

Doucecroft School

Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, CO6 3QL

Inspection dates 21-23 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Good teaching, based on planning for each individual student and effective support in lessons, enables all students to achieve well.
- The emphasis on students' personal development provides an outstanding basis for them to learn and make progress.
- Good curriculum provision encourages students to take their place in the local community.
- Leaders and managers are implementing a clear vision for the school and have an accurate understanding of its current progress.
- Outstanding provision for students' welfare, health and safety gives them confidence to overcome their disabilities and difficulties and engage in successful learning.

It is not yet outstanding because

- There is insufficient evidence of exceptional achievement.
- The management of staff performance and its impact on achieving excellence in teaching and learning is still in the early stages of development.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets 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.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed eight lessons. Discussions were held with the director, the head of education, key teaching and support staff, visiting staff and students.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the standards for independent schools. He viewed a wide range of documentation including policies, schemes of work, the school's self-evaluation, data on students' performance, students' work and information for parents and carers.
- There were 11 responses to Ofsted's Parent View and 33 questionnaires were returned by staff.

Inspection team

Peter McKenzie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Doucecroft is a day and residential special school for up to 79 students aged three to 19 years who have autistic spectrum disorders and, increasingly, Asperger's Syndrome (ASD). The school forms part of the provision and services owned and run by Autism Anglia and is accredited by the National Autistic Society.
- There are currently 53 students aged eight to 19 years on roll; 49 boys and four girls. Fourteen students are weekly boarders. Three students are looked after by their local authority and 52 have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school first opened in 1977 and the main school moved to its current site in Eight Ash Green, near Colchester, in 2005. A further education department for post-16 students, including residential accommodation, opened in 1999 in Kelvedon, a few miles away. This is still operational although there is additional post-16 provision on the main site.
- The school uses external organisations to offer alternative provision for older students. These include local further education colleges, employers and community groups.
- The school's residential provision was inspected in June 2013. The school's last educational inspection was in January 2011.
- The school aims to 'provide a specialist service for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders that is developed and resourced to facilitate and promote individual growth through education, social skills and self-esteem.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make the best progress at all times by ensuring that as soon as they are ready they are challenged to take one step more.
- Continue to implement the school's arrangements for managing the performance of all teaching and support staff in order to raise all teaching to the highest standard.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Achievement is good. Almost all students enter the school below National Curriculum Level 1 and make good progress in small but secure steps throughout their time at school. This progress is the result of a combination of good personal development and well-planned teaching and learning. The provision for students' personal development gives them confidence to express themselves and interact with others. Throughout students' time at school, this confidence and communication grows, so that the oldest students become inquisitive learners. At all ages, students benefit from a high quality of one-to-one support from staff who know them well and, if necessary, are able to take them out of a potentially stressful situation for a short break. They can then return refreshed to continue with their learning. Students follow personal learning plans in lessons, which help them to make good progress from their own starting points.

In 2012, most students exceeded national expectations in the progress they made in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). In 2013 all students met national expectations in most of these subjects, with half exceeding them. There was an unexpected decline in ICT, although the numbers involved were very small. A very small group of Year 9 students exceeded expectations in English and mathematics. Achievement in English for all students at the end of both key stages is consistently good. The great majority of parents and carers responding to Parent View believe that students make good progress. In 2013, students achieved well from their starting points and gained a total of 17 Entry Level 1 and 2 qualifications in mathematics, preparing for working life, ICT and physical education.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Students attend well and say that they like school. Personal development plays a major part in preparing students for learning. Most enter the school lacking confidence and communication skills. The excellent work of all adults in the school and visiting specialists has an outstanding impact on helping students to manage their behaviour. Staff are highly trained in de-escalation and after-restraint procedures, and understanding characteristics and causes of trends in behaviour. All correction is supportive; there is no blame. The school sees only rare need for sanctions, preferring to reward and engage students, placing trends in behaviour as part of a communication disability that needs to be understood. As a result the school is usually a calm learning environment; any outbursts are brief and managed well. The impact of this approach is gradual over time, resulting in improved self-esteem, confidence and independence in the oldest students. Students say that bullying is rare and always resolved well. Their parents and carers agree.

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effective in preparing them for life in wider society. Students have a well-developed understanding of right and wrong; they follow instructions loyally. The school is a harmonious multi-racial community; a few students and many staff are from ethnic minority cultures. As a result of personal, social and health education (PSHE) topics such as 'Me and Others; differences and similarities', students have equal regard for people from all different backgrounds. In religious education (RE) lessons, they learn about the beliefs and customs of world religions. Older students show an understanding of how to deal with extremism. Students gradually develop social skills and learn to engage with the local community. The oldest students attend college and take part in work experience. All students engage in fund raising for the school's charity.

Quality of teaching

Good

Teaching is good and leads to good achievement. It is planned meticulously, each student having

an individual programme, to cater for small classes with a very wide range of ability. Students are often supported by an individual teaching assistant. Adults know students' prior attainment levels and make use of them in their planning. As a result, students make good progress over time. This was particularly effective in a Key Stage 4 mathematics lesson where students made outstanding progress at their personal levels because of the support of adults who knew their starting points and potential, and because of the students' own commitment to learning. Occasionally in lessons, students may repeat a task when they seem to be confident in it and an opportunity is lost to try to move them to the next stage. Adults in the classroom are skilful in their questioning, ensuring the students have to think for themselves. Older students question each other and respond cleverly. One student said to his neighbour 'It begins with "a"', rather than telling him the answer. Any disruption in the classroom is managed swiftly and effectively; other students carry on with their work and do not become involved. Parents and carers say that teaching is good. Good work is praised and rewards earned. Students value these rewards and the privilege of choosing how to spend free time. Teachers develop students' imagination very well. An English lesson for younger students produced outstanding achievement when students linked colours to items, senses and emotions. Students appreciate the work of the adults who help them to learn, commenting 'They help you better here'.

Assessment is developing well as a support for planning and evaluation. Students are tracked according to the school's recently developed framework and practice based on National Curriculum levels and 'P' scales. The school also carries out a communication assessment on all students, which evaluates functional communication, understanding and social interaction. The school has an accurate view of students' progress over time.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school follows the general principles of the National Curriculum and fulfils the required areas of learning in the independent schools standards. The school operates a 24-hour curriculum for boarders, with handovers at the beginning and end of the school day. The curriculum is driven by a comprehensive policy clearly linking the skills of communication, social communication and flexible thinking with the core subjects and creative subjects. The school has a particularly varied and effective physical education (PE) programme both within the curriculum and as extra-curricular activities. Students say how much they enjoy these activities. The aim over time is that students develop independent living and work skills to support them in the next stage of their lives. In the final year, the school successfully places students in the community where they attend college, and sample work experience and similar activities. Colleges provide art/media, motor vehicle, and sport and leisure courses. The school provides support to all students undertaking these courses. Schemes of work recognise the journey students take, from below Level 1 on entry to Level 4 or beyond. Accreditation is provided by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and AQA Entry Level qualifications. Careers education and advice is provided by Transition Pathways. A local farm offers the National Open College 'step-up' award. Schemes of work outline policy and content; medium term planning is more detailed and lesson planning is comprehensive and personalised. Together they ensure that students follow appropriate learning paths to good achievement. Information from students' statements of special educational needs is developed into personal planning to ensure that their needs are met.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The single central record of checks on staff suitability to work with children fully meets requirements and all interview panels have at least one member with current accreditation in safer recruitment. All required policies are in place and are fully implemented. Risk assessments are in place for activities in the school, on educational visits, in practical lessons and for individual students, as appropriate. Fire safety and

first aid provision, including relevant training, are in place and, like all other welfare, health and safety policies and practice, are reviewed regularly. Fire prevention equipment and portable electrical appliances are maintained and tested as required. Adults supervise all areas of the school well throughout the day and during students' arrival and departure. There is always an adult nearby if students need help. Students say that they feel safe and well cared for in school. 'Adults look after you if anyone tries to hurt you.' Staff who returned questionnaires, and parents and carers who responded on 'Parent View', agree with this view.

All staff and students receive training in e-safety and show a clear understanding of the dangers of inappropriate use of social media. The school recognises that issues often originate out of school and involves parents and carers by sending them its e-safety policy. Students understand risk and are able to respond appropriately. One student received messages on a social media site encouraging him to become involved with an extremist organisation. The school had prepared him well; he was able to identify the nature of the approach and reject it. The PSHE programme includes understanding of 'people who help you' and students showed a good understanding of the role of public services, how to recognise them and how to contact them.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good. The proprietors have ensured that the school meets all the independent schools standards. The leadership of the school comprises the proprietors, a body of governors and the leadership team. All these groups display a challenging vision and highest ambition for the school. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and assessment and good curriculum provision, including partnerships with local colleges, companies and charities. The focus on behaviour through understanding students' disabilities is highly effective. The drive to give students increased self-confidence and self-esteem is at the heart of the school's ethos and direction. The school has outstanding practice in assuring the health, welfare and safety of pupils and in securing improvements to their behaviour and personal development. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of giving students confidence in their ability, particularly in communication skills and is developing their self-esteem as a basis for taking their place in society. The evidence of the growth in these skills is clear as students go through the school. Older students benefit significantly from college courses, work experience and other connections with the community. The great majority of staff and stakeholders have confidence in the leadership of the school and its response to changing circumstances. The management of staff performance is in its early stages and is not yet leading to exceptional teaching and learning for all students. The school's own evaluation of how well it is doing is accurate and detailed, providing a platform for further improvement. The members of the extended school leadership team reflect the ethos and ambition of the school and make a valued contribution to the school's ability to develop further. The school premises and grounds are an attractive, spacious environment for learning, leisure and boarding. Parents and carers are provided with annual reports on students' achievements and the school provides reports for reviews of students with statements of special educational needs.

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	115426
Inspection number	429913
DfE registration number	881/6032

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	Independent
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Chair	Mr Clive Stobbs
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Jane Smart
Date of previous school inspection	19-20 January 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,799 to £54,291
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