

The Birches

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 Birches is a small residential special school owned by Whistledawn Ltd and run by Northern Care. It provides up to 39 weeks education for a maximum of six boys. Some are emergency placements while others are planned placements. The school is registered for students between the ages of 11 and 16 years. Currently there are six students on roll. The school is situated in a residential area of Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire. The school opened in 2002. It takes students from locations across the country. All have experienced interruptions in their educational history, for example, through repeated family moves or a succession of permanent exclusions. The average length of stay is approximately one year. Four of the students have statements of special educational needs for severe emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The school's aim is to equip students for mainstream education and to assist them in their personal development. The school's last full education inspection was in May 2009. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2012 and is reported separately.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and, together with good teaching and assessment, enables students to make good progress in their learning. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and their behaviour is good. The school's promotion of the welfare, health and safety of students and the arrangements for safeguarding are good. The school has improved since the last inspection and fully meets its aims.

Quality of education

The quality of the education provided by the school is good. The good curriculum provides broad and balanced experiences in all of the required areas of learning. It meets the needs of students of varying abilities, including those with special educational needs. Nearly all students arrive at the school with very low attainment and most with negative attitudes towards school and education. The curriculum is designed to make school interesting and exciting; it meets these aims well and, after a short time, students become fully engaged and make good progress. The

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

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

curriculum is supported by good plans and schemes of work which are individualised to meet the specific needs and interests of the students. The requirements set out in students' statements of the special educational needs are systematically reflected in the provision the school makes for them. The policy for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSCHE) is particularly well-implemented. Education and care staff work together to promote PSCHE at every turn. As a result, students improve their social skills, and learn about healthy lifestyles and being responsible citizens.

The school achieves its aims through well-structured lessons, extra-curricular activities and visits. Students enjoy school trips and see them as part of their education. They learn about horticulture while working at the school's allotment and make good use of the local library. They take part in many sporting activities, such as badminton, fishing, sailing, canoeing and golf, and participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. They have visited a football stadium and watched an ice hockey game. These activities make a very positive contribution to students' attitudes towards learning; they foster aspirations and lead to good progress in all areas of learning.

The curriculum helps students prepare for the responsibilities of adult life through providing valuable, enjoyable educational experiences. The school has initiated contact with local schools, colleges and training providers in order to gauge provision in the area to facilitate the transition of students. A strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy in all subjects ensures that students are supported in gaining accreditation within the school and suitably prepared for the next stage of their education. Staff from the local Young People's Services visit the school regularly and advise students on possibilities for further education and careers. Students are active members of the school community and take a role in determining programmes of study and establishing school rules. On occasions, they cook meals, help decorate the home for holidays and the school with displays of their work.

The curriculum provides a range of accredited courses of study. These include short units of work which are accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), together with Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Entry Levels and GCSE courses, where appropriate. Students develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) through discreet lessons or as part of other subjects such as science, modern foreign languages and art. The school has improved in its provision of art, and design and technology, since the last inspection and has a room that is designated and equipped for these subjects. However, the provision for drama and music is underdeveloped.

Teaching and assessment are good. Lessons are planned and paced very well, and often integrate a wide range of subjects. Examples of this include a science lesson that included elements of ICT and literacy, and an English lesson that stressed elements of history and media studies. Students like this approach to learning and say that they find lessons interesting. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and impart this well to their students. They are genuinely interested in the subjects that they teach and share this enthusiastically with the students. As a result, they act

as good role models and create an environment that is conducive to learning. Students produce good standards of work and are proud of their accomplishments; one student looked for the headteacher at the end of an art lesson to show him a piece of art that he had created. Teachers understand the aptitudes and need of their students; they adjust individual learning programmes appropriately and plan lessons accordingly. As a result, students make good progress in their learning. When students join the school, they are given baseline assessments that inform their individual learning programmes. Assessments at regular intervals help teachers monitor progress and make adjustments to provision when necessary. In addition, informal and formal assessments are undertaken regularly to assess the social and emotional development of each student.

Students are punctual to lessons; they are active learners and take part in discussions amongst themselves and with teachers. They have plenty of opportunities to learn independently and collaboratively. The school's good range of resources enables the effective delivery of the curriculum; in an outstanding mathematics lesson, the teacher used a variety of objects to help students learn about probability. Interesting lessons and the even application of the school's systems for behaviour management ensure that students are well engaged in lessons and that behaviour is consistently good.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Students are inquisitive but courteous and make visitors feel welcome. The school places strong emphasis on helping students develop socially and morally. It does this well through PSCH and frequent discussions with education and care staff. Students take part in regular group discussions that cover important topics such as bullying, drug misuse, team work, emotions, children's rights, peer pressure and anti-social behaviour. These sessions are led by staff and occasionally by visitors to the school, including the local parish priest. Discussions help students grow in self-esteem and confidence. Students improve their social and economic skills through project work on managing budgets and semi-independent living. They gain insights into becoming responsible members of society through their studies about money such as managing a bank account, utility bills and income tax.

Students develop good relationships with teachers and care staff; they feel respected and, as a result, discuss important social and moral issues with them. They have good attitudes towards learning; attendance for most students is good and lessons start punctually. Spiritual development is promoted through religious education, visits to different places of worship and visitors to the school. It is further supported through food technology, art and outdoor activities when students gain an appreciation of beauty and nature. These studies and activities promote students' cultural development and their development of tolerance and understanding about other cultures well. Students contribute to the community through ground clearance and planting at the local library, clearing the local churchyard and visiting the local

home for the elderly. These activities led to the school winning first prize in a national competition that promoted young people becoming involved in the community. They raise funds for charity through 'Red Nose day', a coast-to-coast bike ride, a swim-a-thon and sponsored walk. They learn about public institutions through PSCH and visits, for example, to Kirkham Prison.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for student's welfare, health and safety is good. The school's policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust and students are safe at school. All staff, including the designated person, are suitably trained in safeguarding at the required intervals and a safer recruitment policy is implemented effectively. All of the required policies and procedures, including those for first-aid, have full regard for the welfare, health and safety of students and are implemented effectively. The premises comply with all health and safety requirements and the school has good regard for fire safety. Fire drills are conducted regularly and are accurately recorded.

The school carries out thorough risk assessments for all activities, both in and out of school to ensure that students are always kept safe. Students have good guidance on how to lead healthy lifestyles and receive consistent advice on how to curb dangerous habits, such as smoking. The school robustly follows its e-safety policy and students are aware of the dangers of using the internet inappropriately. The school works closely with care staff and has developed good relationships with outside agencies to support students well. The school's policies to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying among students are implemented effectively. Admission and attendance registers are kept in good order and all incidents and sanctions are systematically recorded.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out the required checks on staff and the proprietor and maintains a single central register which complies with regulations.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is located in a large detached house in a residential area. The accommodation is well-maintained and enables the effective delivery of the curriculum. It has a good-sized classroom, a room that is used for art, and design and technology, and a kitchen area with worktops and a sink. The classroom is equipped with computers that students use for work and research during lessons. There is a small classroom equipped with three other computers that is used when students need a quieter place to work. The accommodation has a dining area and a suitable room for students that become ill. Outdoors, there is a garden area which is used for physical recreation and leisure. Local facilities, such as the sports centre, gymnasium and swimming pool, are used to support the provision of physical education.

Provision of information

The school prospectus includes all of the required details. Parents and carers are sent reports that keep them informed about their child's progress every term.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for handling complaints meet 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 school's provision for music and drama.
- Forge stronger links with local mainstream schools and colleges in order share ideas and practice and to facilitate the transition of students.

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 - for students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties		
Date school opened	2002		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 0	Total: 5
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 0	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£15,340		
Address of school	106 Breck Road Poulton-le-Fyde Lancashire FY6 7HT		
Telephone number	01253 892305		
Email address	Tony.rigby@northern-care.co.uk		
Headteacher	Tony Rigby		
Proprietor	Whistledawn 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.



6 December 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Birches, Poulton-le-Fyde, FY6 7HT

I really enjoyed inspecting your school. Thank you for welcoming me and for spending time speaking to me about your school. I spent my time observing lessons, speaking to staff and looking through your work and school policies and documents. During our discussions, you told me that lessons are interesting and bring together a range of subjects and topics. You said that you like your teachers and are happy with the resources that they use to support lessons.

I found that your school provides you with a good level of education and that it promotes your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. I was very impressed by your good behaviour and the ways that you engage in your studies. You have really good attitudes towards learning and are respectful towards your teachers.

I have suggested that the school improve its provision of drama and music. I have also suggested that the school forge stronger links with local mainstream schools and colleges so that it can share ideas with them and ensure that those of you that go on to mainstream education have a smooth transition.

I am sure that you will continue to take good advantage of the education that the school provides and I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Chanan Tomlin
Lead Inspector