

The Evolution Centre

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

The Evolution Centre is a day special school which provides education for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and/or autistic spectrum conditions. It is owned by Reflexion Care Group Ltd. The school is located in a rural village setting close to Shrewsbury in the West Midlands. The school opened in 2008 and is registered for 28 students. There are currently 16 full-time students on roll aged 12 to 16 years. The majority of the current students are looked-after children living in the company's children's homes. The remainder are day students placed by local authorities. Eleven of the students have statements of special educational needs. The school aims to, 'support students to move on to further education, training or employment and along with the parent company supports care leavers into independent living.' The school was last inspected in September 2009.

Evaluation of the school

The Evolution Centre provides a good quality of education and prepares students well for the responsibilities and expectations of adult life. The curriculum is outstanding, providing students with a rich, engaging range of academic, vocational and practical activities. The quality of teaching is good, enabling students to make satisfactory progress in their learning, restricted only by the complex individual challenges faced in their personal lives. Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students, including safeguarding, are outstanding. Students, parents and carers are unanimous in their appreciation of the quality of what the school provides. The school has made sustained improvement since the last inspection and now meets all the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which is adapted flexibly to meet the aspirations and needs of each individual student. All students have access to core subjects, including English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and physical education. These subjects are complemented by a range of enriching and engaging experiences from across all subjects of the National

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

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

Curriculum. The timetable of subjects for students in Key Stage 3 is flexible enough to ensure that the requirements of individual statements of special educational needs are always addressed effectively. For example, individual arrangements have been made for students to be tutored in Welsh, Spanish or French in response to individual wishes. Very effective one-to-one tuition is provided to enable students to fill in gaps in their reading, writing, spelling or numeracy. Key Stage 4 students have access to additional optional subjects and the school is very responsive to individual aspirations. For example, small groups of students study child development, food technology or graphic design to examination level. There are appropriate opportunities for students to achieve a wide range of externally accredited awards. Good provision for careers education, including a strong contribution from the local careers service, ensures that students are supported effectively in planning the next stages in their personal education or employment on leaving school.

The curriculum for all students is underpinned with excellent themes and activities which address their emotional literacy, personal learning and thinking skills, and social development. Personal timetables are provided for individual students which enable them to benefit from regular, full-day, outdoor education or off-site vocational training in, for example, vehicle maintenance, rural skills or hairdressing. Work experience is arranged to meet individual needs in locations such as a local primary school. Students across the full age-range come together to take part in successful project days each half-term. During the inspection, students were working cooperatively in groups on an enterprise project, enjoying making table and tree decorations for sale at a Christmas fair. The results of a previous project day add to the high quality of display throughout the school, with particularly effective graffiti art and ceramics produced by students. Further enrichment is provided through visits related to classroom subjects, for example to Powys Castle and Attingham Park. The openness of the school to innovative ideas has resulted in a curriculum which has an outstanding impact on the engagement of students and the development of their emotional and social resilience.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Almost all students on entry to the school are working at levels well-below expectations for their age. Many have missed large periods of schooling. The quality of planning and the range of visual resources prepared by teachers are exemplary, including the regular use of interactive whiteboards, digital technology and individual student laptops. Students take an active part in their learning in response to a wide variety of interesting and appealing activities. These include encountering Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, handling fruit as an introduction to algebra, making burgers and cupcakes, 'exploding' hydrogen, evaluating children's books and designing the components of a crazy golf course. The teachers understand how students learn, have identified their individual learning needs, and ensure that lessons proceed with good pace and high expectations. Students respect the staff and the high quality of personal relationships has a positive impact on the generally calm environment. A number of students develop the ability to write expressively and accurately but there is not a consistent whole-school approach to the development of writing in all subject areas. Writing tasks are not always demanding enough. Some students struggle to maintain their concentration or to commit their ideas to paper. However, staff, including effective

learning support assistants, are persistent and diligent in finding ways to develop their learning.

Overall, students make satisfactory progress over time from their varied starting points. Their personal anxieties and traumas often restrict their ability to benefit fully from some of the high quality experiences provided. Poor attendance also limits the progress of a small number of students. For a number of students, progress is good and results in the achievement of a variety of externally accredited awards. The school's records demonstrate that all students, if they attend regularly, make progress in their learning even when placed in the school for a relatively short period of time. Information is recorded in a manner which enables sound judgements to be made about the extent of students' progress against national averages. However, it is not easy to identify when a student has exceeded national expectations in an individual subject.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In students' response to the online questionnaire and in discussion, they state how the school takes account of their views and helps to prepare them for the future. Regular tutorial sessions, including the effective use of the school's adaptation of 'circle time', provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their personal development and their responses to daily events in school. The agenda and minutes of the student council demonstrate how the school values students' opinions and takes action to respond to their concerns. Students, who mostly enter the school with low self-esteem and lacking in confidence, are supported and encouraged to confront their concerns and to manage their reactions. Behaviour is good. The school is an orderly community and the majority of students take their work seriously. Attendance by the majority of students is good, but persistent absence by a minority results in below-average attendance overall.

The work of the company's clinical psychologist and her colleagues helps to inform the staff's understanding of the complex issues which impact on students' readiness to learn. As a result, shared strategies are devised which are successful in supporting students' motivation to learn. Parents and placing local authorities comment positively about the extent to which the school engages in dialogue and takes account of their views. As a result of effective teamwork both within and beyond the school, the majority of students make good progress in their personal development.

Students take an active part in fund-raising for charities such as Sports Relief, and enjoy opportunities to be involved in the local community, such as running a stall at the village summer fete. Themes studied across a number of subjects enable students to understand the local and wider communities; a number supported the Olympic flame as it travelled through the local area. Students are encouraged to value different cultures and lifestyles, and work, for example, in religious education and personal, social and health education, challenges stereotypes. A recent audit of how existing subject content provides for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students has generated a number of ideas for further development.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are outstanding. A key feature of the school's provision is the continuous communication between the school and students' homes. Daily calls are made to aid teachers' preparation and to ensure students' readiness for education. Students state that they feel safe in school and that they do not experience bullying. The school is an inclusive community and the celebration of the uniqueness of each student is at the forefront of every conversation. Themes within the personal, social and health education programme combine with lessons in food technology and physical education to encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles.

The school's policies and practices to safeguard students and minimise risks are excellent. The staff recruitment policy and procedures are robust and implemented diligently. Comprehensive staff training and practices in child protection, first aid and fire safety contribute to a safe environment where procedures are implemented consistently. All staff are aware of the school's expectations for the management of behaviour, the prevention of bullying and the preparation of suitable risk assessments. All aspects of premises and fire safety are carefully risk-assessed and regular records are maintained of the testing of fire safety equipment. The headteacher is vigilant in ensuring that all policies and procedures comply with the latest DfE guidance and the continuous training of staff is given a high priority.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the compulsory checks on the suitability of staff and proprietors are implemented consistently. Details of these checks are recorded in the required single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is housed in the premises of the previous village primary school. The accommodation has been refurbished and re-modelled to a high standard to provide excellent facilities for safe and effective learning. The premises are maintained and decorated to a high standard and present a bright and welcoming environment. There is ample outside space, including hard-surfaced and garden areas, which are used well for a number of learning activities.

Provision of information

The school provides clear, relevant and up-to-date information for parents and carers. The prospectus makes it clear that parents and carers may request copies of any of the school's policies. Annual reports on students' progress in personal development and in the various subjects of the curriculum are detailed and comprehensive; these are supplemented appropriately with termly summary reports.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's policy and procedures for managing 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 attendance of persistent absentees to a target of at least 91% annually.
- Develop a systematic approach to the consistent development of writing across all subjects.
- Implement the ideas for the further development of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension of the curriculum, as identified by the recent audit of practice.

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	Secondary day school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	November 2008		
Age range of pupils	11-18 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 9	Girls: 2	Total: 11
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,760		
Address of school	The Old School Holyhead Road Bicton Shrewsbury SY3 8EQ		
Telephone number	01743 850517		
Email address	jacqui.brooks@evolution-centre.co.uk		
Headteacher	Jacqui Brooks		
Proprietor	Reflexion Care Group 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.



16 November 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Evolution Centre, Shrewsbury SY3 8EQ

I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed sampling the burgers and the cup-cakes which you prepared so well. The inspection judged that The Evolution Centre provides you with a good quality of education. I was pleased to be able to visit a number of your lessons and to see the interesting things that you are learning. I was particularly impressed with the good use that you and your teachers make of computers, the digital projector and interactive whiteboards. You enjoy a wide range of practical activities in your learning and these are helping you to make good progress. Your teachers and support assistants work very hard to make sure that you have good opportunities to learn and to achieve qualifications. The project work on Thursday afternoon was particularly interesting and I hope you are successful in selling your products and raising the amount of money that you have planned. You told me that you feel safe in school and that you believe that you are making good progress. The results of the inspection agree that this is true. You are also pleased that you are making good progress in your personal development, learning to get along well together and to control your behaviour. You should be proud of your good behaviour in school, and I was delighted to see the respect that you show to adults.

Most of you attend school regularly and take your work seriously. A small number of you are not so good at getting to school every day, and you are not always on time. I have asked the staff to continue to help you to improve in these areas. I saw some excellent examples of high quality written work in your books. I have asked the headteacher and staff to make sure that you all have good opportunities to improve your writing in all the subjects that you study. I have also asked them to find new and interesting ways to help you to improve your knowledge and understanding of the variety of lifestyles and cultures of different groups of people in this country and overseas. I would like to wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Young
Lead inspector