

# The Amicus School

2 Yeoman's Nursery, Warningcamp, Arundel, West Sussex, BN18 9QY

**Inspection dates** 27–28 February 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management	Adequate	3

## Summary of key findings

### This school is adequate because

- While teaching has some strengths which ensure students' adequate achievement, lesson planning and learning activities do not take sufficient account of students' different ages and capabilities. Students do not have a good enough understanding of exactly what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Students make good progress in some aspects of their personal development and their behaviour and attitudes improve during their time at the school, but disturbances and other difficulties interfere with learning.
- A lack of continuity in staffing has resulted in very patchy records of students' achievements. Assessment records do not show clearly how much progress students have made from their starting points.
- There is not enough difference in the curriculum provided for younger secondary-aged students and older students.
- Leaders and managers have already begun to address weaknesses by introducing improvements to the curriculum and to teaching but these improvements are at an early stage of development.

### The school has the following strengths

- The procedures for recruiting staff are very thorough and rigorously applied.
- Amicus's therapeutic approach enables students to make good progress in their emotional development.
- Leaders oversee a very comprehensive programme of staff training that ensures students' safety and well-being.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- Two lessons and two teachers were observed and records of the school's own monitoring of lessons were considered.
- Meetings were held with directors of the proprietorial company, the headteacher and other staff. No parents, carers or local authorities submitted their views about the school. Two members of staff completed questionnaires.
- Students' work files and records of achievement were scrutinised.
- A wide range of school policies and procedures was examined.

## Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Amicus School is a small day special school for a maximum of six boys and girls aged five to 16 years. All of the four students currently on roll are boys of secondary school age.
- The proprietor is The Amicus Community Limited, a company that provides specialist therapeutic services for children through its ownership of the school and two residential homes.
- All students are children in care and live in one of the Amicus residential houses located in the local area.
- The school only admits students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and who have a statement of special educational needs.
- The Amicus Community aims to ensure that children with severe emotional difficulties can feel safe, cared for and understood, and have enjoyable educational experiences.
- None of the staff were in post when the school was last inspected in November 2009. All of them have been appointed within the past two years.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by more detailed and focused planning of activities that are tailored to accelerate each individual student's progress.
- Develop further the procedures for assessing students' work and recording and tracking attainment, along with improving marking and the quality of comments that show students how to improve.
- Develop the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 by improving the work-related learning programme through increased opportunities to follow accredited courses and strengthened links with local colleges.
- The school must meet the following independent school standard.
  - Maintain an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006<sup>1</sup> (paragraph 17).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/contents/made).

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

#### Adequate

Students' achievement is adequate. All students have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and they enter the school following placement in a care home. Therefore, even though students' transition into school is planned and managed well, they take significant time to settle. Initially, the school concentrates on providing stability and helping students to re-engage with education. It does this well, but it does not then build on this good start by accelerating the pace of learning. Overall, students make adequate progress.

Higher achievement is prevented by a combination of factors. Curriculum planning does not discriminate enough between the needs of Key Stages 3 and 4 students. Teaching encourages students to learn, but the degree of challenge is not always at a level that indicates the very highest expectations. Furthermore, students' unpredictable behaviour and attitudes in lessons occasionally hinder more rapid learning. Despite this, students make adequate progress in lessons in acquiring key literacy and numeracy skills. They make satisfactory improvement in developing all aspects of their communication skills. This gives them growing confidence and competence to take part in social interactions as well as helping them to get around and make sense of day-to-day situations, such as reading signs, notices and instructions. Their growing confidence with numbers in particular also enables them to function better in everyday situations such as measurement and calculating cost.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

#### Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is adequate overall but they make good progress in some aspects. When they arrive in the school, they generally have a poor self-image, lack confidence, display negative attitudes and have a history of very disruptive and challenging behaviour. They find it very difficult to build relationships and are wary of people that they do not know well. Students make significant improvements in some aspects of their personal development, which reflects not only the success of the school's personal, social and health education programme (PSHE), but also the impact of the caring and understanding therapeutic approach that it deploys to help students to grow as young people.

Students learn how to build trusting relationships with adults, although these are sometimes fragile. They also gain insight into how to express their views and feelings in appropriate and socially acceptable ways, and can frequently translate this understanding into actions. At times, they are mature young people who readily engage in conversation and who remain calm in potentially stressful situations by expressing their feelings, and possibly anger, verbally rather than through their behaviour. At other times, they turn very quickly into challenging and defiant young people with little appreciation of making the right choice or of understanding that actions have consequences. Students' attendance is high because they are always transported from their place of residence to school, but their punctuality for lessons is more erratic. Students show an adequate awareness of British institutions and of other beliefs, cultures and faiths.

### Quality of teaching

#### Adequate

Teaching is adequate. There are some strengths in the quality of teaching but also weaknesses that the school has yet to address.

A high ratio of adults to students enables staff to prompt and guide students' learning as well as encouraging them to maintain focus and to manage their behaviour themselves. Staff are calm and

remain positive even when students lose concentration or become difficult. However, teachers' planning is not always sufficient for the very wide age and attainment range of the students. In the lessons observed, instances were seen of activities meeting students' interests and capabilities and capturing their imagination. This was because, when planning the activities, teachers had acknowledged students' prior achievements. For example, work on building structures using simple resources, including wine gums, saw students remaining engaged and time being used productively. However, learning was less rapid when there was not such a good match between what students are capable of doing and what was being asked of them. Part of the reason for this is that although students' National Curriculum levels of attainment are now assessed termly, staff do not always take enough notice of individuals' attainment levels in reading and writing.

Students' work is marked regularly, but they are not routinely told exactly what they need to do in order to improve the standard of their work. Past assessment data, including attainment on entry, are lacking so that until recently, the school had no accurate measure of students' progress over time. Students' work is now being assessed using levels and recorded regularly so that a picture of progress is being obtained.

### **Quality of curriculum**

### **Adequate**

Students follow an adequate curriculum. The Key Stage 3 curriculum enables students to make adequate progress through a reasonably wide range of learning opportunities that is underpinned by a good focus on literacy, numeracy and PSHE. Breadth is provided through subjects such as science, art, geography and design and technology.

The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is not different enough from that in Key Stage 3, although it promotes adequate progress and preparation for leaving school. The continued focus on developing core literacy and numeracy is supplemented by a small amount of careers education and work-related learning, but the vocational education programme generally is underdeveloped in terms of offering students a varied range of accredited courses in school or through links with local colleges. Specific arrangements benefit individual students, such as a link with a neighbouring mainstream school to enable a Key Stage 4 student to attend weekly physical education lessons. Other activities are available to develop students' self-help skills and these make a good contribution to encouraging their independence. For instance, the daily rota for working with staff to prepare lunch is a valuable addition to the curriculum.

All students make good, regular use of other local facilities, including the local swimming pool. Additionally, they all benefit from the input of partners such as staff from Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club, who visit to take games lessons and other outdoor activities, such as orienteering. The school makes good use of visits into the community to reinforce learning in real-life situations.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

### **Adequate**

There is adequate provision to ensure the welfare, health and safety of students. It is not good provision because the attendance register does not record students' absences correctly. This shortcoming does not put students at risk as the school always knows students' exact whereabouts. Other aspects of provision are extremely good. The procedures for appointing staff are rigorously applied and candidates are vetted very carefully. All required checks are carried out and they are recorded in a well-organised single central register. Once they have been appointed, staff pursue a well-structured programme of initial and refresher training for aspects of safeguarding such as child protection and the use of physical restraint, and they are also trained first aiders. Risk assessments are thorough and fire equipment is checked and serviced correctly, with fire drills being carried out at regular intervals.

The school has a good range of policies and procedures to encourage students' behaviour and to develop their respect for others. These include policies for child protection, health and safety and anti-bullying and they are applied successfully. They incorporate clear guidelines for students about the consequences of persistent unacceptable low-level misbehaviour, such as the loss of points on students' daily self-assessment of their behaviour. They also draw attention to the implications of much more serious one-off incidents. Close supervision and the application of relevant procedures ensure that students work free of any form of bullying or harassment.

### **Leadership and management**

### **Adequate**

Leadership and management are adequate. The proprietor has ensured that the premises and accommodation meet all regulations and are fit for purpose; all of the information that parents, carers and local authorities are entitled to receive is made readily available to them, and the procedure for making a complaint is easy to use and meets all requirements. However, the organisation has not been so effective in improving the quality of education by building upon the positive findings of the last inspection report. This is because the high turnover of education staff, including headteachers, has made it difficult to sustain any continuity of provision.

There is now some evidence of the impact of more stable leadership. Curriculum initiatives, such as links with other schools, have been recently implemented and others are planned, and teachers' classroom practice is now being more regularly monitored and evaluated. This is beginning to have an impact on improving students' learning by raising expectations. Historical shortcomings in leadership and management are most apparent in the absence of long-term assessment data and of a procedure for tracking students' progress over time. The school is aware that it needs to record, analyse and respond to such information but the procedure is at a very early stage of being implemented. Ambitious school improvement planning is well advanced in other respects, such as developing more curriculum links with partners, improving the quality of teaching and radical development to the school site and accommodation.

The proprietor has ensured that all but one of the regulations for independent schools are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131504
<b>Inspection number</b>	397759
<b>DfE registration number</b>	938/6265

This inspection was carried out 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School status</b>	Independent School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	4
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Amicus Community Limited
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annie Richardson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25–26 November 2009
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£65,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01903 885135
<b>Fax number</b>	01903 885135
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