

Farm Cottage

C/O Castlecare, The Manor House, Squires Hill, Rothwell, Kettering, Northamptonshire, NN14 6BQ

Inspection dates

25–26 November 2014

Overall effectiveness

Good

2

Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school because

- Students who enter the school with low levels of attainment make good progress and achieve well. This results from the high expectations of all adults involved in the school.
- The quality of teaching is good, based on excellent relationships between staff and students. Students respond positively to the wide range of interesting educational experiences available to them.
- Students who in the past have shown a lack of interest in school, including many who have been excluded from school, have demonstrated rapid improvements in their attitudes and behaviour. As a result, they respect their teachers and support staff and are keen to do well for them.
- Teachers continuously assess students' achievements; their learning targets are realistic and challenging.
- Leaders and managers, including the proprietor's representatives, ensure that the quality of teaching and students' progress are checked regularly. They plan effectively and ensure that the school continuously improves.
- Senior leaders place a strong emphasis on safeguarding. Policies and procedures to ensure the safety and welfare of students are implemented consistently and are regularly checked and kept up to date.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always take sufficient account of students' particular learning difficulties, so that activities, writing tasks and the language used are sometimes inappropriate.
- Students' behaviour is not outstanding. Occasional inattention and distraction can slow the pace of learning.
- Assessment data are not used sufficiently to compare the extent of students' progress with national expectations.
- The observation and evaluation of teaching does not always focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress.

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

- The school was inspected with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed five lessons taught by two teachers. Discussions were held with the company's head of education, teaching staff and students.
- Questionnaires completed by six members of staff were considered. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's on-line Parent View questionnaire for these to be considered.
- A number of documents were scrutinised, including policies and procedures, data about students' achievements, the school's evaluation of its own performance and examples of students' work across a range of subject areas.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Farm Cottage is a small school operated by the Castlecare Group. Students who attend the school live in residential accommodation provided by the company. The school is registered to provide education for boys and girls in the age range eight to 16 years.
- Students are placed at the school usually following a breakdown in their previous educational arrangements due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All current students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school aims 'to engage young people in learning with a view to integrating them either into mainstream school or into an alternative age-appropriate provision'.
- Additional personal development activities are provided through the Prince's Trust Farbridge programme. Individual work experience placements are arranged, when appropriate, for students in Key Stage 4.
- The school was last inspected in February 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching and students' learning by ensuring that:
 - learning activities are broken down into a sequence of smaller, achievable tasks which take full account of students' special educational needs
 - the spoken language used by adults is easily understood by all students
 - students maintain a continuous record of key tasks completed to aid future recall and reinforcement of learning.
- Further improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - data from assessment activities are used to continuously check on the extent of students' progress compared with national expectations
 - observations of teaching by senior managers focus consistently on the quality of students' learning and their achievements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The good quality of leadership and management ensures that students are provided with an excellent curriculum and good teaching which enable them to make good progress. Students who enter the school with negative experiences of education or a lack of confidence in their own achievements find that relationships are very positive and they have exemplary role models.
- Senior leaders and staff are ambitious for their students to make the academic progress of which they are capable and to achieve standards that will enable them to succeed in further education or employment. They give excellent attention to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to ensure that they are well equipped for life in modern Britain. Suitable information and careers guidance ensure that students are presented with appropriate choices and well-timed advice about future careers and further education opportunities.
- The headteacher, who is also the education manager for the company, provides excellent support and challenge for the work of the school. Together with the lead teacher, she ensures that the work of the school is kept under regular review. The school's improvement plan includes appropriate attention to the continuous development of teaching, assessment of students' achievement and the roles of additional adults in the classroom.
- The company makes an effective contribution to the recruitment of staff, the review and development of their work, and the training provided for both school and residential staff. This external support helps to ensure that staff are familiar with changes in statutory requirements and kept up to date with their practice in care and education.
- Senior leaders know the school well and ensure that any areas for improvement are identified and acted upon. For example, the role of learning support assistants in the classroom has been extended since the last inspection to include good use of their expertise in teaching. Leaders and staff are reflective about their practice and open to advice.
- Management arrangements for the school are closely integrated with policies and practices in the students' residences. As a result, there is consistency in the expectations expressed by all the significant adults with whom the students come into regular contact. Similarly, there are appropriate efficiencies in the management of health and safety and integrated staff training events.
- Members of staff are unanimously proud to work at the school and strongly agree that the school is well led and managed. The demonstrable achievements of leaders and managers show that there is good capacity for continuous improvement.
- All aspects of safeguarding are addressed meticulously, including the safe recruitment of suitable staff and training in child protection, first aid, fire safety and the assessment of risks. As a result, the school provides a safe and secure environment for students.
- The headteacher and teaching staff have ensured that the school premises are welcoming and well maintained for effective learning. Suitable information, including details of school policies and the complaints procedure, is made available for parents, carers and placing authorities.

■ The governance of the school:

The company's education manager provides effective challenge to the school on behalf of the proprietor. Arrangements for the appraisal of staff performance are effective and include suitable observations of teaching. The quality of teaching is clearly recorded and discussed with the teaching staff but written records do not always include sufficient information about the impact of teaching on students' progress.

The proprietors have access to data about the achievements of students and are fully informed about external accreditations achieved. However, insufficient use is made of national comparisons when reviewing students' rates of progress.

The proprietors have ensured that the school's written policies require any controversial political topics in the curriculum to be presented in a balanced and non-partisan manner. Staff ensure that students are well informed about current issues in the media and enabled to develop their own considered views and opinions.

Appropriate arrangements for the governance of the school have ensured that all the independent school regulations are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good and contributes positively to their academic progress and personal development. Students enter the school with mixed experiences of education and have often found it difficult to maintain trusting relationships with adults or other young people. The excellent quality of relationships established with staff makes a strong contribution to students' ability to benefit from the education provided.
- The school has introduced effective systems to assess the changes and improvements in students' behaviour once they have settled in to the school. These records show improvements, for example, in students' constructive involvement in activities, their emotional security and their ability to respond positively to others. These improvements in attitudes and behaviour enable students to get the most out of the learning experiences provided.
- Within the classroom, students mostly demonstrate exemplary attitudes to learning, cooperation with staff, interest and the ability to sustain conversation. There was no evidence of low-level disruptive behaviour or any attempts to avoid tasks. Students' concentration occasionally wanders and such distraction sometimes slows the pace of learning. Teaching staff are quick to adopt a good-humoured approach to restoring their attention.
- Students attend school regularly and willingly. They enjoy the activities provided both within and outside the classroom and, despite occasional tendency to underestimate their own successes, they are proud of their achievements. Similarly, they take a pride in their personal appearance and in the quality of the presentation of their finished work.
- Recent and current students have demonstrated the ability to take responsibility within school and in the local community, for example, through an eco-school project, special focus days celebrating Jamaican or Gypsy Roma heritages, and a range of charitable events. One student contributes to the Regional Youth Forum. Occasionally, individual students lack the self-confidence to mix socially with other young people. However, the staff persevere with the provision of a range of opportunities for students to experience activities such as dancing, cheerleading and outdoor physical activities to encourage their social development.
- Good attention is given to preparing students for independence and a productive life in the wider community. Excellent work in citizenship, personal, social and health education and religious education enables students to develop an awareness and respect for British values and for the diversity of beliefs and cultures represented in the wider community. The multicultural nature of the community within the school and students' residences provides the opportunity for first-hand experience of different beliefs, diets, customs and celebrations.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Themes within the curriculum enable them to consider the impact of healthy lifestyles and the risks associated with alcohol or substance abuse. The school's records show no recent serious incidents and no evidence of bullying. No student has been excluded from lessons and sanctions are rarely required.
- Arrangements for the assessment of risk on the premises and during off-site activities are robust. All aspects of health and safety, including fire safety, are checked and recorded regularly. Arrangements for the recruitment of staff and training in all aspects of safe practice are robust.
- Placing authorities are pleased with the quality of the provision for students. Students also comment positively on their sense of safety and the support they receive from the adults around them.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The quality of teaching is good and enables students to make good progress and achieve well. Students are often placed at the school for relatively short periods of time, dependent on the temporary nature of their residential placements. The teaching staff ensure that the subjects, activities and accreditations available provide a meaningful experience for each student.
- The majority of students have experienced disruption to their previous education or have been unwilling to engage with the education provided for them. Some students have learning difficulties or needs arising from emotional or social difficulties. All students currently at the school have a statement of special educational needs.
- Teachers make sure that students understand the main concepts in each subject studied and persevere

patiently to reinforce knowledge and understanding. Occasionally, however, tasks are not broken down into small enough steps to ensure that essential knowledge and understanding are achieved and recorded by students with particular learning needs.

- A major strength of the teaching is the high quality of relationships established between staff and students. The staff have high expectations of what students can achieve and communicate these in a sensitive and suitable manner. Relationships are relaxed and good-humoured, while maintaining appropriate respect and cooperation. Students enjoy their learning and respond positively to appropriate challenges.
- More able students are presented with challenging and appropriate learning materials which enable them to achieve success in GCSE examinations.
- The main focus of teaching is on the improvement of students' basic skills in English and mathematics. Sufficient time is allocated to these subjects and learning activities are carefully chosen to build on students' current achievements. During the inspection, for example, students' skills in recognising the properties of circles and their ability to calculate areas were reinforced by patient dialogue and practice.
- Students' ability to apply their skills in writing and research are systematically applied to the completion of written and word-processed activities to be submitted for accreditation. Excellent emphasis is given to students' particular interests in, for example, ecology, animal care and popular music, in the content chosen as the medium for this work.
- Teachers and additional adults working with students make excellent use of dialogue, involving students in extended discussion supported with excellent questioning. Sometimes, students' understanding is restricted by the teacher's use of words and phrases that the student is not familiar with. However, students are not slow to say when they are not sure.
- Students are presented with a wide range of imaginative learning activities, including experiences in subjects such as science and art and design. Students make extensive use of information and communication technology. They are given the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. They use a local gym for fitness and playing squash. Excellent use is made of off-site venues, such as trips to museums locally and in London, outdoor activities organised by the Prince's Trust, or work experience in a residential care home.
- Students' work is assessed regularly and includes good opportunities to achieve accreditation, including through entry level and GCSE examinations. Teachers' records of assessed work are used appropriately to set targets for future work and achievement.
- Teachers are reflective about their own practice, the level of challenge in learning activities and the extent to which their teaching enables students to achieve. As a result, the quality of teaching is continuously adapted to the needs of individual students.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The majority of students enter the school with levels of attainment below those expected for their age, as a result of disruption to their previous education, often having been excluded from previous schools or with periods of non-attendance. The school is successful in turning around students' attitudes to learning and ensuring that they experience success. As a result, those with statements of special educational needs are successful in progressing towards the targets in their individual education and behaviour plans.
- Students make good progress with their reading, writing and numeracy skills during their time in attendance at Farm Cottage. Those who are placed at the school for periods of less than one year achieve successful accreditation. These qualifications help to restore their confidence and enable them to take their successes to future educational placements.
- The majority of students who attend for longer periods make or exceed nationally expected rates of progress in English, mathematics and science. This is shown, for example in improved reading and spelling ages well in excess of their twelve months' attendance at the school and, for some students, creditable GCSE results across a range of subjects.
- Students develop an interest in reading for pleasure and speak with confidence about the books they have read recently. They make good progress with learning to play musical instruments such as the violin and drums. Recent and current students have achieved specific awards. Much of this achievement results from strong working relationships between the school and staff in students' residences.
- Records show that students who have remained at the school for sufficient time have successfully reintegrated into mainstream schools as a result of the improvements in their attitudes to learning and improved social skills. They begin to catch up lost ground in their learning and develop the confidence to tackle more demanding tasks.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	132783
Inspection number	446243
DfE registration number	886/6118

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted 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	Day special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Proprietor	Castle Homes Limited
Chair	Not applicable
Headteacher	Marion Paige
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 February 2011
Telephone number	01536 711111
Email address	rburrows@castlehomes.co.uk

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