

Sheridan House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Linda Killman 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

Sheridan House School, in rural Norfolk, is part of the Priory Group's education provision. It opened in October 1983 as an independent residential special school for boys and moved to its current, new premises in 2009. In July 2012, the school extended its age range to accommodate boys and girls aged between eight and 19 years with capacity to take up to 40 students accessing full-time education. About a third are weekly or full-time boarders either on site or at Brook House (the former Sheridan House) near Thetford, and the others attend as day students, some travelling considerable distances each day. The residential provision is inspected separately and did not form part of this inspection. The education provision was last inspected in December 2009 and the residential provision early in November 2012. The school has just started to provide education for post-16 students at Brook House. Some students accessing this provision are dual-registered with local colleges.

There are 31 students on roll, all of whom have statements of special educational needs to support their complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some have additional needs and/or disabilities such as autism, post-traumatic stress disorder or attachment disorder. Pupils are placed by local authorities in the East Midlands and London regions. All pupils are at risk of exclusion or have been excluded permanently from mainstream schools and/or maintained special schools. The school aims to help young people to make a successful transition into adulthood with an acceptable set of personal qualities and values. In addition, it aims to provide an appropriate educational experience that will allow them to participate positively as valued members of society and to achieve greater independence in their adult lives.

Evaluation of the school

Sheridan House provides a good quality of education. The provision for students' health, welfare and safety, including the arrangements for safeguarding, has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are outstanding; they are making exceptional progress in self-regulating their anger and anti-social behaviour, frequently exceeding professionals' expectations before they joined the school.

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

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

Excellent guidance from all staff, coupled with extremely good communication with parents and carers, social workers and health professionals, have a significant effect on students' learning and their good academic achievement. The school meets all of the independent school regulations.

Quality of education

The provision for primary and secondary students is good; the post-16 provision, which is in the early stages of development, is satisfactory. The quality of the curriculum is good overall and it prepares students effectively for the next stage of their education and adult life. The school has a secure curriculum policy, underpinned by clear and detailed schemes of work in all the required areas of learning. Good planning ensures that skills are taught systematically and most students make good progress. The development of students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT) is well prioritised. All students are entered for externally accredited courses. These include functional skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, Entry Level in a range of subjects, BTEC courses and GCSE. Nearly all Year 11 students achieved a pass in GCSE mathematics in 2012 and all went on to further education or training. The curriculum covers a wide range of academic and practical subjects from Years 4 to 11, but it is more limited for the post-16 age range. It takes into account students' complex learning, personal, social and emotional needs outlined in their statements of special educational needs.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. Teachers follow the National Curriculum programmes of study for students of compulsory school age. Schemes of work take into account individual students' interests and talents. In all subjects, teachers make regular checks to make sure that all students are making at least the same progress expected of all students nationally. Students are closely involved in assessing their progress. They know exactly the level that the work is set at and decide whether or not they have achieved it at certain points during each lesson. Some of the systems for testing students' knowledge, understanding and skills are extremely effective. For example, in food technology key skills such as dicing, sautéing and rolling dough are broken down into levels and students use these to self-check their performance. A discussion with the teacher confirms the level they have reached and they know exactly what to do to reach the next level. Suitable provision is made for careers education and work experience for students of compulsory school age. Post-16 students develop self-knowledge and independent skills through the careers guidance system.

In the main school, teaching is good in all subjects and in some, such as drama, physical education (PE), food technology and numeracy in Key Stage 2, it is outstanding. The best teaching is extremely skilful in ensuring that students understand the purpose of the learning and ensures that it is set in a context that students can relate to. For example, in drama, all students were highly motivated to practise techniques to develop characters because they were preparing for a performance for families and friends. They worked with complete cooperation, often supporting and spontaneously applauding each other. Others painstakingly decorated

gingerbread houses they were making for a Christmas exhibition demonstrating high levels of concentration, precision, skill and creativity. Boys and girls energetically participated in a competitive game of rugby while learning new skills to enhance their chances of winning. In all of these activities, students were fully engaged in their learning and no time was wasted as result of poor behaviour. They made good progress in learning new skills and outstanding progress in their social skills and behaviour, with strong support for each other. In all subjects, teachers' assessments of students' learning are accurate. Some staff, however, are better than others at using this information to adjust tasks in lessons so that the learning is pitched at precisely the right level of difficulty for everyone in the group. This is particularly the case where students are required to write or record their findings. Here, students who are capable of writing independently often use worksheets that are suitable for those who need much more structure to be successful. Opportunities are too few for students to write independently and at length in most subjects.

The school day is organised in a similar format to that which is found in most maintained schools, giving students the opportunity to take responsibility and show that they can be independent and trusted. Primary-aged students spend most of their day with their class teacher in the 'Rainbows Room' which is fully equipped to deliver the full range of subjects. Older students are taught by subject specialists and move around the school's specialist rooms. Students are allocated to a tutor group (with a maximum of four students) and are accompanied throughout the day by a highly skilled teaching assistant. Teaching assistants provide excellent support and guidance, often reshaping the learning in class when students hit momentary barriers such as a sudden loss in confidence through lack of understanding or temporary emotional upset. Teachers use ICT advantageously to support their teaching; students have plentiful access to ICT to use, where appropriate, in their learning. The school has devised sophisticated ways to track pupils' academic progress and personal development over time and provide helpful feedback to students and their parents and carers. Meetings with the placing authority are held regularly to check that provision is working and to make any adjustments, if necessary.

The post-16 curriculum was introduced in September 2012 and is not fully established. Refurbishment work is underway at the Brook House site to increase post-16 students' access to a range of vocational studies such as plumbing, painting and decorating, and beauty therapy. Some students follow courses, such as hair and beauty or construction, at local colleges in addition to AQA and ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) courses at the school. Students attending this alternative provision participate well and make good progress. Current levels of staffing in the post-16 provision provide little flexibility in approaches to meet the needs of all students the school's provision. Students' access to ICT is currently limited at Brook House.

The school makes appropriate provision for students' personal, social and health education and citizenship education for all its students, including those post-16. Promotion of healthy lifestyles includes eating and sleeping habits, active lifestyles,

emotional well-being and sexual health. Students learn to be acutely aware of the potential dangers of social networking on the internet, cyber- and other forms of bullying. Everything possible is done to make students feel safe, especially following a personal crisis. Their well-being, mental health and medical conditions are monitored closely and a team of specialist therapists provide onsite consultations. This provides flexibility of access and helps students to build trust in those they work with. Therapy and education staff work in harmony in the best interests of students to promote their good learning. There are good links between the care staff and the education staff and information about students, including assessments of how well they have done in their work, is shared daily in handover sessions. The 24 hour curriculum is effectively implemented and extra-curricular opportunities are carefully coordinated to ensure students can participate in their chosen activity.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The good curriculum supports and promotes students' outstanding personal, social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. The excellent behaviour policy is applied consistently by all staff. The system of rewards and sanctions, using points and stars, is clearly understood and enables students to earn treats and privileges as well as to redeem themselves should they have 'a naughty day', as one student described it.

Students' cultural awareness is enhanced by regular teaching about diversity and celebrations in major world religions. The school is inclusive and any discrimination is not tolerated. Year 11 students confidently explained the 'family feel' that the school's ethos promotes with no-one left out because of their appearance, difficulties or background. Attendance rates are high and, despite the long distances that day students travel, they arrive on time. They attend a range of clubs after school, with special arrangements made for day students so that they are able to take part if they wish. Equality of opportunity is high on the school's agenda. Students frequently start at the school with low self-esteem and self-worth. All have experienced troubled and turbulent lives, and have failed to thrive in other educational settings. They rapidly gain in confidence and learn to accept responsibility for their actions. Term-by-term, the frequency of incidents of poor behaviour diminish markedly. This is why students' behaviour is outstanding. The headteacher of a local maintained secondary school sends staff to Sheridan House to see how well the most challenging students can behave and learn. A social worker endorsed this, commenting that all of the students he has been involved with have made remarkable progress in their behaviour and have exceeded the expectations of health and social care professionals. Students are courteous to visitors and very willing to engage respectfully in conversation with adults. Meal times are especially pleasant where staff and students catch up with each other in a relaxed atmosphere.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is outstanding. Risk assessments are extremely thorough and identify the particular risks for individual

students. The school's behaviour policy is extremely well implemented. The senior teacher responsible for behaviour advises staff on positive behaviour strategies designed to reduce anxiety, risk and restraint, while providing the highest level of safeguarding at or away from the school site. Record keeping is meticulous and carefully checked. Students are always supervised and they believe strongly that staff care about them. The school's anti-bullying policy is well known to students who confirm that if there is even a suggestion of bullying, it is nipped in the bud because students will tell staff and they take action quickly. All the required policies are in place and they are clearly written in accessible language. For example, a separate complaints policy is available for students to guide them, should they need it. All staff receive regular training in child protection, first aid and fire safety. The designated professional for child protection is well-informed and highly trained. Child protection is high on the school's agenda and procedures are regularly reviewed. Recruitment and vetting procedures are rigorous and fully reflect the Secretary of State's guidance.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Procedures for verifying the suitability of all staff and the proprietor, including obtaining enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, meet requirements. All checks are systematically recorded on a single central record.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The main school accommodation is bright, clean, comfortable, warm, safe and well-maintained. Teaching rooms are entirely suitable for learning and students have access to break-out areas that they can elect to use for some space to reflect. All teaching rooms have access to ICT for staff and students. There are well-equipped specialist rooms for ICT, food technology, design technology and science. A separate block is dedicated to therapists for one-to-one work with students. Students have access to a pleasant outdoor space with facilities for ball games, such as football and basketball, and this is used extensively. Security arrangements ensure that students are safe. The school makes good use of facilities in the local community for some sports and leisure activities. Although requirements are met, the teaching space at Brook Hall is currently limited for post-16 students. Refurbishment of this accommodation is underway, with completion set for the end of January 2013. This will provide specialist teaching areas for a range of vocational courses and studies.

Provision of information

All regulations are met. The special needs coordinator ensures that parents and carers are well-informed about their children's academic progress and personal development. The school attends all statutory reviews, provides detailed reports and a taxi service to ensure that parents and carers are able to attend. The school prides itself on keeping in regular contact ensuring that 'good news' messages are passed

on as well as any concerns. The school prospectus is a generic Priory prospectus. Although it contains all relevant information, it does not explain the school's uniqueness and ethos to give parents and carers a true flavour of all that the school provides.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's very clear complaints policy and procedures meet all the 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:

- Extend and develop provision for post-16 students to allow greater flexibility in staffing, the range of vocational courses on offer and access to ICT.
- Allow more opportunities for all students, particularly the most able, to write independently and extensively in all subjects.
- Design a school prospectus that reflects more accurately the school's uniqueness.

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	Residential/Day Special School		
Date school opened	November 1983		
Age range of pupils	8–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 22	Girls: 9	Total: 31
Number of boarders	Boys: 9	Girls: 4	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 22	Girls: 9	Total: 13
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 3	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,400–£98,000		
Annual fees (boarders)	£172,800–£267,000		
Address of school	Thetford Rd, Northwold, Thetford, IP26 5LQ		
Telephone number	01366 726040		
Email address	janetcopeland@priorygroup.com		
Headteacher	Janet Copeland		
Proprietor	Andrew Clark		

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.



30 November 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Sheridan House School, Thetford, IP26 5LQ

It was an absolute pleasure to meet you when my colleague and I came to inspect the school. I would like to thank you for being so welcoming and willing to talk to us. This helped us greatly in reaching our judgements. One inspector spent a whole day at Brook House and found that the education provided there was satisfactory. We know that there is a lot of work going on at Brook House to improve what is on offer there currently. I have asked the school to make sure this happens. I saw nothing less than good teaching at Sheridan House and in some cases it was outstanding (a word inspectors use for excellent). The way you worked in drama, food technology and PE was impressive. The good humour shared between you and the adults showed me that learning at Sheridan House is good fun and you all get on well together. Lunch in the dining room was like joining a huge family for a tasty meal in good company.

I judged your behaviour as outstanding. You receive superb help and guidance from staff throughout the day to help you to make the right choices. That is not to say that your behaviour is faultless. Some of you do have 'naughty days and moments' but it is fantastic how quickly your behaviour improves once you come to Sheridan House. Your scores for collecting points and stars rise quickly term after term so that you can earn rewards. Your attendance is excellent even though some of you travel a very long way to school every day. The staff are not only interested in how well you do academically, but they also want to help you to behave well and get along with others. Best of all, because you achieve well, you all continue to learn and develop your skills once you leave school. All of you gain some qualifications and awards. I think that some of you could write more than you do in some lessons and I have asked the school to encourage this.

I wish you all the very best in whatever you choose to do in life in the future. You are all doing really well at Sheridan House achieving more in your learning and behaving better than ever before. I am sure the Christmas show and exhibition will be a 'wow' to all who come and see it.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector