

Gryphon School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	856/6021
Unique Reference Number (URN)	135530
Inspection number	397662
Inspection dates	9–10 October 2012
Reporting inspector	David Young

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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.

Information about the school

Gryphon School, established in March 2008, is situated close to Leicester City Centre. It is located in two buildings within Abbey Park, the Abbey and the gate house known as Slater Street Lodge. The proprietor leases the refurbished listed building from the city council, and the school, being within the grounds of Abbey Park, has access to extensive park facilities. The school provides day education for up to 30 students, aged seven to 17 years who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are currently 26 students on roll. All students have statements of special educational needs. A high percentage of the students are looked after by carers and they travel from a wide catchment area. They have not usually been in education for a considerable time before coming to the school and have experienced problems associated with conventional mainstream schooling. Placements are currently made by Leicester City, Leicestershire and Warwickshire local authorities. The school's aim is to create opportunities for students to be successful and develop a positive self-image. The ethos of Gryphon School is to provide a high quality education designed to develop students to their full potential: academically, socially and vocationally. The school's last inspection was in June 2009.

Evaluation of the school

Gryphon School continues to provide an outstanding quality of education which enables students of all ages to make outstanding progress in their academic and personal development. All aspects of the school's work, including the curriculum, teaching, assessment and arrangements for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Similarly, attention to the welfare, health and safety of students, including safeguarding arrangements, is outstanding. The foundation for this exemplary provision lies in the exceptional quality and dedication of the staff team under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher. The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and enables students to make exceptionally good progress in their learning. A unique and comprehensive curriculum model has been developed which is dependent upon the teamwork, commitment and creativity of the whole staff team. The primary curriculum reflects a common theme for each half term and imaginative activities, for example in art, technology and food studies, are provided alongside the structured development of

reading, writing and numeracy skills. Excellent attention is given to the requirements of individual students' statements of special educational needs. An individual education plan, covering targets for academic learning and personal development, is created for each student. These plans are written in language which even the younger students can understand, and in a manner which allows them to monitor their own progress realistically alongside their teachers.

The secondary curriculum is organised into a series of half-termly themes, each of which integrates all the required areas of learning. Students are involved in a lot of successful active learning which draws upon content and concepts from subjects as diverse as art and science, humanities and technology. Excellent use is made of the local environment, enhanced by a continuous relationship with the landscape, architecture, history and people of the Abbey Park in which the school is located. The required skills of literacy, numeracy and science are thoughtfully planned into the themes in a manner which ensures that basic skills are being developed at a challenging pace appropriate to the needs of each individual student.

The curriculum is enhanced by easy access to computers for research or recording, and to a range of off-site visits and activities, including physical education. Good attention is given to the personal needs of students as they prepare for the transition to further education and life beyond school. Excellent opportunities are available for work experience and a number of students have enjoyed working alongside the park staff in, for example, horticulture, events planning and office administration. The school is currently working with the local authority to prepare students for transition to level 2 college courses part-way through Year 11. The school has plans to accredit work covered in its existing curriculum, through functional skills or GCSE awards, for students who are ready to advance to these standards before progressing to college.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Students benefit from the way in which the daily timetable is organised and the opportunity to work for extended periods of time on a theme with an individual teacher. The high quality of teachers' planning ensures that learning objectives are clear and students understand what is expected of them. Learning support assistants share the learning experiences with the students, act as excellent role models, and use patient questioning and discussion to enable students to resolve their concerns. All lessons are characterised by warm relationships, flexibility and sensitivity to the changing moods of students. As a result, whether making salad dressings, rehearsing mental number bonds, solving riddles, choosing the vocabulary for a play, studying personal phobias or learning about the functions of the internal organs of the body, students engage readily in their learning. Students who enter the school with negative experience of relationships, fear of failure and high levels of anxiety learn to work cooperatively in teams and to trust both adults and fellow students. Teachers have a very good understanding of the extent of progress being made by individual students throughout the day and over each term.

The school has outstanding arrangements for the assessment of students' academic and personal progress. The assessment of progress in English, mathematics and science is exemplary. National Curriculum level descriptors form the basis of team

judgements about students' current levels of progress. Consistency of judgement is monitored by the school's special educational needs coordinator and the headteacher. Systematic records of all assessment activity demonstrate precisely the extent of students' progress over time. This system is supported by an equally powerful programme of assessment of students' readiness to learn. Observations of students' learning behaviours, for example the development of their emotional reactions and their ability to organise and plan, are brought together by the staff at daily team meetings. In addition, students are involved in aspects of self-assessment of their social development and readiness for the future. All of this information is mapped and recorded systematically in a manner which enables all staff to focus on development strategies unique to each student. The school's records of assessment demonstrate that students make outstanding progress in their personal development and in their learning. A large majority exceed expected progress, for example in English and mathematics, when compared with national figures. All students enter the school with attainment below age-related expectations and make outstanding progress from often low starting points.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is outstanding. Students are taught to reflect on their personal strengths and desired areas for improvement. They are encouraged to have a realistic understanding of the challenges they are experiencing with their behaviour and are provided with personal strategies to manage these. They are provided with opportunities for art therapy which enable them to explore and address issues and concerns in their own emotional lives. They acknowledge the importance of this experience and appreciate the way in which it enables them to relax and join in. The school has developed excellent relationships with parents and carers, all of whom are visited regularly in their homes. Parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire are highly positive. One parent wrote, 'My son has thrived beyond our expectations... he is today confident, happy and capable, and loves going to school.' As a result of a consistent focus on individual students' needs, supported by the extensive assessment data recorded, all staff have an excellent understanding of how to enable students to learn. Students develop self-esteem and a sense of purpose; the majority are able to respond to the challenges of learning within a supportive environment. One student said, 'This is school is more of a family than a school.' Students do not feel constrained by the confines of the classroom and they respond positively to their relaxed relationship with the staff. As a result, behaviour throughout the school is good and students make continuous progress with the management of their anxiety and anger. Students maintain high levels of attendance and unauthorised absence is unknown for the majority. Students of all ages engage in learning, show respect for the staff, and value the activities which they experience. The location of the school in the extensive grounds of the historic park provides an effective environment for their cultural development. They are actively involved in a wide range of cultural activities, including the celebration of festivals such as Diwali, a special Olympics programme, or working with a local group to plan improvements to the park's fitness facilities. Walks in the park also provide opportunities for reflection during times of stress or anxiety. The curriculum includes a continuous focus on themes of citizenship,

diversity and contribution, enabling students to broaden their understanding of their relationship with the wider community.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are outstanding. All members of staff give the highest priority to the well-being of their students. This is made possible through the structure of the school day, the continuous supervision of students through breaks and lunch-times, and a consistent focus on students' health and safety. Policies for the management of behaviour, the prevention of bullying and for safeguarding are implemented consistently. The school has an extensive programme of continuous staff development, including the required training for child protection, first aid and fire safety. The designated person for child protection is trained to the required level and oversees regular updates for all staff. Routine checks on fire safety equipment and fire evacuations are maintained to appropriate timescales. Students acknowledge the quality of the healthy food which is provided at lunchtimes and enjoy their opportunities to be involved in its preparation. They all feel included in the life of the school and understand the expectations that they will act in a responsible and safe manner.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required checks on the suitability of staff and the proprietor are completed consistently and entered into a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation provide an excellent environment for safe and effective learning. The accommodation is located in a gatehouse and refurbished abbey premises in the extensive grounds of the Abbey Park. The abbey buildings have been sympathetically restored and both buildings provide a good range of suitable teaching spaces together with appropriate dining arrangements, washrooms and office space. The grounds of the park are used regularly for play and recreation.

Provision of information

The school provides all required information for parents and carers through its prospectus. Parents and carers are provided with access to the full range of school policy documents. The staff make home visits each term to discuss students' attainment and progress with their families.

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 point for development.

- Implement opportunities for external certification of work in English, mathematics and science, for example by using functional skills and GCSE accreditation.

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	Day school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	March 2008		
Age range of pupils	7–17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 19	Girls: 7	Total: 26
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 19	Girls: 7	Total: 26
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,000–£46,000		
Address of school	Slater Street Lodge Abbey Park Leicester LE1 3EJ		
Telephone number	07833 623420		
Email address	gryphonschool@gmail.com		
Headteacher	Christina Church		
Proprietor	Christina Church		

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.



11 October 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Gryphon School, Leicester, LE1 3EJ

I am writing to thank you for your welcome when I visited your school recently. I appreciate the time you took to talk to me, to show me round, and to show me your work. The inspection judged that Gryphon School provides you with an outstanding quality of education. The organisation of your teaching groups and daily timetable give you plenty of time to concentrate on learning new subjects and to improve your English and your mathematics. I was particularly pleased to see:

- the warm relationships between everyone at the school, including students and the staff
- how well you settle to your work in your classrooms
- the excellent progress you make in managing your behaviour and cooperating with each other
- the interesting practical activities which you do in lessons such as art, food studies and science
- the way in which the facilities of the park are used to make your work interesting and exciting
- the excellent information which the staff collect about your progress with your work and your behaviour.

You have a lot to be proud of in your school. Your attendance at school is very good and you are keen to get involved in a wide range of activities. In order to make your learning even better, I have asked the staff to introduce arrangements to make it possible for you to achieve certificates for your work in English, mathematics and science, including GCSE awards, for those of you who are ready to do this level of work. I would like to wish you all the best for the future and continued success with your work.

Yours sincerely

David Young
Lead Inspector