

Northeast Manor School

Rodmell, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 3EY

Inspection dates

25 June 2014

Reason for inspection

This unannounced inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the Department for Education. The purpose was to judge whether the school is appropriately addressing the failings identified at the inspection of the residential provision in February 2014, as well as to consider a number of parental concerns and complaints.

Conclusions

Her Majesty's Inspector and social care regulatory inspectors met a wide range of staff including the headteacher, the full governing body, the governor with specific responsibility for special educational needs and safeguarding, the child protection liaison officer, the acting head of boarding, and care and education staff. Her Majesty's Inspector made visits to lessons and held conversations with students about their learning and matters relating to their welfare. Meetings and telephone conversations were held with parents and a former member of staff, many of whom had raised concerns. Inspectors spent time in the residential provision, particularly assessing the effectiveness of arrangements to ensure boarders' safety and well-being.

A broad range of documentary evidence relating to both education and welfare was scrutinised. Documents included the school's complaints policy, child protection records and the safeguarding policy, records of sanctions, risk assessments, individual behaviour and placement plans, as well as an analysis of behavioural incidents, medication records and policies, boarding logs, accident reports, curriculum policies, governing body minutes and evidence of staff training. Procedures for recruitment and staff development, including pre-employment checks and records of training, were looked at in detail.

The vast majority of parental concerns are acted upon swiftly and are usually resolved. The school's complaints policy is appropriate, up to date and provides the opportunity for complaints to be resolved informally. Letters written by the school are typically brief and very formal in style. Other forms of communication are positive in tone. For example, the weekly bulletins and termly newsletters are informative and celebratory and contain many pictures of students involved in different learning activities and events.

The governing body is unusually constituted. A decision has been made that no current parents may become governors. This arrangement has been balanced by the establishment of a parent forum and opportunities for individual parents to meet with the headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body. As a result, systems are in place to seek and respond to parents' views. Governors visit the school frequently and know the staff and pupils well and can provide evidence of the times when they have held the headteacher rigorously to account. However, governors have a limited understanding of what constitutes effective monitoring. There is little evidence of governors questioning leaders about students' achievements and the governor linked to special educational needs and safeguarding is not fully aware of deficits linked to these areas.

Inspectors found that there were insufficient resources for information and communication technology (ICT) in school, with a lack of specialist equipment to support individual students' needs. Consequently the Independent Schools Standard regarding classroom resources is not fully met. There is not enough technical support. Systems to manage the range of school data are inadequate. School leaders and governors are fully aware that this is the position and work to update to operating systems and purchase new equipment is well underway.

The admissions criteria for the school have not changed. Behaviour was observed to be well managed in all but one lesson during this inspection. The behaviour policy is used consistently and students report that lessons are rarely disrupted. Individual behaviour plans are implemented when necessary and used to good effect.

Class sizes are small, with a high staff-to-pupil ratio. In all lessons, students have targets and complete tasks that are tailored to their own needs. Workbooks frequently demonstrate strong progress towards often challenging targets. Workbooks are generally marked regularly, but often marking refers to effort and behaviour rather than focusing precisely on learning and guiding students about how to improve further. Homework is not used to good enough effect. Too frequently students are unsure of what they must do and instructions provided are insufficiently clear for parents to be able step in and help. There is not a uniform response from teachers when homework is done or not done. Marking and homework are rightly identified on the school plan as areas requiring improvement.

The majority of students have a statement of special educational needs and these are reviewed annually. Students generally access the therapy and support as identified in their statement. However, this is not always the case, particularly for older students. The school is therefore not fully meeting the related Independent Schools Standard related to fulfilling the requirements of a statement of special educational needs. The school and governing body accept the need to address this issue and have identified it as a priority for action. Teachers, therapists and support staff are appropriately qualified and receive regular training. There is a current focus on increasing expertise in communication, language and literacy, including the teaching of reading and writing, and meeting the needs of dyslexic students.

Members of staff currently employed at the school speak positively about the leadership of the headteacher and governors. They report that the headteacher has high expectations of them, is approachable and is ambitious for the students. Arrangements to mentor the newly qualified teacher appear particularly successful. When identified, weak performance is tackled robustly by the headteacher, fully supported by the governing body.

Staff turnover is unusually high. On analysis, most staff have left due to retirement, career progression or family circumstances, although more than might be anticipated have left as a result of concerns over their performance. Senior leaders and governors are aware of the impact of staff change on the sense of stability for students and parents. The school is fully staffed for September.

Inspectors concluded that students are generally positive about school and their learning. Information about students' achievement, workbooks and visits to lessons by inspectors indicate that students are clear about their learning tasks, are well supported and make

good progress. Evidence from parental questionnaires shows that most parents are happy with the school and the education their children are receiving.

A major focus of the monitoring inspection was safeguarding and child protection. Key individuals were spoken to, including the headteacher, acting head of boarding and child protection liaison officer. Time was spent observing and talking to students in the boarding houses. Various documents were examined, including those relating to the specific concerns and complaints raised by parents. Policies and training linked to safeguarding, including e-safety, are up to date, although some records and individual pupils' plans are insufficiently detailed. The school site is large and open. Closed circuit television cameras monitor the main entrance and systems are in place to ensure that boarding houses are secure. However, other doors into the building are not routinely secured.

Safer recruitment practices have been adopted and volunteers, such as students taking a gap year, are adequately vetted. There is still some work to do, such as ensuring all files contain full information including a full employment history. The single central register should accurately reflect job titles. Telephone verification of referees and obtaining copies of references for agency staff would be good practice to adopt.

The student welfare officer, who joined the school in October 2013, has subsequently completed relevant training including in the control and administration of medication. In addition, since the inspection of February 2014 an independent pharmacy adviser has completed an audit on all systems and processes on the administration of medication. There have been significant improvements; for example, the medication policy has been updated. Risk assessments are in place for young people who self-medicate and a controlled drugs cabinet has been installed. There is still work to complete such as inclusion, in the policy of action to be taken in the event of a mistake being made or of how to proceed when taking medicine off site. In addition, the monitoring of medication administration records needs to be signed off by a senior member of staff. The Independent Schools Standard linked to the first aid policy and its implementation is therefore not fully met. Considerable work has been completed to ensure that the portable appliances on site are safe. Advice given in the independent fire risk assessor's report has been carried out. Evacuation procedures are clear and trial evacuations now regularly take place.

In addition, a new post has been created: the head of pastoral care. Recruitment has been successful, with a start date in September 2014. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator will also start at the same time and will take the lead for child protection. The governing body is actively recruiting an additional governor to strengthen the oversight on safeguarding.

Progress has been made in developing behaviour management plans, risk assessments and placement plans. Leaders are beginning to challenge other professionals to provide information to inform the school's risk assessments, such as night-time arrangements to keep students safe. However, risk assessments are not always thorough enough. Work has started to capture information on all disciplinary measures and to analyse trends. Likewise, safeguarding concerns are now recorded centrally and are checked appropriately by senior leaders.

On occasion, staffing levels are not adequate. This particularly applies when some

students are identified as having particularly challenging behaviour and additional support is required. The supervision during shower times is appropriate, without being intrusive. Records and discussions showed that staff take appropriate action to safeguard students, including calling the ambulance service if necessary. Students are kept as safe as possible in the event of an accident. However, some records do not provide full evidence of all action taken, such as making contact with parents. New systems established ensure that staff confirm with parents any agreement to stay for after-school activities if students request it. When necessary the school liaises with the Local Authority Designated Officer over safeguarding concerns. Staff disciplinary procedures in response to concerns were observed to be very robust.

Some of the complaints expressed concerns about an alleged sexual assault that occurred a number of years ago. Inspectors were able to establish verbally, from the local authority during the course of the inspection, that no further action was required. Inspectors concluded that the school acted appropriately on the information they had, but should have gained further information from the local authority when their own investigations were concluded. The senior management team acknowledges this point. The school's risk assessment is weak. A concern was also raised about weapons being stored under beds. Inspectors are confident that weapons are not being stored by students at the school.

Inspectors consider that the school has worked with determination to address the deficits identified at the inspection of February 2014. Some aspects of the complaints regarding education were found to have validity. Complaints relating to safeguarding matters have all been addressed by the school, although inspectors identified aspects on welfare, health and safety requiring further improvement. Independent Schools Standards relating to welfare, health and safety are therefore not fully met. The school fully accepts the continuing need to strengthen various procedures including risk assessments and record keeping. Senior leaders acknowledge the necessity to monitor staffing levels to ensure they are always reflective of need. The school have reviewed staff roles and responsibilities. A student welfare committee has been established and a student welfare officer appointed. A head of pastoral care will join the school in September as will a new special educational needs coordinator with responsibility for child protection.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school requires improvement and must take action to meet The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 ('the Regulations'), and associated requirements

Where pupils have a statement of special educational needs the education provided fulfils its requirements.	Paragraph 2(2)(e)
Classroom resources are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and are used effectively.	Paragraph 3(f)
Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.	Paragraph 7
Arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders and arrangements have regard for the national minimum	Paragraph 8

standards for residential special schools.

There is a written policy on first aid and that it is implemented.

Paragraph
14

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

NMS 14.1

Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

NMS 11

The school has, and implements, appropriate policies for the care of children who are unwell. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, administration of medicines and dealing with medical emergencies.

NMS 3.6

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald HMI, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maire Atherton	Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Keith Riley	Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Information about this school

- Northease Manor is a co-educational, independent day and weekly boarding special school for children aged between 10 and 17 years. The school also offers flexible boarding arrangements.
- The school provides education and residential provision for potentially able students who have a range of specific learning disabilities including dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and social and communication difficulties including autistic spectrum disorders and Asperger's syndrome.
- There are currently 113 students on roll, of whom 50 are resident. Around 80% of students are boys. Around 80% of students have a statement of special educational needs.
- Students are taught in small groups and have access to a range of professional support, including therapists.
- Northease Manor opened in 1963. It is set in expansive grounds within a rural location. The last inspection of education provision took place in 2011. The last inspection of residential provision took place in February 2014.

School details

Unique reference number	114645
Social care unique reference number	SC050107
Inspection number	451014
DfE registration number	845/6028
<p>This inspection was conducted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005.</p> <p>The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.</p>	
Type of school	Independent
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	10–17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	50
Proprietor	The governing body
Chair	David Boys
Headteacher	Carmen Harvey-Browne
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,352
Annual fees (boarders)	£27,696
Telephone number	01273 472915
Email address	office@northease.co.uk

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