

Avocet House School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	926/6419
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134978
Inspection number	393281
Inspection dates	26–27 June 2012
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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.

Information about the school

Avocet House School is a small independent special school in Norfolk, which is owned by Specialist Education Services Limited. It opened in 2005 and is situated in the grounds of a large house in open countryside. The school provides education for a maximum of 10 boys aged eight to 16 years, most of whom are residential students. There are nine students on roll aged 11 to 16 years. Eight students have a statement of special educational needs identifying behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Eight of the students are looked after by their respective local authorities. The school was last inspected in January 2009 and its residential provision was inspected in March 2012.

The school's motto is 'Care and learning without limits'. It believes that 'regardless of past experiences every child, given the right circumstances, has the resources to move forward positively to a preferred future.'

Evaluation of the school

Avocet House School continues to provide an outstanding quality of education. The outstanding curriculum and teaching are very carefully matched to the specific needs of the students, who make outstanding progress from their various starting points. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour are outstanding, due to the focus on developing the whole person, valuing difference and appreciating the needs of others. The provision for welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All requirements regarding safeguarding are effectively met.

Relationships with the residential provision are outstanding and encourage the students to thrive at school. The educational provision meets all the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum continues to be outstanding. The highly individualised and specialised curriculum meets the specific needs of the students and the requirements of their statements of special educational needs very effectively. This is achieved through very careful planning of schemes of work, based on the National Curriculum and examination guidance. The curriculum extends throughout the 24-hour day and the learning opportunities during the residential time complement and enhance the school curriculum. The curriculum is very closely matched to the students' needs and successfully engages them.

There is a very strong emphasis on students acquiring improved basic skills with time spent on English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE), together with a wide range of other subjects. The good careers support enables the students to make positive choices about their futures. A very carefully chosen range of accredited courses, both academic and vocational, is offered to students and these suit well their different levels of attainment. Students leave with a wide range of accreditation, which equips them very well for the next stage of their education.

A very wide range of activities and visits, including residential trips, further extends the curriculum. Students attend local clubs, such as a fishing club supported by the residential staff.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. The committed, well-trained and dedicated team of teachers, teaching assistants, therapists and care team work together seamlessly to provide a very stimulating, enriching and holistic educational environment. Students are mainly taught individually, this enables them to make outstanding progress as a result of the very focused, well planned teaching; the staff's extensive knowledge of each student's individual needs; and the extremely positive relationships between staff and students. Sessions are made interesting as the school tries to follow students' interests. For example, one expressed a wish to learn Mandarin; this is achieved through using an ICT program with staff and student learning together. Lessons generally move at a brisk pace, most students respond well to the lively teaching and show a genuine desire to improve. Staff use a wide variety of teaching methods such as visual, practical, auditory and experiential to successfully engage the students. The tasks given are carefully matched to meet their needs. There is a very good balance between practical, investigative learning and recording in a variety of formats, including written, electronic, photographic and auditory. For example, in science investigating the separation of different mixtures, the practical activity engaged the student very well. He responded with interest and through careful staff questioning he displayed very good subject knowledge based on previous learning, and extended his understanding.

Staff use of the wide range of resources is very good, especially ICT, which is used extremely effectively, both as a teaching tool and for students recording their learning. They all have their own laptops, which are used in many lessons. For example, devising a short animated film as part of a PSHEE task. Students, on the whole, are enthusiastic learners, making comments such as, 'Learning wasn't cool when I arrived, now it is fun.' The therapist team, who work alongside the teaching and care staff, effectively support the students' learning by enabling them to recognise the importance of relationships and their families within the context of the school. The school highly values the close contact with parents and facilitates the establishing of close relationships between students and their families, which has a positive effect on the students' re-integration.

Assessment is an embedded part of the lessons with continual but unobtrusive checking of learning by staff. The very effective assessment procedures provide staff

with a very wide range of information on each student, which they use well in their planning. Students typically arrive at the school following a succession of placements resulting from a breakdown in education, or more typically care. This leads to fragmented learning, with negative attitudes towards school and significant challenging behaviour in all previous educational settings, often due to fear of failure and rejection. Most have been out of school for long periods, some in excess of a year, and as a result many have low levels of basic skills, with some being non-readers. On admission, baseline assessments confirm this, with subsequent procedures and outcomes demonstrating outstanding progress whilst attending Avocet House. The school was asked, following the last inspection, to further develop the tracking of students' progress, which they have now done very well. Students are currently involved in feeding back to staff after lessons on how the lesson supported them. The school has identified that it would now like to build on this by asking the students to reflect more on how they could further improve their own learning. All reviews as required by the placing authorities are held and the school reports very regularly and thoroughly to parents, carers and others.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and reflects the 'no limits' school philosophy. Students are encouraged to believe in themselves through a wide range of very effective strategies adopted by the school to re-engage them in learning. Students made positive comments in their questionnaires and through discussion such as, 'This school has given me back my independence... it's not like a school, they make it nice by easing you in slowly.' Students are encouraged to believe in success, not failure and adopt the 'can do' philosophy, which very successfully re-engages them not just in learning but also in becoming part of an inclusive community. Their behaviour is outstanding and attendance is very good. The older students develop into confident and well-rounded young people with an enthusiasm for learning and show exceptionally positive attitudes. All staff are excellent role models and an atmosphere of mutual respect permeates the school. Students willingly take on roles and responsibilities and take an active role in decision-making.

Students learn about world religions and are encouraged to adopt a tolerant approach to others, including those from different cultural backgrounds. They have creative arts opportunities in music technology, individual instrumental and group playing, woodcraft and sculpture, which helps extend their aesthetic awareness. A student has been selected to take part in a charitable trip to Tanzania. Students' interests are pursued with one student recently spending time in France with a French family and attending school to improve his French. Students are introduced to English services and institutions through the curriculum especially through art, drama and music, through visits, and special events such as the Diamond Jubilee.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of the students are outstanding. Very high levels of staff care and support and consistent supervision actively promote the safety and

welfare of the students. Good records are kept and carefully monitored to evaluate the success of each student's personal education and behaviour plan. The sanctions book is kept appropriately. The school has devised and effectively implemented an extensive range of policies which pay due regard to national guidance. These include anti-bullying, health and safety, including visits outside school, behaviour and safeguarding. The designated persons responsible for child protection are trained appropriately in both safeguarding and safer recruitment. All staff are trained in safeguarding; the detailed policy fully meets the requirements and staff are fully aware of it. The school very carefully risk assesses all activities both within and outside the school and is very vigilant in checking safety within the school site. All staff are fully trained in first aid and accidents are carefully recorded. Regular exercise plans and the healthy eating programme are fully implemented which encourages the students to stay fit and healthy. Precautions for fire prevention are very thorough, with a risk assessment undertaken, all fire appliances checked annually and fire drills undertaken very regularly and recorded. The students are extremely well supervised at all times and staffing ratios are very high. The admission and attendance registers meet the regulations. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and has devised and fully implemented a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out all of the required checks on all staff and others to confirm their suitability to work with children. The single central register contains all of the necessary information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation provide a safe and effective learning environment. The learning centre is located in a detached building adjacent to the residential building. It provides a very welcoming, well-maintained and attractive setting. Other facilities on the site are used for teaching practical skills such as cookery, music technology and creative arts. The attractive grounds surrounding the house, in which examples of the students' creative work are displayed, are used effectively for teaching and recreation, as are many local facilities.

Provision of information

The school provides very clear, accurate and up-to-date information through its website and prospectus. The school highly values the close contact with parents and takes every opportunity to keep them well informed. Several placing authorities responded very positively to the pre-inspection questionnaire. They commented, 'Avocet House has been a very positive learning experience for the young person...I view Avocet House as a centre of excellence and I rate them higher than any other establishment in the country.' Parents were equally positive and appreciative of the work the school has done.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure 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 point for development:

- increase the students' opportunities to reflect on how they could further improve their own learning at the end of lessons.

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, for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	April 2005		
Age range of pupils	8-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 9	Girls: 0	Total: 9
Number of boarders	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 244,500		
Address of school	Avocet House The Old Vicarage School Lane Heckingham Norwich NR14 6QP		
Telephone number	01508 549320		
Email address	jon.lees@specialisteducation.co.uk		
Headteacher	Jonathan Lees		
Proprietor	Specialist Education Services Ltd		

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.



28 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Avocet House, Heckingham, NR14 6QP

Thankyou for the welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit, including the opportunity to speak with a number of you. The inspection judged that Avocet House provides you with an outstanding quality of education through the outstanding teaching and curriculum.

I was pleased to learn from talking to you and from your questionnaires that you enjoy your education and you recognize that the staff care about you and you show respect to them. You have now settled well in the school, are prepared to work in lessons and you are making good efforts to improve your behaviour and to co-operate with each other.

We have asked the school to ensure that you have the opportunity to comment on how you have made progress in your lessons and how they can help you to improve.

With best wishes for your future,

Yours sincerely

Jill Bainton
Lead inspector