

3 Dimensions School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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

3 Dimensions School is an independent special school that is registered to provide education for boys and girls with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties and for pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition. It is set in a rural location near the town of Chard in Somerset. All pupils have additional learning needs associated with the acquisition of basic numeracy and literacy skills and almost all have failed to thrive in their previous educational settings. The school opened in 2004 and is currently registered for seven pupils between eleven and sixteen years of age. Currently seven pupils attend, six of whom have a statement of special educational needs. The school is seeking a material change to increase to 12 the number of pupils it may admit and to establish provision for students aged between 16 and 18 years. It is in the ownership of 3 Dimensions, a registered company. The company also owns three children's homes in the area, which provide residential accommodation for almost all of the pupils.

The school seeks to develop pupils' communication, social and independence skills through the provision of individual programmes within a safe and secure learning environment. It was last inspected in September 2008. Since that time it has broadened its intake to include pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition.

Evaluation of the school

3 Dimensions School is successful in meeting its aims and provides a good quality of education. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils support pupils' good behaviour and their good spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Good teaching ensures pupils make good progress in their learning. Arrangements for safeguarding and the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety are good. The school meets almost all of the regulations and has made good progress since the last inspection, particularly in improving the quality of teaching and in adapting successfully to meet the needs of pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition. A material change to admit up to 12 pupils is recommended, although further evidence of planning is required before students aged between 16 and 18 years are admitted.

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

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

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. It is supported by a clear set of aims and covers all of the required areas of learning. A particularly successful feature is the use of a recognised verbal communication programme for developing the language skills of pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition. Specific targets are set and small gains in pupils' language and behaviour are noted and rewarded. This is reinforced by the effective use of pictures, symbols and signing. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme contains a good range of topics relevant to students' special educational needs; for example, staying safe, how to manage feelings and dealing with change. Information and communication technology (ICT) features prominently in the curriculum and pupils have good access to computers. Science, art and elements of design and technology are provided in a craft room. Physical exercise is provided by visits to a local gymnasium or through the Forest School outdoor activities programme, which enables pupils to keep fit. Pupils are currently offered a satisfactory range of GCSE and Entry level courses, including English, mathematics, science, history and ICT, and an accredited course in social and independence skills. Planning is in place for the subjects offered and, wherever possible, the school responds flexibly to pupils' individual needs and interests by introducing additional subjects. For example, in recent years, links with local colleges have been used to provide vocational courses.

The curriculum contains a good range of activities which focus on developing pupils' social skills and self-esteem. However, given that almost all pupils have low levels of reading and writing, insufficient time is allocated for the regular teaching of literacy. The school engages appropriate support from a speech and language therapist and an educational psychologist to help plan suitable behaviour and communication programmes for pupils. However, some pupils' statements of special educational needs specify full access to the National Curriculum, which the school does not provide. For example, some pupils do not receive comprehensive coverage of music, design and technology and physical education. All pupils receive suitable careers advice and benefit from detailed planning to prepare them for their next stage beyond school. Several have completed work experience placements, for example in a charity shop, hairdressing salon and an office. These placements are carefully managed to reduce pupils' anxiety and to ensure success.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers and teaching assistants form excellent relationships with pupils and demonstrate a close understanding of their individual needs and preferences. They have a very good knowledge of how to teach pupils who have complex behaviour and communication difficulties based on a thorough training programme provided by an external specialist. Periods of work are often followed by short reward activities which ensure pupils' concentration is maintained. A positive climate for learning in lessons is underpinned by good humour and respect. Pupils arrive on time to their lessons and settle quickly to their work. The range of resources to support learning is satisfactory. ICT is used to good effect, for example when pupils research topics in history or construct a bar chart in mathematics. There is less availability of artefacts to support learning in history and

geography, and of equipment to support the teaching of science and design and technology. Staff are generally well deployed and give pupils the right level of individual support, for example when conducting the verbal communication programme. However they occasionally limit independence by giving help too readily, rather than expecting pupils to persevere at a task for longer on their own.

Teachers assess pupils' attainment on entry and keep a detailed record of their progress in literacy, numeracy and science. The information is used effectively to plan lessons that give pupils the right level of challenge and ensure that they achieve well. Data show that pupils make good academic progress in relation to their starting points. Almost all pupils leave having gained GCSE or Entry level passes in several subjects each year and they progress to suitable destinations in further training and occasionally in employment. Pupils make particularly good progress in managing their behaviour and in developing their communication skills.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is extremely successfully in promoting pupils' self-esteem by enabling pupils to experience success. Pupils are proud of their achievements and are pleased to discuss their work. This is encouraged when pupils select their best piece of work each week for display on a 'work of the week' board. The Forest School outdoor activities programme is effective in promoting pupils' sense of adventure and self-confidence.

Pupils' behaviour is good because staff adopt a clear and consistent approach to behaviour management. Pupils display positive attitudes to their work in lessons and behave sensibly around the school. They enjoy the reward system linked to their behaviour targets, whereby they can choose activities or save up for particular items. Staff treat pupils with patience and respect which helps to promote harmonious relationships between pupils, irrespective of their individual learning difficulties or backgrounds. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good.

Pupils are prepared well so that they can make a meaningful contribution to their educational reviews. They are also encouraged to make choices about their learning in lessons. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community, for example when they discuss and allocate jobs at the beginning of each week, such as sharpening pencils, tidying up and emptying waste bins, and when they make craft products and sell them in the local market to raise money for charity. Pupils benefit from an appropriate citizenship curriculum which includes topics on rights and responsibilities, government and democracy and personal finance. Satisfactory support is given for pupils to develop an understanding of different religious and cultural traditions in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. Relevant topics are covered in the religious education curriculum and festivals of the major faiths are celebrated, although there are few visits to support this programme.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The quality of welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The school provides a safe and caring environment for pupils. Pupils report they feel safe in school and that any incidents of misbehaviour are managed well by staff. Detailed health and safety policies and procedures and risk assessments cover all aspects of the school's work. Robust arrangements are in place to safeguard pupils and staff have received recent training, at the appropriate level, in child protection. High levels of staffing ensure pupils' safety. Staff have had appropriate training in order to manage the rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour in a calm and non-confrontational manner. Incidents are recorded as required and analysed to identify any underlying causes. Fire drills are held regularly and fire-fighting equipment is checked by a specialist company. Several staff are trained in first aid and the school has a written first-aid policy. The PSHE curriculum has a strong focus on leading a healthy lifestyle and forming positive relationships. Pupils gain an understanding of healthy eating when they cook vegetables grown in the school garden.

The school keeps a daily attendance register and holds a range of information electronically and in pupils' files. However, this information is not kept in a single admission register as required. The school has produced a suitable plan to increase accessibility in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Action has been taken to install ramps and a toilet for disabled users.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has thorough procedures for the safe recruitment of staff. All of the required checks on the suitability of the proprietor and of staff have been completed effectively. All checks are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The accommodation is well maintained. The main building comprises two classrooms, a craft room and an office. A separate room is located nearby which is used for individual tuition. Classrooms are small but of adequate size for the number of pupils using them. While the school has a sufficient number of toilets, one toilet leads directly off a classroom which compromises pupils' privacy. The school does not provide a clearly designated area for pupils who might be ill or in need of first aid. The accommodation provides a suitable learning environment for up to 12 pupils. A patio with picnic tables and a grassed area provides satisfactory space for outside recreation.

Provision of information

The school provides most of the information for parents, carers and others required by the regulations; however, it does not make clear that its policies and procedures are available on request. Detailed annual reports are provided on pupils' progress.

Parents and carers and local authorities hold overwhelmingly positive views about the school's work and feel well informed about pupils' progress.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints policy meets all of the 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'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- ensure that the curriculum policy set out in writing which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work is implemented to fulfil the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs (paragraph 2(1))
- where pupils have a statement of special educational needs ensure that the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 2(2)(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure washrooms provided for pupils, including facilities for pupils with special educational needs and disability, take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with regulation 5 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available the required information, policies and procedures to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils, and on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State, or an independent inspectorate (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

In order to accommodate the material change in terms of taking 16-18 year olds the school must:

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made.

- draw up a planned programme of activities for post-16 students
- draw up a plan showing how the accommodation will be organised to provide a discrete, age-appropriate learning base for students aged between 16 and 18 years.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to work independently in lessons.
- Include more time in the curriculum for teaching literacy.

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 pupils with behavioural difficulties and an autistic spectrum condition.		
Date school opened	September 2004		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000 - £67,000		
Address of school	Chardleigh House Chardleigh Green Wadeford Chard Somerset TA20 3AJ		
Telephone number	01460 68055		
Email address	team@3dimensionscare.co.uk		
Headteacher	Rachel Syrett		
Proprietor	Adele Frost		

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.

15 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of 3 Dimensions School, Chard, TA20 3AJ

As you know I visited your school recently to check how well it is doing. I enjoyed my visit very much and appreciated the welcome I received. Thanks to those of you who took time to talk with me about your work and life at school. I thought you were very sensible and mature. I also talked to staff and some other adults connected with the school, visited lessons and looked at your work.

Here are the main points.

- Your school gives you a good education.
- You enjoy your lessons, behave well and make good progress.
- The school helps you to feel good about yourselves and about your achievements.
- The school is particularly good at helping you to improve your behaviour and the way you speak to each other.
- The school cares for you well and you feel safe in school.

I have asked the school to improve by doing the following things.

- Include more time for teaching you reading and writing.
- Give you more opportunities to work on your own and without adult help in lessons.

You can help by trying to do more work on your own and by working hard to improve your reading and writing.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector