



Heathland College

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Introduction and summary

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

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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

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Heathland College is an independent day school that caters for 125 boys and girls from the ages of three months to twelve years. The school, which is owned by Heathland College Ltd, is housed in a large Victorian house and was established in 1994. An adjoining cottage accommodates children up to the age of two years and a prefabricated building is used for the three-year-olds. The school is set in extensive grounds adjacent to Accrington and Rossendale College. The proprietors are seeking to extend the upper age limit of the school to 16 years and planning permission is currently being sought to add further buildings to provide specialist accommodation for science, technology and art. A small group of Year 7 pupils formed the first group of secondary school age pupils from September 2004.

Summary of main findings

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Heathland College is a good school. It is a friendly and purposeful community that provides a warm welcome for pupils and adults. The pupils benefit from a broad and interesting curriculum and from teachers' expectations that they will work hard and enjoy school. The teaching is good and pupils of all abilities achieve well.

What the school does well

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- it gives the pupils a good level of individual attention, as a result of which they make good progress and achieve high academic standards;
- it provides a varied and worthwhile curriculum that is enhanced by visits out of school; and
- it ensures that the pupils' personal and social development is promoted effectively.

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

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- ensure that appropriate checks on medical fitness are carried out on all staff prior to their appointment;
- improve the information provided to parents and prospective parents referred to in section 6; and
- clarify the complaints procedure as detailed in section 7.

Next steps

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Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- disseminate the best examples of marking;
- give further attention to the professional development of teachers; and
- increase the amount of detail in annual reports to parents.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

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1. The quality of education provided by the school

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The quality of the curriculum

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The curriculum meets all the requirements for registration. It gives the pupils a balanced, interesting and worthwhile education. The curriculum is well planned and based largely on the National Curriculum for pupils between the ages of five and twelve. The school makes good use of national guidance to plan work appropriate to the pupils' ages in each subject. In the nursery and reception classes, the curriculum takes account of all the areas of learning and gives the pupils a suitable range of experiences. The outdoor area and the school's grounds are used well to extend the pupils' social skills. This is an improvement since the last inspection in 2002.

In accordance with the school's aims, a strong emphasis is placed on English and mathematics in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 to ensure that the pupils acquire key skills systematically in these subjects. Nevertheless, the curriculum includes a broad range of subjects and takes account of the development of the pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE). The school provides lessons in information and communication technology (ICT), the arts and humanities, French and physical education (PE). In the latter, in addition to PE lessons at school and at a local swimming pool, pupils in Key Stage 2 benefit from a residential visit that provides opportunities for adventurous activities. Visits out of school add further meaning to the curriculum for the pupils. A visit that took place during the inspection added greatly to the pupils' understanding of the wide range of uses of ICT in running a football club and stadium.

The director of studies gives a strong lead in the management of the school's curriculum and maintains a good overview of its development and implementation. Recently, plans for the curriculum have been successfully expanded to include the work to be covered by pupils in the first year of secondary education. The school has also taken initial steps to consider the curriculum for these pupils as they grow older. For example, thought is currently being given to the expansion of existing links with Accrington and Rossendale College of Further Education, to provide vocational courses at Key Stage 4.

The quality of the teaching and assessment

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The quality of teaching is good and is a significant factor in ensuring that the pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve their potential. The teaching in some lessons was very good. Lessons are carefully planned in sufficient detail to take account of the different ages in the classes and to establish a clear sense of purpose. Teachers' close working knowledge of the curriculum means that they are able to plan challenging and interesting work for the pupils. Even when tasks are of a routine nature, for example to give pupils important practice in reading, writing and mathematics, teachers' high expectations and successful communication of the importance of the work ensure that the pupils tackle the work studiously.

The pupils in Year 7 are taught well, mainly as a separate group. The subject knowledge of the two teachers principally responsible for teaching them is good and wide ranging. The work is pitched at a suitably challenging level and some good use is made of existing specialist rooms in the school,

for example to teach science and ICT.

Teachers manage the pupils well and lessons proceed in a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Routines are well established in all classes and applied consistently throughout the school, so that the pupils know what is expected of them in their work and behaviour. As a result, the pupils settle quickly to work and time for learning is used efficiently. During lessons, teachers keep a close watch on the pupils' progress and are quick to intervene with further questions or illuminating explanations to sort out any difficulties. One pupil in a Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson had been struggling with some simple methods of calculation but patient explanations and a step-by-step approach did the trick and was a cause for celebration for pupil and teacher.

The small number of pupils in classes is a significant factor in enabling teachers to monitor the progress of individual pupils closely. Consequently, teachers have a good understanding of the pupils' strengths and of aspects where further work is needed. In the best lessons, the level of the work is adjusted subtly either to give encouragement and confidence to those who need it or to provide extra challenge for those who complete tasks with ease. Teachers seek to make the work varied and memorable for the pupils.

The school uses appropriate systems to check the pupils' progress. Good use is made of national tests not only to measure progress in core subjects, but also to assess how well the pupils are doing in relation to national standards of attainment. Teachers' routine and regular checks on progress, for example in spelling and mathematics, provide useful information about how well the pupils have learned and they help in planning the next stages of work. The pupils' work is marked conscientiously. The best examples of marking include comments to help pupils understand their mistakes or show them how to improve.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

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Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good. The school provides a calm, ordered and civilised environment in which the children are well behaved, relate well to each other and staff, and develop respect and tolerance for the views and feelings of others. Through religious education and a programme of PSHE and citizenship, the pupils learn about appropriate health issues as well as learning about state and civic institutions.

The curriculum for religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual awareness by developing an understanding of spirituality and by teaching the pupils about ideas and practices from the major world religions. From Year 1, pupils can relate stories from the Bible and comment on their moral significance. School assemblies introduce pupils to major feasts and festivals from the different faiths and cultures. For example, the theme of Halloween generated various projects around the school and the pupils were informed of the pagan and later Christian origins of this celebration. A number of senior pupils of the Muslim faith were supported by their teachers and peers in the observance of Ramadan.

Clear guidelines on behaviour and high expectations of staff promote good behaviour in and around the school and on visits. The system of rewards and sanctions is understood and considered fair by the pupils. Rewards for good work and behaviour are awarded through the house points system and are keenly sought by the pupils and celebrated in assemblies. Pupils react well to adults and to each other. The pupils who arrived recently from Zimbabwe were well received by their peers and

enabled to settle in quickly. Through the efforts of one teacher, the pupils are raising funds for an extension to a school in The Gambia and regularly correspond with pen-pals there. Thus, they gain valuable insights into life in a developing country.

Opportunities for pupils to assume responsibility and develop leadership are provided through the 'seeds and gardeners' scheme where senior pupils take responsibility for a reception child during playtime. Excursions away from school, including an annual residential trip to an adventure holiday centre, contribute well to pupils' personal growth and development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

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The principal and staff provide a secure, healthy and safe environment for the pupils, whose welfare is given a high priority.

The vice principal makes an important contribution to the day-to-day implementation of the school's policies and procedures. Documents and policies dealing with all regulatory aspects of health and safety provide clear instructions and advice to the staff who are required to sign to confirm that they have read them. The documents reflect appropriate national guidelines and legislation. Thus, the school policies on bullying, child protection, trips away from school and First Aid are known and implemented by the staff and are all well embedded in the caring culture of the school. There are nine First Aiders whose qualifications are kept up-to-date, and there is adequate provision for dealing with pupils who are sick. First Aid and medicine are administered in accordance with school guidelines. Parents are required to provide clear information in writing when requesting the administration of medicine during school hours. The school is most conscientious in complying with fire checks and regulations and in responding promptly to advice from the local fire service.

Staff are well deployed to ensure that the pupils are properly supervised in and around the school. Detailed risk assessments are undertaken in advance of trips away from the school and a very detailed guidance document provides information to staff on how to deal with all eventualities. Child protection policy is based on that of the local education authority's guidance and contains advice to staff on the recognition of different kinds of abuse.

Nutritious hot meals are provided by the school's own catering staff and there is sufficient accommodation for meals to be consumed in comfortable and civilised surroundings. During mealtimes the pupils behave well and show courtesy and consideration to each other. Good behaviour is further encouraged by a clear behaviour policy specifying the high expectations upon the pupils. This is supported by an appropriate system of sanctions and rewards.

The admission register is kept up-to-date, and the attendance registers are marked correctly at the beginning of each session. Attendance is excellent with no unauthorised absence recorded for the last academic year.

The school has considered its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and within the limitations of an old house, has gone some way to improving access to the school. There is ramped access to all sections of the school and the feasibility of providing a lift to the upper floor is being considered.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

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The school proprietors have many years experience running independent schools and they have assembled a team of well qualified and experienced teachers. Recently appointed teachers are qualified to teach up to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level and there are plans to appoint additional subject specialists in anticipation of the school's expansion to provide secondary education. In addition to the full-time teachers, the school employs other part-time teachers who have expertise in music, physical education and technology.

The school carries out appropriate checks on employees prior to appointment to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. These include checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. It does not confirm the medical fitness of staff prior to their appointment, as required by the regulations.

Staff in the nursery receive regular training through the local education authority's early years consortium of which the school is a part, but the professional development of other teachers is given insufficient attention.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets almost all the requirements.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- carry out appropriate checks on the medical fitness of the staff prior to confirmation of their appointment (paragraph 4(c)).

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

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The school is situated in a large converted house close to the centre of Accrington. Originally a country home, it was subsequently used for many years as a home for the elderly and was converted to use as a school by the present proprietor in 1994.

The house has been sensibly and suitably adapted for teaching pupils from reception to Year 7. It contains several specialist facilities, including two networked computer rooms, a small library, a dining room, an assembly hall and a science room. There are adequate playing fields and outdoor play space, and a separate baby unit and nursery, each with its own suitably equipped safe outside play areas. Plans are well advanced for the provision of specialist science and technology rooms as part of the proposed secondary expansion.

The use of local off-site facilities is well planned to extend pupils' learning experience and skills. The

whole school attends a local leisure centre for swimming lessons once a week.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

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The school has an attractive, well-presented prospectus which paints a broad picture of its provision, including arrangements for admissions, an outline of the curriculum and a description of the school's facilities and main aims. The prospectus, which is replicated on the school's website, is currently being updated. This is a timely action, because it does not yet include all the statutory information.

Termly reports to parents on the pupils' progress include information about the work covered in each subject and also comment on the pupils' attitudes and response in lessons. Little information is given, however, to show what the individual pupil needs to learn next or to explain to parents how they might usefully help their child at home. Letters home keep parents well informed of school events. Newsletters from the nursery are very informative and include useful information about the curriculum being covered. Parents who responded to the questionnaire were nearly all pleased with the information that they received from the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide the address and telephone number of the proprietor's registered office to parents of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 6.2(b)); and
- explain how parents may request information that is available about the school (paragraph 6.2(h)).

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

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The school has a written complaints procedure and is willing to act promptly in response to a complaint. The procedures are in the final stages of revision and the school plans to distribute the new document to parents. Currently, too little detail is included to clarify the timescales for dealing with complaints at an informal stage or to explain the arrangements for keeping written records of complaints and how they were resolved.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- set out clear timescales for the management of a complaint (paragraph 7c); and
- establish arrangements for keeping written records of complaints to show whether they were resolved at a preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)).

School details

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Name of school:	Heathland College		
DfES ref number:	888/6024		
Type of school:	Nursery, primary and secondary school		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	1 - 12 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 43,	Girls 29,	Total 72
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys 25,	Girls 28,	Total 53
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3723 - £4500		
Address of school:	Heathland College Broadoak, Sandy Lane Accrington Lancashire BB5 2AN		
E-mail address:	bursar@heathlandcollege.co.uk		
Telephone number:	01254 567584		
Fax number:	01254 235398		
Headteacher:	Mrs J Harrison		
Proprietor:	Heathland College Limited		
Lead Inspector:	Mr John Evans		
Dates of inspection:	1 - 4 November 2004		

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