

# Vranch House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Vranch House School is a small specialist day school in Exeter providing education for pupils with physical difficulties and/or severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Half of the children have a visual impairment. The school is owned and operated by a registered charity directed and managed by a board of trustees. It opened in 1969.

Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and all have a statement of special educational needs. The school is registered for 20 pupils aged 3 to 11 years of age who attend from Exeter and neighbouring towns and villages. There are currently 24 pupils on the school roll, with two children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in a mixed Reception and Key Stage 1 class. Of the pupils on roll, 21 have shared placements at maintained primary schools. The school's extended provision includes medical and therapy support for parents and carers.

The school was last inspected in May 2009. The headteacher took up post in September 2010.

## **Evaluation of the school**

Vranch School provides a good quality of education. The outstanding quality of welfare, health and safety of pupils, including safeguarding, and the outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensure that pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. A good curriculum, supported by good teaching and assessment, results in pupils making good progress in improving academically and in attending school. The school is particularly successful in achieving its aim to ensure almost all pupils receive part of their education in a mainstream school. The school now meets all of the regulations, which is an improvement on the last inspection.

## **Quality of education**

The quality of the curriculum is good. Activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage are planned well to take account of children's different needs. The children make good progress in relation to their different starting points, especially in

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

communication, language and literacy. Children are happy and sociable. The school has made significant improvements to the setting since the last inspection, and it now provides an attractive outdoor learning environment. Children are able to move freely between the indoor and outdoor learning areas.

The curriculum for other pupils follows the National Curriculum. The effective liaison between Vranck House and pupils' maintained schools ensures the curriculum is broad and balanced. It is planned well to ensure an appropriate balance between core education activities and therapy, ensuring pupils' progress in line with the expectations of their individual education plans. The headteacher has introduced several positive changes to the curriculum in a relatively short period of time to meet the needs of pupils who have more complex needs. This includes the integrated activity hours where pupils of different ages come together to receive a targeted curriculum.

A very wide range of therapies ensures that pupils' individual needs are fully met. These include speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and hydrotherapy. The school has used its specialists extremely well to extend provision for the pupils' reintegration into mainstream schools. For example, new sensory resources have been purchased, a sensory garden created in the school grounds and an extensive programme of professional development offered to partner schools to enable pupils to study in mainstream school.

The linking of pupils' therapeutic and educational needs is developing and not yet reflected fully in curricular planning. The headteacher and management team recognise this as a next step and have good plans to strengthen this area of work. The curriculum is enriched by regular outings in the local community, cultural weeks and trips and visits.

All groups of pupils make good progress in their academic learning and outstanding progress in their personal development. The requirements of individual education plans are largely met. This has much to do with the good quality of teaching and assessment. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and are proud of their achievements. A few pupils learn to write simple sentences and to express themselves verbally. Those with more profound needs express their views through gesture and the use of signing, pictures, symbols, touch pads and switches. Pupils' good learning and progress in the classroom are due to the high expectations of staff and the effective use of sensory resources. Good examples were seen during the inspection when musical instruments and objects of reference were used effectively to deepen pupils' awareness and understanding. Teachers and teaching assistants form excellent relationships with pupils. They are very alert to the individual needs of pupils, especially their medical conditions, and adapt tasks flexibly to take account of small changes in concentration. However, teachers are not consistent in setting precise learning goals for each pupil in all lessons, and this results in a few missed opportunities to accelerate learning. This is one of the reasons why academic learning is good rather than outstanding. Classrooms are busy environments where pupils are encouraged to try hard and to overcome difficulties. In the words of one

parent, 'Branch House has helped my child achieve far more than I ever thought possible.'

New systems have recently been put into place for tracking and measuring pupils' academic progress. They are beginning to help teachers fine-tune targets which are even more specific to the individual than the present already good assessments. The new systems measure the small steps of improvement and identify, clearly, next steps. They are beginning to be used with success. Teachers and teaching assistants assess and record pupils' progress during each lesson using a 'response sheet'. Information is then collated at the end of each term to check pupils' overall progress and to set targets for improvement. This new system is working well but is not yet established fully, and the targets are often too many and the evaluations vary in quality between classes.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school's positive ethos is at the heart of pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is very inclusive and ensures all pupils are made to feel welcome and are encouraged to achieve. As a result, given their capabilities, pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community and their behaviour is outstanding. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle well and make a good start to their education. A particular strength of the outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is children's acute awareness of others and their needs. This is borne out in the highly successful partner work and an excellent attitude towards turn taking. Pupils behave exceptionally well, managing their frustrations with maturity that belies their communication and physical difficulties. They develop their self-esteem extremely well through participating in a wide range of stimulating activities. For example, they perform in musical productions with other schools, make contributions in assemblies and take part in numerous trips.

The personal, social, health education programme and the wide range of physical activities and therapies reinforce pupils' self-confidence and understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle. Pupils contribute fully to the life of the school and become more socially aware, for example when they celebrate each other's successes in assembly, take part in the school council or participate in 'Chatterbox' sessions which aid communication with a wider group. They contribute to the community through participation in local events and by raising funds for charities. Pupils' attendance is high when compared with similar schools, although there is some unavoidable absence due to the nature of pupils' medical needs.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The strong team of teachers, support assistants and therapists, working in close partnership with parents, carers and schools, underpins the pupils' outstanding welfare, health and safety. Parents and carers value the school's training sessions and the access to therapists which help to extend their knowledge of how to meet their children's needs. A full range of policies focusing on the different learning

difficulties ensures that pupils' intimate care needs are met sensitively. Pupils are clearly at ease in the school and respond positively to the respect shown by staff. Attendance is monitored carefully and, when pupils with medical needs require treatment, very good support is given to minimise disruption to their education.

All staff have undertaken the required child protection training to ensure pupils are safe and are well cared for. Supervision is excellent, thus ensuring the safety of pupils in school and when undertaking visits off site. Appropriate safer recruitment procedures are in place as are the policies for fire and first aid, health and safety, behaviour and anti-bullying. Procedures are implemented effectively as are risk assessments. Pupils indicate that they are free from harassment and are well cared for. Parents and carers agree. This was summed up in the words of a pupil. 'I couldn't ask for a better caring bunch of people to look after me. I love school and are close to all the people in it.'

### **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

All the required safeguarding checks on staff are made, including Criminal Records Bureau checks. All are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

### **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is spacious, well lit with a mix of natural and artificial lighting suited to the needs of those with visual impairment. Corridors and rooms are uncluttered allowing for easy and safe access for wheelchair users to a range of specialist rooms. The whole school is well decorated with pupils' work from across the full range of experiences offered. The work celebrates individual endeavour and is displayed in a purposeful manner. Since the last inspection, the school has made several improvements to the accommodation, including the provision of an outdoor sensory nature trail that is fully accessible for all through its unique independent mobility system. Markers for visually impaired children include water features, spray, musical instruments and scented plants.

### **Provision of information**

The school provides, or makes available, all of the required information for parents, carers, local authorities and others. An accessible website and a hard copy of the prospectus and the pack for parents provide a clear picture of the school's work. A few parents and carers returned the pre-inspection questionnaire. They were overwhelmingly positive about the educational provision, outcomes and welfare of pupils at the school.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's complaints policy and procedures fully meet the 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:

- improve consistency in teaching and learning by refining the learning goals in all lessons so that they are always matched precisely to the needs of the pupils
- build on the already good assessment procedures and implement the new assessment systems consistently in classes across the school so that academic progress can be tracked more precisely
- improve the curriculum by implementing plans to link more closely the learning and therapeutic aspects of pupils' education.

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special Day		
<b>Date school opened</b>	1969		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 –11 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 1	Girls: 2	Total: 3
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 12	Girls: 9	Total: 21
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 13	Girls: 11	Total: 24
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£17000		
<b>Address of school</b>	Pinhoe Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 8AD		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01392 468333		
<b>Email address</b>	education@vbranchhouse.org		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Jane Parsons		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Vbranch House School and Centre		

**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.**



25 May 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Vranth House School, Exeter EX4 8AD**

Recently I visited your school with another inspector. We enjoyed our visit very much and thought it was a very happy school. You made us feel very welcome.

Yours is a good school and here are just some of the things we liked best.

- Everyone works so well together to understand your needs and help you make good progress.
- There are always plenty of exciting things to do in school, outside and in your local area.
- You are growing in confidence because you feel safe and are looked after so well.
- You show a great deal of respect for each other and think about feelings. Consequently, your behaviour is excellent and your attendance is good.
- The school works very closely with other schools in the local area and with your parents and carers to help you learn.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased with the work of the school and how it helps you to succeed.

I have asked the school to do a few things to help it get even better.

- Make sure all teachers are planning and teaching lessons that take account of the small steps needed to help you reach your goals.
- Get a clearer picture of how you are making progress and use the information to ensure the right level of expectation in lessons.

You can help by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk  
Her Majesty's Inspector