



Office for Standards
in Education

The Sybil Elgar School

CONTENTS

[INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY](#)

[Purpose and scope of the inspection](#)

[Information about the school](#)

[Summary of main findings](#)

[What the school does well:](#)

[What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:](#)

[COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION](#)

[1. The quality of education provided by the school](#)

[Curriculum](#)

[The quality of teaching and assessment](#)

[2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils](#)

[3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils](#)

[4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff](#)

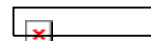
[5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation](#)

[6. The quality of information for parents and other partners](#)

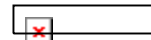
[7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints](#)

[SCHOOL DETAILS](#)

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

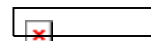


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school



The Sybil Elgar School is an independent special school and is part of the educational provision made by the National Autistic Society (NAS). The school was originally established in 1965 and gained approval status from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in June 1984. It moved to the present premises in 1994 and is now located on three sites in Southall, Acton and Ealing.

The Southall site provides day school accommodation for 70 students of secondary school age. There are currently 50 male and 20 female students, which is typical of the male to female ratio in the autistic population.

The Acton site provides for further education of students aged 16 to 19 in a separate building on the campus of Hammersmith College. There are currently 24 students, of whom 21 are male and 3 are female. The provision is developing a specialism in the creative and performing arts curriculum, as well as providing a wider course of further education.

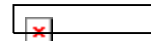
The Ealing site provides weekly residential facilities for 24 students from the school and further education. There are currently 19 male and 5 female students in weekly residence. The residential provision is inspected by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) and was last inspected in June 2003, when it received a very favourable report.

All the students have a statement of special educational need identifying them as being on the autistic spectrum. They are all placed at the school by local education authorities or jointly by local education authorities and social services departments in the south eastern part of England.

The attainment levels of the students fall mainly within the range of severe learning difficulties and many students present challenging behaviours. The school successfully meets its aims of developing the students' knowledge and understanding of the secondary-aged curriculum, together with the development of effective communication and relationships with others and increasing the students' levels of independence and self confidence.

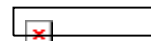
Parents and students indicated their pleasure and support for the significant improvement which is made by students through attendance at the school. Parents and students are very pleased with the provision made by the school.

Summary of main findings



The Sybil Elgar School is a very good school with a significant number of strengths. There is a clear ethos of promoting and celebrating achievement and progress by the students. The school is very well led and managed by the Principal, who is well supported by a strong senior management team. It provides high quality teaching and support to students. The curriculum is based firmly on the National Curriculum, but delivered in a manner which meets the particular needs and abilities of the students. The school has very good accommodation and resources and offers provision for 16 to 19 year olds on a separate site on the campus of a college. The residential provision is of very high quality and provides a very high standard of care and support for the students who are resident on a weekly basis.

What the school does well:



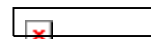
- The school has an ethos which promotes and celebrates achievement and progress by the students;
- It provides high quality teaching and support which enable the students to learn effectively, to develop increasing levels of communication and independence and make very good progress;
- Staff work very effectively as a team, together with visiting professionals. All the staff have high but realistic expectations of the students, which are based on very good knowledge of their needs, abilities and progress. The students respond positively to these expectations and are keen to reach them and to improve their achievement;
- There are effective arrangements for the induction and ongoing training of all staff;
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, is based upon the National Curriculum, and delivered in a manner which meets the particular learning needs of the students;
- The very good quality accommodation and resources support effectively the students' learning and development of independence;
- There is consistent and effective management of instances of challenging behaviour so that these do not disrupt teaching and learning;
- There are very good relationships between staff and students which are based on mutual respect;
- There is effective use of community and real life experiences to promote the students' understanding of the world around them and to promote their independence;
- The school provides good opportunities for older students to gain nationally recognised accreditation of their learning and progress. The high level of success in these awards is a credit to both students and staff;
- The very high quality of the accommodation and care for those students who are weekly boarders contributes very effectively to their learning and personal development; and
- The Principal and senior management team provide excellent leadership and management. This enables the school to provide very effectively for the students and also to develop the provision so that the quality continues to improve.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

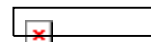


- The school needs to review the existing complaints procedure, in order to fully comply with the recently-introduced regulations regarding the complaints procedures in independent schools.

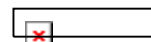
COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION



1. The quality of education provided by the school



Curriculum



The school provides a broad curriculum for its students, all of whom have statements of special educational need, operating within "SPELL" (Structure Positive Empathetic Low Arousal Links) - the NAS educational framework. It has developed extensive documentation to lead and support curriculum planning, including a very clear Curriculum Policy and both a detailed current development plan and plans for a further three years.

In addition to providing the curriculum experience required for registration, the school provides an enriched curriculum through the well-focused daily physical activity sessions, the attention given to social skills and transitions, and through the whole school focus on events such as concerts and celebrations of students' achievements. The residential provision extends this to the twenty four hour curriculum, with well-planned opportunities for students to take part in a range of activities both in the home and the local community. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on communication and social skills, and the students' special needs are very well supported by the consistent use of signing and symbols.

Literacy and numeracy are taught within tutor groups using suitably adapted materials from the national strategies. Teachers make cross-curricular links where possible and this enhances opportunities for students to reinforce and apply their knowledge.

The school has recently undertaken a review of the information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum and new initiatives have been developed. There is a clear policy, and a student-friendly version, which includes an Internet use policy. Recent developments include investment in new hardware and developing individual websites for students.

There are good systems in place for liaison between academic and residential staff to promote continuity. Homework for both day and residential students is linked to Individual Education Plans (IEP) and to student-specific aspects of the curriculum.

The school makes very good, well-focused provision to meet the objectives specified in students'

statements. IEP targets are clearly linked to objectives arising from annual reviews, and almost all show detailed practical strategies for implementation. These, linked to clear lesson planning and thorough curriculum development and review, give all students the opportunity to learn and make good progress.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship are considered to be priority areas within the school. There is a well-structured policy setting out the key role of these subjects in the development of students who have autism.

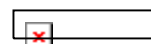
The school provides a good careers curriculum specifically designed to raise students' awareness of the world of work and to promote students' ability to develop skills and make choices in work and leisure. Throughout the school, teaching takes place in "real life" situations which helps promote preparation for adult life. Links are made with citizenship and to the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) "Transition Challenge", in which Key Stage 4 students have achieved 100 per cent success over the last three years.

Students attending the Further Education (FE) facility at the Woodlands unit have access to a good programme of activities with a strong emphasis on creative and expressive arts. All students who took ASDAN "Towards Independence" achieved awards in at least three modules.

There are opportunities for work experience both within the school, and on external placements for some students. The head of social care has developed good links with the Connexions worker and two meetings are held each term to discuss the needs and future placements of post-16 students.

The school provides very good opportunities for students to take responsibility and to have experiences of adult life. These begin in Year 7, for example by taking the register to the office under supervision and include belonging to the School Council, running the school café, through the "Buddy" system and through a range of extra-curricular activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching is very good and is a strength of the school. Twenty nine lessons were observed. In eight out of ten of these the quality of teaching was good or better. In the vast majority of lessons it was very good or better. There were no lessons in which the quality of teaching had serious weaknesses or was unsatisfactory.

The system of tutor groups for the initial lesson each day and for transition to subsequent lessons provides security for the students. The system also produces a calm atmosphere for effective teaching and learning.

Teachers know the students well. They demonstrate very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and of the particular needs of students on the autistic spectrum and of teaching methods to meet these.

Lessons are planned very well, with clear learning objectives which are differentiated well to meet the individual needs and abilities of the students in the groups. Teaching and learning are very effectively supported by the very good quality teaching assistants, who also know the students well. These staff are a very valuable part of the staff team and provide valuable continuity as students are taught different subjects by different teachers. Very effective use is made by all staff of the system of symbols and signing to support communication with the students and to promote their understanding and learning. All staff manage skilfully any incidences of challenging behaviour that occur. The management of such behaviour is achieved in a calm, consistent manner which is highly

effective.

Teaching and learning are also supported by the good quality accommodation and by the very good resources for learning. These resources are appropriate to the ages of the students and are carefully chosen to meet their particular needs.

There is very good teamwork between all staff and very good relationships with the students, which are based on mutual respect and the promotion of their independence. The students enjoy their lessons. They respond well to the high, but realistic, expectations that staff have of them.

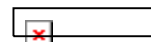
Effective assessment of the students' progress is made and recorded after each lesson as well as over a longer period of time. Students' work and records show clear evidence that they make good progress. Older students have the opportunity to gain nationally recognised accreditation through the ASDAN Awards. The achievement of these awards by all students is another indicator of the successful progress and good personal development of the students.

Overall, the combination of a well-planned curriculum, appropriately tailored to the particular needs of the students, together with the very good quality of teaching and support provided by the school, results in the students making very good progress. This includes academic progress, the development of communication with others and the development of social skills and increased levels of independence.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



The school is successful in developing students' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self confidence. This is done through a comprehensive PSHE curriculum, the study of citizenship and a complementary religious education programme. Plenary sessions in the lessons are consistently and effectively used to encourage students to evaluate their work and the tasks and activities in which they have been successful.

Moments of reflection during assembly and prayers, and listening to music, combined with visits to local religious buildings, provide good opportunities for students' spiritual experience and development.

The provision for students' moral development is good. The ethos of the school, as a place of order and respect for others, has a strong influence on students' understanding of right and wrong and the development of good behaviour. Staff provide good role models. Students are taught the difference between right and wrong clearly and effectively through the consistent application of the school's approach to the management of behaviour.

Students' social development is well supported through regular routines and participation in activities such as snack time, where they can practise taking turns and sharing. Through taking responsibility for small tasks their independence is promoted and they gain satisfaction in doing things for others. Integration into the wider social scene of the community is developed through participation in events such as the Ealing special schools' athletics meetings and inter-borough

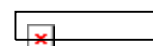
swimming galas. Social experience in the residential setting is further developed through small group visits to local swimming pools and cafes.

The school provides a good range of opportunities to develop cultural awareness and understanding through assemblies such as 'Peoples of the World' and study of traditional dress and ethnic patterns in fabrics. The school's Cultural Diversity Group oversees and develops the school's approach to cultural understanding and diversity.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school has a very positive ethos. Students' individual personalities and needs are respected and there are very good relationships between staff and students. Students are sensitively supervised and staff are effectively deployed to minimise behaviour issues. Positive behaviour approaches which reduce challenging behaviour are used consistently across the school. Care and academic staff work in close partnership to ensure that there is a consistent approach in both the school and residential unit.

The school has comprehensive written policies to safeguard students' welfare, including child protection, bullying, and health and safety. A record book for sanctions is kept in line with regulations. There is a named Child Protection Officer who has received training and there are clear procedures in place to support students and staff.

The school takes good care of the students with regard to health and safety and first aid. There is a nominated responsible officer, with a named person on each site. There is an appropriate, succinct written policy, and procedures which address the health and safety of students on educational visits and these are used consistently on out of school visits. Risk assessments are undertaken on students and on the places to be visited. Appropriate fire risk assessments have been undertaken and the school has recently received advice from the Fire Service.

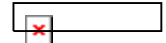
The accommodation provided for residential students is of a very high standard. Bedrooms and communal rooms are clean, well decorated and spacious, and a range of social experiences are provided for students out of school hours. The accommodation and residential setting meets the Care Standards and the school received a very good report from the NCSC Inspection in June 2003.

Admission registers and attendance registers are kept in the appropriate manner and school policies reflect observance of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



The National Autistic Society is the proprietor of the school. All senior staff of the Society and all members of the teaching, support and residential staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) at an enhanced level.

The school is scrupulous in checking the qualifications, previous experience and references of all staff appointed. There are clear records that all of this has been done.

The staff are of very high quality. Teaching, support and residential staff are effectively inducted on appointment and there are very good arrangements for ongoing training, support and supervision of all staff. The appointment of staff from a rich variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds helps to develop the understanding and awareness of different religions and cultures, which is reflected in the good provision made by the school for the students.

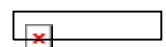
The Principal provides very clear and excellent leadership and is supported by a strong senior management team. Together they ensure that the school and the residential provision are very effectively organised and managed and that there are clear plans for ongoing development to improve the quality of provision even further.

There is a management committee, known as the Service Support Committee, which fulfils many of the functions and responsibilities of a school governing body. The committee provides effective support and challenge to the Principal and staff and has clear knowledge of the work of the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The premises and accommodation on all three sites are immaculately clean and very well maintained. They contribute to the very positive ethos of the school with its clear emphasis on high quality and the promotion of good progress, high achievement and respect for the students' increasing levels of maturity and independence. Effective arrangements ensure the safety and security of students and staff.

The teaching accommodation is in a purpose-built school, which is equipped and furnished to a very high standard. The classrooms and other accommodation provide good space and facilities for the teaching and social aspects of the curriculum. There is good specialist accommodation for science, art, food technology, ICT, design and technology and music. Other rooms are designated for English, mathematics and humanities, as well as being tutor group bases.

Specialist accommodation for physical education (PE) is limited by the size of the hall and by the fact that it has to be used for other purposes such as assemblies and dining, so that available teaching time is restricted. The school recognises this and there are plans to provide additional

accommodation. This would enable the school to teach the planned curriculum for all aspects of PE.

While display in classrooms is deliberately limited in order to provide a non-distractive setting, there is good display of students' work, particularly art work, around the school. This display is presented very well in a way which prevents possible accidental damage and contributes to the positive ethos of the promotion and celebration of the students' achievement.

The separate provision of accommodation for post-16 students on the campus of a local college provides an appropriate recognition of their increased maturity and independence.

Effective use is made of the outside space at both teaching sites, both for aspects of PE and for recreational purposes.

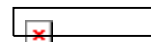
The residential accommodation for a maximum of 24 students is of very high quality. It provides a calm but purposeful setting with high quality care for the residential students.

Although the school does not have separate sick bay facilities, the nature of the residential accommodation is such that appropriate provision can be made for pupils who are ill.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



A comprehensive prospectus provides a wide range of information on school matters to parents and prospective parents and meets the requirements of regulations. An overview of the school's philosophy, the curriculum offered to students and the approaches to health, behaviour management and life in the residential setting are given in addition to admission arrangements. Full details are provided on teaching staff and people with specific responsibilities within the NAS organisation. The school's commitment to working in partnership with parents is emphasised. The partnership philosophy and information provided in the prospectus is reinforced through coffee mornings when parents are given more detailed information and may raise issues or peruse school policies and documentation.

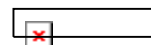
Information on students' personal and academic progress in the different subject areas is provided in termly reports and in the annual reviews of all students' statements of special educational needs. Weekly home-school books and newsletters also allow parents to keep in touch with school developments.

Most parents consider that they are kept well informed about their children's progress and feel comfortable approaching the school with questions, suggestions or problems.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints



The school has both its own complaints policy and that of the NAS. The school policy does not clearly specify its target audience and this is confusing in places. However there is also a document designed specifically for students ("Please Help Me") and a form for students to indicate their concerns ("Are You Unhappy?"). The school records complaints carefully and treats the concerns and issues raised by students seriously. Where appropriate, students receive a written response from the principal. The school has sent a copy of its policy to all parents and most parents have sent back a reply slip indicating they have read and understood it.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

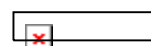
No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

The school meets many of the requirements for registration but in order to fully comply with Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 the school should revise its existing procedures to ensure that it is clear:

- that there are at least three people on a complaints panel (paragraph 7 (f));
- that one person on a panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7 (g));
- that parents can attend a panel hearing and may be accompanied if they wish (paragraph 7 (h));
- that all parties involved in a complaint will receive a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7 (i)); and
- that written records of complaints indicate whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7 (j)).

SCHOOL DETAILS



Name of school:	The Sybil Elgar School
Type of school:	Special, catering for pupils on the autistic spectrum
DfES ref. no.	307/6064
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 19
Number on roll:	93
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Fees:	Day: £30,467.97 (excluding VAT); Residential: £58,830 (excluding VAT) .

Address of school: Havelock Road
Southall
Middlesex
UB2 4NR

Email address: rosemariemcgrath@nas.org.uk

Telephone number: 0208 813 9168

Fax number: 0208 571 7332

Headteacher: Ms Chloe Phillips

Proprietor: National Autistic Society

Reporting Inspector: David A Gardiner HMI

Dates of Inspection: 10-13 November 2003

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