

Groundwork West Midlands (Stoke-On-Trent & Staffs)

Independent school standard inspection report

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| Reporting inspector | Anthony O'Malley 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

Groundwork West Midlands is an independent day school for students aged 14 to 16 years with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. It is situated in a refurbished former factory in a small industrial estate. It opened in September 2011. All students have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools and their education has been disrupted significantly. Students are placed by the local authority. The school is registered for 18 students; there are currently five students on roll. All of these students attend on a part-time basis. The majority also attend other alternative providers of education. One student has a statement of special educational needs for behavioural problems.

The proprietorial body is Groundwork West Midlands. This is an independent charitable trust providing a wide range of community programmes within disadvantaged communities. Although the school does not have a religious character, it places a strong emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is clearly reflected in its aims. The school aims, 'to empower young people to make a valuable contribution to their communities within Stoke-on-Trent, developing their personal and social skills and enhancing their personal aspirations'. This is the school's first inspection since its registration as an independent school.

Evaluation of the school

Groundwork provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. It supports them appropriately in building their confidence and self-esteem, developing their personal and social skills, and gaining qualifications to access employment or post-16 education. Students make satisfactory progress. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust and the school meets all of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. Students choose to spend part of their school week at Groundwork because it provides a programme of study leading to City and Guild qualifications in construction at NVQ levels 1 and 2. The provision, including a well-

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

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

resourced workroom, enables students to experience and gain skills in bricklaying, plumbing, electrical work, and painting and decorating. These experiences prepare them well for further training in areas of construction that interest them. The wider curriculum is delivered through personal, social and health education lessons. These lessons focus on issues such as money management, anti-social behaviour, immigration and migration, smoking, drug awareness, driving, and sex and personal relationships. Within these topics, there is an appropriate emphasis on literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT). In this way, the curriculum provides a suitable range of experiences for part-time students at Key Stage 4, and helps them to make satisfactory progress to qualifications in functional skills and wider key skills through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

The curriculum takes satisfactory account of the needs of those who have a statement of special educational needs. Adults are aware of factors that have served as barriers to learning in the past and planning demonstrates how teaching will address the individual needs of students. The curriculum is personalised to allow prospective students to try taster sessions in the construction workshop, sometimes with one-to-one tuition, and to give particular emphasis to issues of high relevance to individual students. For example, it deals with issues such as personal injury, drug taking, and the harmful effects of crime on both victims and perpetrators. The teaching and learning resources benefit from two ICT suites and a food technology area. The school's assessment policy includes a range of suitable assessments, from initial assessment on entry through to accreditation. All students have clear individual learning plans guiding their work in construction.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. One parent's comments sum up the strengths in teaching: 'The staff's approach really connects with my son. He tells me about his experiences, which is great. I have already seen a positive impact.' Students relate well to the adults and their attitudes to learning improve during their time at Groundwork. Adults use a good range of resources and a variety of activities to interest and motivate students. For example, one lesson focused on the issues involved in organising a music event at a local park. The activities included studying clips from the annual 'V Festival', role-play considering the views of different members of the public to a pop music concert in their locality, internet searches to cost the event and the drawing up of a detailed risk assessment. In the construction workshop, good subject knowledge enables the tutor to model a range of skills and techniques that students are keen to copy and master. Students are proud of their achievements in this area. However, not all teaching is of this quality. Apart from in construction, lesson plans contain too many learning intentions, not all of which are relevant to the students in the lesson. These learning intentions often lack precision, making it difficult for either the adult or the student to evaluate carefully the progress made at the end of a lesson. Other factors leading to satisfactory rather than good progress, include the tendency of adults to over-direct learning and so restrict opportunities for sustained independent learning, questioning that does not consistently promote extended answers, and only adequate links with other providers

of alternative provision, attended by the students, to ensure that their literacy, numeracy, science and ICT skills are developed consistently.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students make satisfactory gains in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The promotion of good relationships, appreciation of diversity and treating others respectfully is central to the school's ethos. Students comment that there is no racist behaviour in the school and that they learn about a range of cultures different to their own. All students said they felt safe in school and that there is no bullying. Parents and carers who completed questionnaires were equally positive about these issues. Through their personal, social and emotional education lessons, students are developing a basic knowledge of public services. However, they do not have positions of responsibility within the school beyond tidying up after a session. They have few links with the local community. All students have past histories of very poor behaviour and attendance. They make satisfactory progress in improving in both of these areas because teaching approaches and the curriculum are more suited to their needs. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory. Students do have lapses when their behaviour deteriorates, but these reduce over time. Fixed-term exclusions are rare and there have been no permanent exclusions from the school. The school's expectations for behaviour are set out explicitly in its policy and students respect the rules regarding the use of mobile phones and smoking onsite. However, the students demonstrate limited awareness of the importance of good punctuality.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of students are satisfactory. These aspects feature prominently in the school's priorities. Students are always supervised while on the school premises. They report that they feel safe and are confident that staff will always step in quickly to resolve any difficulties that arise. Good use is made of professional agencies and charities to provide specific support and expert advice on drugs, sex education and other health issues. In particular, students are guided on how to keep themselves safe when using modern technologies or engaging in social networking. However, the school does not make use of the food technology area to encourage the students to prepare healthy lunches. Instead, students leave the site at lunchtime and typically have chips, crisps and a cigarette during the midday break. The school's policy for safeguarding meets requirements fully. The designated person for child protection ensures that all staff are trained to the required level and their training is up to date. Satisfactory links between home, school and other professional agencies ensure that most relevant information about the students is shared. This enables the school to take account of factors influencing the students' emotional and personal lives and to adapt provision accordingly. However, the school does not receive sufficient information about the students' academic attainment and progress in other provision to ensure that its curriculum builds progressively on what they are learning elsewhere. Staff are trained appropriately in first aid and follow effective procedures. Fire drills and checks of fire systems and electrical equipment are regular

and documented carefully. The school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Procedures to ensure the suitability of prospective employees are followed diligently by the school's human resources team. The single central register of checks on staff suitability is up to date and comprehensive, ensuring that all relevant checks are made of potential employees before they start work.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises have been refurbished to provide appropriate internal teaching areas. In addition, there are two ICT suites, a construction workroom and kitchen facilities. Students are kept safe through carefully regulated access to the building. The classroom areas are spacious given the number of students currently on roll. The outside areas meet requirements but lack seating or any generous space for recreation. Students say they tend to sit on a wall outside the school at break times. However, the school makes occasional use of a local park a short walk from the school for recreational purposes.

Provision of information

The school provides information for parents, carers and others through its website and prospectus. These sources ensure that parents, carers and others can request the necessary information from the school. Parents and carers are provided with brief written reports about the attainment and progress of their children at the end of each year.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's arrangements for the management of any complaints meet statutory 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 the quality of education by: ensuring lessons have precise learning objectives that are relevant to the student; students have more

opportunities for sustained independent work; and adults use questioning well to promote thinking and encourage extended answers.

- Strengthen links with other alternative providers so that the school's provision builds upon the skills and knowledge that students learn elsewhere.
- Develop further systems and initiatives to improve punctuality.
- Make use of the food technology area to increase opportunities for students to make a contribution to the school community and to eat more healthily at lunchtimes.

Inspection judgements

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|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
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The quality of education

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|--|--|--|---|--|
| 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

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|--|--|--|---|--|
| Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | | | ✓ | |
| The behaviour of pupils | | | ✓ | |

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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|--|--|--|---|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils | | | ✓ | |
|--|--|--|---|--|

School details

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| School status | Independent | | |
| Type of school | Special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties | | |
| Date school opened | September 2011 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 14–16 years | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 5 | Girls: 0 | Total: 5 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs | Boys: 1 | Girls: 0 | Total: 1 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £14,250 | | |
| Address of school | Groundwork West Midlands Albany Works Moorlands Road Burslen Stoke-on-Trent ST6 1EB | | |
| Telephone number | 01782 829900 | | |
| Headteacher | Julie Read | | |
| Proprietor | Groundwork West Midlands Trust | | |

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.



12 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Groundwork West Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 1EB

Thank you for your welcome when I inspected your school. I enjoyed my visit, including the opportunity to see you at work in the construction workroom. The inspection judged that Groundwork provides you with a satisfactory quality of education and helps you with both your academic and personal development. The school meets all government requirements. I was particularly pleased to find that:

- in lessons, you take an active part and work well
- you have good relationships with adults who teach you
- you enjoy the opportunities provided for you to learn a range of construction skills
- you feel safe in school and there is no bullying
- you are attending school much more regularly than in the past and improving your behaviour.

I was disappointed to see that you were late for some for lessons. I have asked the school to work with you to improve your punctuality. Other things I have asked the school to do include:

- improving the way they plan and teach lessons in the classroom
- finding out more about what you are learning in the other schools you attend
- encouraging you to prepare healthy meals at lunchtimes in the food technology area.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Her Majesty's Inspector