcroft School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster 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

Highcroft School is a small independent special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is registered for 12 girls and boys aged from 11 to 16 years. There are currently five girls on roll aged from 13 to 15 years. Pupils are referred by the local authority or by individual schools. Two pupils have a statement of special educational needs and all five are in the care of a local authority. The school is part of Keys Childcare, which is a national provider of special education and residential accommodation.

The school's mission statement states that the school aims to 'establish a culture that promotes excellence, equality and high achievement for all by striving for unconditional regard for everyone'. Through small class sizes and a high staff-to-pupil ratio, it aims to allow young people with complex problems who have failed in the mainstream school setting to achieve their potential and succeed both academically and socially. Particular emphasis is therefore put on fostering pupils' social and inter-personal skills, as well as encouraging them to develop a positive attitude towards study. The school opened in March 2011 and this is its first inspection.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education and meets its aims. The curriculum, teaching and assessment are good and this enables pupils to make good progress in their learning. The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good, including the arrangements for safeguarding which are rigorous. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are good and this does much to promote pupils' confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. The school meets all of the regulations for continued registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and covers the National Curriculum programmes of study and all required areas of learning. There are effective long-term, medium-term and short-term plans in place for these

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

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

subjects and they are adapted to meet the specific needs of each pupil. Pupils are given the opportunity to achieve Entry Level Certificates and some are following courses leading to GCSE qualifications. The curriculum also incorporates work on the Prince's Trust programme and provides good opportunities for outdoor education. Pupils participate in a wide range of activities which help them to develop effective team-building and social skills including walking, personal fitness training, outdoor survival, field cooking, abseiling, climbing and developing navigation skills. These activities take place in a range of local venues, such as in Teesdale or Hamsterley Forest. Pupils say they particularly enjoy their work in art and design and they have produced some good work including in textiles, clay work, digital photography and making jewellery and masks. There is a good range of educational visits, for example to museums to promote learning in history and to the coast to study geographical features. There is regular contact with pupils from the other settings in the Keys Group and a number of joint activities take place, such as Open Days when pupils' learning is celebrated. Personal, social, health (PSHE) and citizenship education is taught in discrete lessons as well as throughout the curriculum and the Prince's Trust programme and this does much to promote pupils' good personal development. Careers education is provided on post-16 options and the school has effective links with the Connexions service. Pupils enjoy a range of activities such as horse riding, dancing, swimming, cheer leading and attending army cadets.

Teaching and assessment are good, enabling pupils to make good progress. Staff have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to ensure the needs of individual pupils are met. They have a particularly good understanding of the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and ensure these pupils have challenging but realistic targets which they can achieve. Staff work hard to engage pupils who are sometimes reluctant to participate in learning and are sensitive to the changing moods of pupils. Teachers ensure they adapt their teaching to keep pupils interested and engaged. Teachers know pupils well and there are very good relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers promote pupils' speaking and listening skills well by encouraging them to participate in a range of activities such as when one pupil read out their description of a 'Superhero' and a partner had to draw the 'Superhero' based on these details. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to promote pupils' learning, particularly when they are able to carry out their own research. Staff make good use of practical activities to support learning, for example, during a mathematics lesson they went to the nearby recreation area to measure the speed at which a football was kicked across the field. Pupils are ambitious and most have high expectations of themselves and what they can achieve. More-able pupils are challenged effectively to ensure they reach their full potential.

The quality of assessment is good. Regular assessments are carried out and recorded in pupils' individual files so that their progress can be traced. However, there is not an overall tracking system which readily identifies how much progress the pupil group has made over time from their individual starting points. Marking and feedback are effective and pupils have a good understanding of how to improve their work. At the end of each lesson, teachers evaluate how well each pupil has learned

and identify in their planning the 'next steps' in learning, including further challenge or support. The evidence seen in lessons, in pupils' work and in their individual record files shows that they are making good progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' understanding of faiths and cultures other than their own is promoted well through aspects of the curriculum such as religious education, PSHE and citizenship and through food technology, where pupils prepare foods from different countries. They celebrate different festivals and religions through particular 'topic based' weeks, such as those with a focus on Chinese New Year or to celebrate Eid. Pupils have also participated in a 'Show Racism the red card' project. However, opportunities are missed at the beginning and end of the school day for pupils to develop aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as the tutorial sessions are not always used as purposefully as they could be and pupils are sometimes late. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and their attendance is high, despite most pupils having experienced a disrupted education previously. Most pupils are keen to learn and are ambitious, knowing what future careers they wish to pursue and are aware of the qualifications they will need to achieve their ambition. They participate in activities to support their ambitions, for example, attending army cadets for one pupil who wishes to join the army and dancing lessons for another pupil who wishes to pursue a career in the performing arts. They are developing their social skills well through participating in joint activities with pupils from other schools in the Keys Group. Pupils learn about public institutions and services in England through PSHE and citizenship lessons. For example, they were learning about members of the government, local elections and which countries belong to the European Union in a lesson seen during the inspection.

Pupils' behaviour is good overall. Pupils respond well to rewards and achievement assemblies each week and value the certificates they receive. Pupils' behaviour is improving and staff manage behaviour effectively, remaining calm and setting clear expectations for pupils. Pupils are able to work and concentrate well for extended periods of time although occasionally there are disagreements between pupils which are quickly diffused by staff. There have been some incidents of bullying but these have been appropriately dealt with by staff and pupils say they can talk to staff and receive help when they need it. Pupils make a positive contribution to the community, for example through growing vegetables in the allotment and sharing them with local residents and through participating in an extended walk to raise money for charity.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. All staff have attended the required safeguarding and child protection training and the headteacher has completed safer recruitment training. All the required policies and procedures, including those for anti-bullying, child protection, health and safety and first aid are

in place and have regard to national guidance. Thorough risk assessments are carried out, including for educational visits and outdoor education activities. Fire safety requirements are met, fire plans are in place and regular fire drills and checks on equipment are carried out. Pupils are closely supervised in school and on school visits. Pupils greatly appreciate the positive behaviour management strategies employed, including the presentation of certificates for good behaviour each week. Pupils say teaching staff are approachable and care for them very well. There are good opportunities to participate in sports and other physical activities such as dance and horse riding. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and have healthy snacks and meals throughout the day. Through the curriculum, pupils are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles, for example, through shared sessions with pupils from another school led by staff from the National Health Service. An up-to-date accessibility plan shows how the school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required checks, including criminal records bureau checks, to confirm the suitability of proprietors and staff are carried out and meet requirements. Evidence of these checks and the dates when they were made are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The classrooms and other teaching areas, including an ICT suite and kitchen, are attractive and well-equipped. Pupils have had the opportunity to choose the colours for decoration and are encouraged to keep the classrooms clean and tidy. The outdoor area is small and limits the opportunities for play outdoors, but there is a recreation area very close to the school and this is regularly used for sports and play activities and pupils also attend a local gymnasium.

Provision of information

All of the required information is provided, or made available to parents, carers and others. There is an attractive prospectus and website which provide essential information for parents, carers and others, including placing local authorities. Informative termly reports are provided for parents, carers and others but annual reports are not yet available as these will be completed at the end of the first academic year of operation.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure and policy meet all the requirements. There is a separate leaflet for pupils which can easily be followed.

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:

- develop a whole-school tracking system to show more readily how much progress pupils have made over time from their starting points
- ensure that tutorial sessions at the beginning and end of the school day have a particular purpose, for example, to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development further.

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 pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)		
Date school opened	17 March 2011		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 5	Total: 5
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: 2	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 5	Total: 5
Annual fees (day pupils)	£24,000		
Headteacher	Mr David Laheney		
Proprietor	Mrs Heather Laffin		

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.



4 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highcroft School

Thank you for the welcome I received when I visited your school recently and for talking to me about your views of the school. I enjoyed my visit very much. I would like to tell you what I found out.

Yours is a good school. You told me that you enjoy working with your teachers and that they help you with your learning. You are making good progress with your work because, as you told me, work is given at the right level for each of you. Teaching and assessment are good and teachers plan a range of activities to interest you such as developing your survival and outdoor skills. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and some of you told me you particularly enjoy art and design. I was impressed with the masks that you made. You have opportunities to participate in activities which interest you, such as army cadets or dancing and you are aware that these experiences may help you in your chosen careers. The staff care about you and they work hard to ensure that they help each one of you as best they can to keep you safe and healthy. Your behaviour is mainly good in lessons although sometimes you say you would like other pupils to work more quietly so that you can concentrate better.

All schools need to improve so I have asked that the teachers keep a whole-school overview of how much progress you are making in all subjects from your starting points when you first joined the school. I have also asked that tutorial sessions are used for a particular purpose and it would help greatly if you could ensure that you attend the session first thing in the morning on time, so that time is not wasted and so you have a good start to the day. Thank you for your help. I wish you all much success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector