

Underley Garden 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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Underley Garden School is an independent special school near Carnforth in Lancashire which provides for students aged from nine to 19 years who have moderate or severe learning difficulties. Many students have autistic spectrum conditions and associated behavioural and emotional difficulties. Many also have additional health problems. The school opened in 1990 and is registered for 60 students most of whom are residential. It is owned by Acorn Education and Care and was last inspected in February 2009. There are 25 students on roll aged between 12 and 19 years, 10 of whom are post-16 students. Almost all students have a statement of special educational needs and most are of White British heritage.

The school aims for a holistic, person-centred approach to the development of its students and endeavours to ensure they achieve as high a standard as possible. It aims to offer a comprehensive programme of education, therapy and care to meet all students' individual needs.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is good; the school meets its aims well and all of the regulations are met. A broad and relevant curriculum ensures it meets the needs of all students. Good teaching and assessment lead to lively, engaging lessons so that students enjoy and are challenged by their work. Students make good progress, gain relevant qualifications and are well prepared for the future. There has been good improvement since the last inspection with the result that the school is a strong, cohesive community promoting outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour. The arrangements for students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding and all the safeguarding requirements are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. Plans for what is taught across the breadth of work and activities are expertly adapted and focused sharply on meeting students' wide range of needs and capabilities. Highly effective multi-disciplinary team work is positively influential in ensuring curriculum aims are as closely tailored as possible to each student's preferred style of learning. These aims also encompass well-planned opportunities for students to improve their self-esteem and confidence. Reflecting

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

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

upon the benefits of attending this school, students spoke proudly of their greater self-confidence and improved behaviour. All parents and carers answering the questionnaire were happy with their children's experience at this school. All of the required areas of learning are represented in the curriculum and each subject is well planned, taking carefully into account appropriate experiences and challenges in relation to students' age and prior attainment. As a result, the implementation of the curriculum contributes significantly to all students making good progress in their knowledge, skills and personal development.

Areas of significant strength are found in art, physical education, personal, social and health education and in the provision for students with the most complex needs. Students with severe learning difficulties in addition to autism spectrum conditions benefit significantly from a distinctive curriculum providing small steps in learning. Every opportunity is planned with precision enabling these students to progress, at a good rate, their communication, social, literacy and numeracy skills. The planning of all subjects for students with moderate learning difficulties ensures that they have good opportunities to achieve at levels appropriate to their abilities. Accredited courses including GCSE, Entry Level Certificates and National Open College Network units provide a well-suited range of challenges in Key Stage 4 and post-16. Learning opportunities are broadened considerably through vocational options and links with the local community. Horticulture, environmental conservation and land-based work within the school grounds and beyond are exceptionally well planned and offer accreditation which prepares post-16 students very well for higher level courses and employment. Hair and beauty courses in school and at college broaden opportunities further. The English curriculum has a positive impact on developing communication skills through the use of signing, symbols or speaking and listening. Higher-attaining students are able to take their reading and writing skills to a relatively high level and achieve GCSE passes. Mathematics offers a breadth of study but does not have the same impact as English because planning is not as precise in always offering the appropriate level of challenge.

Teaching and assessment are good. Most lessons are planned well in relation to students' needs and prior attainment. Teachers have a well-developed knowledge of students which they use effectively to adapt work, support learning and set high expectations. Relationships between adults and students are extremely positive and this contributes significantly to students' good attitudes to school and their efforts with work. Good planning and positive relationships ensure lessons get off to a brisk start and learning is lively and engaging. The good teamwork of teachers and their assistants ensures students stay on task and remain confident in tackling challenges. Students' behaviour is managed very effectively using subtle, sensitive measures that are settling and confidence-building. Assessment in the course of lessons is usually thorough and, in some lessons, there is particularly effective practice in recording attainment and progress. This is a strong feature of teaching in the classes for students with autism spectrum conditions. The opportunity for students to assess their own learning is particularly good in physical education, art and post-16 vocational courses. A rigorous measure of attainment in English is used effectively to set challenging targets. However, there is an absence of methodical assessment in

mathematics, one consequence of which is that work is not always sufficiently challenging.

Students make good progress and are motivated by their achievement. This is a view shared by parents, carers and placing authorities. A significant number achieve passes in GCSE and gain Entry Level Certificates in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, humanities and art. Vocational awards are gained by students in areas such as environmental conservation and in their college courses. Students progress exceptionally well in their personal development, increasing their self-esteem, confidence, social skills and emotional well-being. Students are well prepared for the future by developing good work-related skills and by improving their independence. Good opportunities to learn in the community gives them the knowledge and confidence to use shops and cafés and to find their way using maps and public transport. In lessons, students make especially good progress in learning to manage money and in finding out essential information about public services.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Many students have come to the school having experienced failure in other settings and with strongly negative attitudes to school. However, whatever their needs, students thrive in the school's positive atmosphere and ethos which create a strong sense of community and common sense of purpose. This has a very positive effect on their outlook and all-round development. Attendance and punctuality are high and students say they enjoy lessons. The very good relationships with staff steer students towards forming good friendships. They develop respect for, and trust and confidence in, those around them. Students' behaviour is outstanding and there has been a marked improvement in behaviour in school over the past year. This, members of the school council say, is the result of developments in the system of rewards and sanctions, which they have had a significant part in planning.

The recent development of a house system has focused students on working in each other's interests and on improving their teamwork skills. These qualities find significant expression in house teams raising money for good causes such as cancer charities. Students take particular pride in being helpful to others and improving the environment. Their involvement in the community means they learn of key public services through visits such as those to the library and fire station. In lessons, and through the carefully chosen resources used in learning, students experience and find out about different cultures. In addition, they have good opportunities to visit a variety of places of worship such as a Buddhist temple and Methodist church.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding as the arrangements for meeting their needs, managing their behaviour and supporting them in every respect are exceptionally strong. Students feel safe and the robust application of the school's anti-bullying policy ensures they are free from all forms of harassment. They are

very well supervised. Students benefit from the school's high level of expertise in providing specialised care and support from a wide range of external consultants, therapies and the school's own specialist staff. Staff and consultants work together very effectively and ensure that their knowledge of each student is developed to a high level. As a result, the full range of students' needs is planned for and met exceptionally well. Staff are trained to promote all aspects of students' well-being and they manage a wide range of clearly defined roles with competence and diligence. Nursing staff ensure that medical conditions and disabilities are treated and kept under close scrutiny. They also contribute significantly to the curriculum and other provision in regard to promoting a healthy lifestyle for students. The arrangements for keeping students safe are robust and the procedures for child protection are kept under close scrutiny and are rigorous. Staff, including the designated officer, are trained at the appropriate levels. The school effectively implements its safer recruitment policy. The oversight of health and safety across the school is managed very effectively and this ensures all of the requirements relating to first aid, fire safety, the safety of equipment and premises and of students while on trips and outdoor activities is kept closely monitored. The school has a detailed plan to improve the premises which meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the checks to confirm the suitability of proprietors, staff, and others meet requirements and are recorded on the single central register as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises have a range of accommodation and outside areas which support the breadth of learning opportunities offered. Every classroom provides a stimulating, well-organised environment and each is well equipped to support students' learning. Several classrooms are equipped specially for practical subjects such as information and communication technology, food technology and art. Recent investment in physical education has given the school a fitness suite and dance studio, which are used well to improve students' physical skills and fitness. The horticulture classroom leads out into the school garden and grounds where much is being achieved in work-related learning, personal development and vocational accreditation.

Provision of information

Parents, carers and placing authorities are provided with a comprehensive prospectus containing all of the required information about the school. The school's website provides a wide range of information including the policies that are available to parents, carers and others, some of which can be downloaded and all can be requested. Detailed reports are provided for the annual review of students' statements of special educational needs and for the reviews of students who are looked after by their local authority. Staff maintain regular communication with parents, carers and placing authorities with regard to meeting the needs of students.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy meets 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 students' progress in mathematics by establishing rigorous assessment procedures and challenging target-setting in the subject to match the developments in English
- develop and refine the gathering and use of data on students' performance so that this is fully effective in all lessons.

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 students with moderate and severe learning difficulties		
Date school opened	January 1990		
Age range of pupils	9 to 19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 11	Girls: 14	Total: 25
Number of boarders	Boys :11	Girls: 14	Total: 25
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 11	Girls: 13	Total: 24
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 12	Total: 18
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,000 – £90,000		
Address of school	Kirkby Lonsdale Via Carnforth Lancashire LA6 2DZ		
Telephone number	01524 271569		
Email address	info@underleygardenschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Graham McEwan		
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education		

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.



5 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Underley Garden School, Kirkby Lonsdale LA6 2DZ

Many thanks for your very warm welcome and a special thanks to all of the students I talked to, the members of the school council in particular. I am pleased to tell you that your school provides you with a good education. These are some of its strongest features.

- The quality of education is good because all of your work and activities in lessons and beyond provide you with the knowledge, skills and qualifications you need for the future.
- Teaching is good. You enjoy your work and teachers make sure lessons are lively and challenging and that you are given the support you need to learn and make good progress.
- Your self-confidence and behaviour improve remarkably well, which is something you are very aware of and this makes your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development outstanding.
- All of the staff do their utmost to ensure you are looked after, stay safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle. The arrangements made for your welfare, health and safety are outstanding.

Two areas I have suggested for improvement are to:

- improve your progress in mathematics so you have assessments and targets similar to those you have in English
- develop the way teachers track your progress so they have a clear and accurate view of where you are doing well or not so well in all lessons.

You contribute a great deal to the success of the school by your outstanding behaviour, the work of the school council and everything that you do to help others. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon
Lead Inspector