

ASD Learning Centre - Gravesend

42–44 Harmer Street, Gravesend, DA12 2AX

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2013

Overall effectiveness

	Overall effectiveness	Score
Pupils' achievement	Inadequate	4
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Inadequate	4
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

This school is inadequate because

- The proprietor and the school's managers have policies and written procedures in place but have failed to monitor their impact sufficiently. The main consequence is that pupils are making inadequate progress.
- Pupils do not make enough progress because of shortcomings in the curriculum and the lack of time to deliver it properly.
- The curriculum is not matched closely to the needs of the pupils. There is virtually no difference between that offered to Key Stage 3 pupils and post-16 students.
- The procedure for tracking pupils' progress over time lacks rigour and it is not based on pupils' movement through National Curriculum levels, making it difficult to compare their performance with others of similar age and attainment elsewhere.
- Pupils are not prepared well enough for leaving school. There are no planned work-related learning or careers programmes.
- Inadequate use is made of external educational providers to better meet pupils' individual curriculum needs, such as through college-based vocational courses.

The school has the following strengths

- The school helps most pupils to re-engage with education and to attend more regularly than they did in their previous schools.
- Staff interact well with pupils and develop very positive relationships with them, encouraging them to communicate their feelings, concerns and anxieties.

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

- The school was given one day's notice of the inspection.
- The inspector observed two group lessons and 10 one-to-one tutorials as well as afternoon activities.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher and centre manager, and many conversations were had with pupils.
- No parents or carers gave their opinion of the school through the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), although one contacted the inspector by email. The inspector gathered the staff's views through the 12 questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school was first registered in June 2012 as a special school for up to 20 pupils in the age range 8 to 19 years. This is its first inspection.
- The proprietor is ASD Learning Limited, a company that owns and manages this centre and four similar ones.
- The school is sited in what were formerly the offices of a local newspaper. The two-storey building is located on a busy road in the centre of Gravesend.
- There are 20 pupils on roll from four different local authorities: Kent, Medway and the London boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich. Two are primary-aged pupils, 13 are in Key Stages 3 and 4 and five are post-16 pupils.
- All of the 18 boys and two girls have been permanently excluded from their previous school or were in danger of exclusion. All of them have a statement of special educational needs for autism or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school works with one partner educational provider, Kickstart. It also uses additional, external provision for physical education.
- The school aims to 'provide high quality alternative provision for young people who are excluded or otherwise without a school placement or appropriate provision'. It intends to do this by providing 'a different approach to learning, with a flexible approach, designed around the individual young person's needs'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by ensuring that all teachers have high expectations and consistently plan challenging activities that match all pupils' capabilities when they are taught in groups, and which encourage them to learn independently.
- Raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that the most efficient use is made of all of the time available for learning by making sure that:
 - all lessons start and finish on time and breaks do not overrun
 - pupils arrive punctually in the morning and that they are not allowed to leave at the end of the day before school officially closes.
- Further develop and implement the curriculum so that:
 - post-16 pupils receive a curriculum that is substantially different to that provided for younger age groups
 - a work-related learning programme is introduced, which includes the use of alternative education providers for vocational training courses if pupils require them
 - a wider range of accredited courses is made available
 - much better use is made of the learning time that is available each afternoon.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers by ensuring that the information that they collect, such as assessment data, the outcomes of lesson observations and information about pupils' behaviour, is collated and analysed much more robustly.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
 - Implement effectively its curriculum policy, plans and schemes of work (paragraph 2(1)).
 - Ensure that the curriculum gives pupils a more consolidated experience in the following areas of learning: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social,

- physical, and aesthetic and creative (paragraph 2(2)(a)).
- Ensure that the curriculum is appropriate for the different ages and aptitudes of the pupils (paragraph 2(2)(b)).
- Ensure that the curriculum gives pupils a more consolidated chance to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy (paragraph 2(2)(c)).
- Ensure that the curriculum properly fulfils the requirements of the statements of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(e)).
- Devise and implement a careers education and guidance programme (paragraph 2(2)(g)).
- Plan and implement a curriculum that is appropriate to the needs of pupils above compulsory school age (paragraph 2(2)(h)).
- Plan the curriculum better to ensure that it provides more planned opportunities for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 2(2)(i)).
- Prepare pupils better for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 2(2)(j)).
- Implement a framework for monitoring and evaluating effectively pupils' progress over time (paragraph (4)).
- Provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education using local amenities that do not have changing and showering facilities (paragraph 23A(1)(c)).
- Fit a washing facility in the accommodation that is used for the short-term care of sick and injured pupils (paragraph 23B(1)(b)).
- Include reference to the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language in the information that the school makes available to parents and carers of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Inadequate

Pupils' achievement is inadequate, with no difference in the performance of different groups of pupils. Despite learning at an adequate pace when they are in lessons, pupils do not make enough progress overall because of weaknesses in curriculum planning and the lack of time available for teaching the curriculum. Time slippage is evident throughout the day; pupils' transport often arrives late in the morning, but collects them before school finishes in the afternoon, and staff are not vigilant in ensuring that lessons start and finish on time. All this results in a lack of time to deliver the curriculum properly, so affecting pupils' progress.

When pupils are in planned and organised lessons, they acquire new literacy and numeracy skills at an adequate rate and this includes the few who are taking GCSEs in English and mathematics, although none has yet completed the courses. However, such prepared and considered lessons are only timetabled in the mornings. The afternoon curriculum lacks any form of rigour or structure. There is no consideration of what pupils are expected to learn and so any progress cannot be properly evaluated by staff. Consequently, there is no evidence of how these sessions contribute to pupils' achievement. For instance, staff are not given enough guidance when identifying activities and their outcomes on planning sheets. In consequence, there are only comments on the sheets such as 'shopping at the supermarket for the centre' rather than making a connection to class-based work on money or time. As the activities are worded in this way, with no reference to what the expected outcomes are, staff cannot evaluate what pupils achieve in terms of new skills, knowledge or understanding that they demonstrate. They also cannot guarantee progression and so ensure pupils' progress.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Pupils' behaviour is adequate, as is the extent to which their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted. Pupils usually arrive at the school with a history of absenteeism and disruptive behaviour. The school does a satisfactory job in helping pupils to reverse these negative attitudes, such as improving their attendance. Most pupils now go to school more often than they did previously and so, although the school attendance is low, this is because the school roll is small and a few persistent non-attenders have a disproportionate effect on the overall figure. Pupils' punctuality for lessons is variable and staff are not assertive enough in insisting upon good time-keeping, although most usually settle once they are in class. They generally interact with each other and with adults in a reasonable and socially aware way, and they show that they understand the difference between right and wrong even though they do not always make the right choice in practice. When they make the wrong choice, such as swearing or using a mobile phone in lessons, staff generally deal with these situations quickly and effectively, reducing the possibility of it escalating into something more serious. The pupils confirm that they feel safe and that bullying is not a problem.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme plans to promote pupils' understanding of different aspects of day-to-day life, which it does with some success. As a result, pupils have opportunities to learn about people with different faiths and religions, which are presented to them in a balanced way, as well as gaining some insight into how to be a good citizen and learning about public institutions in England.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

Teaching in formal, planned morning lessons is adequate overall, although it ranges from good to a very small amount that is inadequate. Pupils are rarely taught in groups or classes. The vast majority of teaching is on a one-to-one basis. Teaching in these sessions is significantly better than

when pupils are in larger groups. Tutors know the individual pupils that they work with very well. They know what has been learned previously and they use this to plan the next set of activities. As these are usually well matched to pupils' capabilities, these one-to-one sessions generally result in adequate learning.

Larger group sessions, though still adequate overall, are generally less effective in advancing pupils' learning quickly, even though group sizes are relatively small at seven or eight pupils. This is because teachers do not routinely take into account their assessment of what pupils have learned previously, or different pupils' capability and their competence in reading and writing. Therefore, teachers do not plan for different pupils to work on different activities or with different resources. For most, this restricts their ability to tackle work independently. In turn, this can sometimes lead to frustration and hence low-level disruption, although behaviour is usually managed without too much fuss. For other, higher attaining pupils the absence of work that is challenging and tailored limits progress. Nevertheless, some useful work is done and pupils' enjoyment and positive social interaction is often clearly visible.

In the afternoons, teachers are not given the curriculum planning guidance to make the most of the sessions. However, pupils do learn and again, there are positive elements such as challenges to overcome a lack in self-confidence, positive social interaction and some gains in knowledge.

Lack of time is a major problem. There is too little time to teach the curriculum properly and ensure pupils' knowledge and understanding even in the core subjects of English and mathematics. Teachers often do their best but lack of time inhibits progress.

Quality of curriculum

Inadequate

The curriculum is inadequate because, in addition to time constraints, it is not sufficiently well planned to enable pupils to make progress in a structured, organised and progressive way. While one-to-one sessions provide some responsiveness to individual pupils' needs, overall, there is insufficient difference between the learning opportunities offered to different age groups and so pupils are not prepared well enough for leaving school and moving into education, training or employment. In particular, post-16 pupils do not follow a range of activities tailored to their age. The work-related learning curriculum is underdeveloped. There is no careers education programme and very little opportunity for pupils to follow a vocational programme; just one pupil participates in a vocational course with Kickstart, an external education provider that provides an NVQ in motorcycle mechanics. Recognition of a few pupils' achievements is available through the GCSE courses that they follow in English and mathematics, but pupils cannot currently follow any other nationally recognised accreditations, such as those for the development of functional skills. Overall, insufficient use is made of external providers.

While the school has a curriculum policy, it is not implemented effectively. Morning lessons provide curriculum breadth as subjects such as art, history and geography supplement the core curriculum of English, mathematics and PSHE, but this is not then complemented by an appropriate, planned curriculum for afternoon sessions.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Adequate

The school has adequate arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring that they are cared for and looked after. All regulations are met, and the staff are unanimous in believing that pupils are safe in school. A suitably organised approach to ensuring the suitability of all staff makes an important contribution to the school's safeguarding arrangements. The required checks on staff are made and these are logged correctly in a single central register. Pupils' health and safety are further maintained through the a training programme that ensures that staff's knowledge and skills are up to date in child protection, first aid, fire safety, food hygiene and physical intervention. The premises are safe and pupils are well supervised both on and off site as staff follow appropriate

procedures, including making risk assessments for different activities. Risk assessment for fire and other aspects of the premises is thorough.

An appropriate range of policies and procedures is used to manage pupils' behaviour. No instances of aggressive or threatening behaviour were seen, and most of the time staff and pupils interact very well and relationships appear strong. Staff listen carefully to pupils' concerns and encourage them to resolve issues for themselves, working with them to consider what the consequences of alternative actions might be. The PSHE curriculum is informative in helping pupils to understand, for instance, the dangers of substance abuse and the risks associated with unsafe internet use. Pupils' behaviour throughout the day is monitored and recorded, but leaders do not analyse this information closely enough to check if there are any patterns to the nature and frequency of any individual's instances of inappropriate behaviour, or the context in which it happens and the triggers that cause it.

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Inadequate leadership and management are adversely affecting academic and personal outcomes for pupils. Leaders have been diligent in producing almost all of the policy and procedure documentation that is required of them but they are much less vigilant in checking their impact. As a result, for instance, their lack of monitoring has not picked up the inefficient use of time or the weaknesses in the curriculum such as the ineffective afternoon learning programme.

In some respects, leaders have adequate systems for monitoring what is happening but this is not then followed up with robust evaluation of their findings. Therefore, they are not effectively teasing out the school's relative strengths and weaknesses and identifying clearly enough what needs to be done to address the latter. For instance, pupils' assessment information is monitored, but it is not then analysed in sufficient depth to evaluate progress and to compare this with the achievement of pupils of the same age and similar attainment starting points elsewhere. Furthermore, teachers' entries on daily recording sheets are not scrutinised to see how well learning is being identified and recorded, and pupils' behaviour records are not evaluated in any refined way. Teaching is observed and individuals' development areas are reported back to them, but there is no overview of teaching across the school or an indication of the common features of the least effective practice. Consequently, while the school development plan highlights some of the weaker aspects of provision that were also noted during the inspection, the plan does not properly reflect the fundamental changes that need to be made.

The school has a procedure for dealing with complaints that meets all regulations, and it provides parents and carers and local authorities with virtually all of the information that it is required to make available. The single omission relates to no reference being made to the school's provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. The premises and accommodation are fit for purpose and so most regulations are met. However, there is no washing facility in the room that is used for pupils who are unwell, and nor are there any showering facilities. Even though no physical education takes place on site, pupils use some local amenities that do not have showering facilities.

The proprietor and school leaders have failed to ensure that all the independent school regulations 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

Unique reference number	138408
Inspection number	420255
DfE registration number	886/6139

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.

Type of school	Special
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	8–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	ASD Learning Limited
Executive headteacher	Paul Mersh
Date of previous school inspection	This is the school's first inspection
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,000 – £30,000
Telephone number	01474 325999
Fax number	No fax number
Email address	paul.mersh@asdlearning.com

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