

The Quest School For Autistic Children

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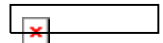
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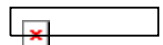
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Introduction and summary

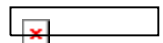


Purpose and scope of the inspection



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 Quest School is an independent day special school which opened in September 2003. It received its charity registration in October 2004. The school caters for up to eight pupils with autistic spectrum disorders within the ages of 4 to 13. There are currently four pupils on roll between the ages of 7 and 11; one girl and three boys. All pupils have statements of special educational needs in respect of their autism. Pupils are placed by local education authorities and funded privately by parents.

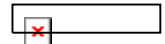
Pupils receive one to one support from staff as they follow intensive individualised programmes.

Group sessions provide opportunities for social interaction and the development of peer relationships.

The curriculum now is based on the development of functional communication skills, learning skills and life skills alongside the National Curriculum. The main method of teaching is a form of Applied Behaviour Analysis in which the emphasis is on teaching skills appropriate to each individual, with the consistent use of positive reinforcement. The overall aim of the school is to develop each pupil's potential, and to maximise their opportunities to lead happy and fulfilled lives as part of the wider community.

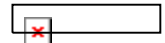
The school is currently located in a village hall which consists of two classrooms and a large hall. The school has plans to move to new premises within eighteen months.

Summary of main findings



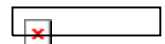
The school has made a satisfactory start. The staff and the board of management have pupils' health, safety and welfare at the heart of their planning and decision making. The school successfully meets its aim of developing pupils' speaking, listening and life skills. Teachers' enthusiastic and encouraging approach and the good relationships they establish with pupils helps them to make steady progress and to enjoy their time at school.

What the school does well



- it enables pupils to make rapid improvement in their behaviour and social skills so that they are able to focus and learn;
- it ensures that pupils make good progress in their communication and listening skills;
- teachers' assessment and recording of pupils' achievement against small, precise targets is of a high quality;
- the intensive teaching in one-to-one sessions is good; and
- its close partnership with parents has a positive impact on pupils' progress, especially in their personal and social development.

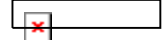
What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- ensure that there are appropriate plans and schemes of work for all areas of the curriculum;
- develop pupils' appreciation of, and respect for, their own and other cultures and their understanding of public institutions and services in England;
- meet the welfare, health, and safety requirement identified detailed in section 3 of this report;
- ensure that heating in all parts of the school is satisfactory and in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999; and

- keep written records of the resolution of all complaints.

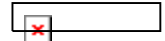
What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



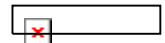
In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises and the curriculum.

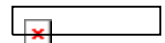
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



The school meets its aim of ensuring that pupils follow a curriculum based on the development of their functional communication skills, learning skills and life skills alongside the National Curriculum. The staff have worked hard to produce some useful plans and schemes of work to guide teaching and learning in both parts of the curriculum. The planning, assessment and tracking of pupils' learning and progress in the functional language and life skills is good. Pupils work towards small, precise targets so that each step in their learning builds on their previous experience. As a result, pupils make good progress in their personal and social development and in developing their skills of communication. Parents are particularly pleased with the progress their children make in these areas, including their self-help skills and their ability to play.

Pupils experience all the required National Curriculum subjects but sessions for some of these, for example, in music, are too short to allow pupils to reinforce and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Other than literacy and numeracy, insufficient time is allocated to National Curriculum subjects and religious education.

The planning of the National Curriculum is not yet fully established. Plans provide broad guidelines for staff but they do not cover all the required aspects of programmes of study and the learning objectives for units of work are not sufficiently clear. As a result, the curriculum is not yet underpinned by schemes of work that ensure continuity in pupils' learning. Currently the provision for music, physical education and religious education is particularly weak. In these subjects pupils cover only small areas of the required programmes.

Throughout the curriculum there is a constant focus on encouraging communication. Visual cues and signing are used well to develop these skills. The visual timetable helps to ensure that pupils know what to expect during each session. As a result, they settle happily to their tasks. Staff have a

good understanding of pupils' needs and use therapists well to enhance the provision; for example, pupils enjoy their weekly individual session with a music therapist. A recently appointed speech and language therapist works with staff in the development of targets to improve pupils' communication skills further.

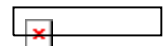
Pupils' personal and social development is reinforced by staff at every opportunity throughout the school day. Lunchtimes are sociable times when pupils and staff sit together and enjoy their food. The relationship between staff and pupils is good but not enough emphasis is placed on encouraging pupils to co-operate and communicate with each other both during social times and within group lessons. This is an important aspect of pupils' personal development as so much of the curriculum is focused on individual teaching.

The local community is beginning to be used well to enhance the curriculum in some areas. Pupils develop their skills of control and co-ordination in trampolining sessions at the local leisure centre. They meet new people and experience different environments and so develop their personal and social skills. They thoroughly enjoy these sessions. The local area has been used well for some science, history and geography topic work.

The school has worked hard to develop the curriculum in a short space of time but as yet insufficient opportunities are included for pupils to learn through experimentation and investigation.

The school has been granted registration for pupils aged 4 to 13 but has not yet established plans for extending the curriculum and facilities to meet the requirements for children under five and pupils in Key Stage 3. There are currently no pupils under five on roll but from September 2005 the school will need to address the issue regarding Key Stage 3 provision in order to meet the needs of its current pupils as they get older.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching in one-to-one sessions is at least good. These are highly structured and tightly focused on what pupils have previously learned. Assessment and recording of pupils' achievements and difficulties is most thorough. Relationships are good, pupils know what is expected of them, rewards are frequent and, as a result, pupils enjoy these sessions. Teachers are well prepared for lessons, resources are interesting, instructions are clear and good questioning helps pupils to remain focused. The use of information and communication technology to reinforce their understanding and develop their skills of communication during these sessions is good. The way in which teachers constantly reinforce expectations, in particular those related to behavioural, personal and social targets, is effective in helping pupils to make progress in short periods of time.

Staff are well qualified in the teaching method used in these sessions and this, combined with the thorough induction staff receive, ensures a consistent approach which has a positive impact on pupils' progress. Staff are deployed well so that pupils work with each adult in turn rather than become reliant on support from one person.

The teaching of all subjects in group lessons is not as effective as in one-to-one sessions. Most teachers do not have qualified teacher status and they have had few opportunities to develop their understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum. Staff have not yet had the opportunity to observe colleagues in other schools and so extend their range of teaching strategies. As a result, they find group teaching more challenging. In some of these sessions, tasks do not fully extend the higher attaining pupils and too little emphasis is placed on encouraging collaborative learning. Staff reward pupils' small achievements to help them focus in these lessons but, at times, they could expect pupils to complete more work before giving them a reward.

The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is good and helps to ensure a consistent approach. Strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning in group sessions are not yet established.

The effective deployment of a trampoline coach helps pupils to achieve well. Good use is made of practical demonstrations so that pupils know what is expected of them. The highest attaining pupils enjoy copying these demonstrations and do so with some good results. Staff work well with the coach; her specialist knowledge and skills combined with the teachers' thorough understanding of the pupils, helps them to achieve well.

The classrooms are attractive learning areas which include some good displays of pupils' work. This together with teachers' enthusiastic and encouraging attitude they create a positive ethos in which pupils enjoy learning. Classroom resources are of a good quality but those to support experimental and investigative work are limited.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

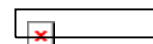
The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- draw up appropriate plans and schemes of work to support the curriculum and implement them effectively, (paragraph 1(2)).

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



The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. The way in which teachers praise pupils and reward their achievements, however small, helps to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils show delight at their own achievements, for example, when attempting a new action on the trampoline. They enjoy the applause given to them by staff at such times. Through the religious education programme and story time pupils are encouraged to think about emotions, such as love and the people who love them, but these good opportunities are rather limited.

The provision for pupils' moral and social development is good. Staff are good role models; they have high expectations and constantly reinforce appropriate ways to behave. There is a strong focus throughout the day on encouraging pupils' personal and social development; for example, their self-help skills. This has a positive impact on the progress they make in these areas. The increasing visits into the local community help to develop pupils' awareness of the environment and the buildings in the community. However, there are too few chances for pupils to develop their understanding of services in the local community.

The provision for pupils' cultural development is unsatisfactory. The limited religious education curriculum does not include references to faiths other than Christianity and there is little focus on the lives of people in other lands in geography. There is an absence of multi-cultural displays and resources to reflect the society we live in.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

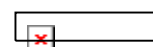
No.

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:

- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph (2)(d)); and
- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of, and respect for, their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph (2)(e)).

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



There is a good range of policies to ensure pupils' health and well-being which are reviewed regularly by designated members of the board of management. The school clearly has the health, safety and welfare of pupils at the heart of its work.

These policies provide useful detailed guidance for staff. Incidents are recorded appropriately, fire drills are carried out regularly and timings recorded. Risk assessments of buildings, fire safety and visits out of school are carried out in accordance with requirements. Staff have received training in some areas, including fire awareness and First Aid. All staff have received child protection training but the named person has not yet received the full training necessary to carry out this role. The staff handbook includes information for staff aimed at ensuring their health, safety and welfare whilst in school.

The ratio of staff to pupils is high and they are deployed well throughout the school day to ensure pupils are supervised appropriately. Time is provided for pupils to develop their play skills with only limited adult supervision which supports increased independence. There is a clear behaviour policy and pupils have individual targets which are focused on improving aspects of their behaviour. Positive reinforcement of small-scale successes leads to good progress in a short space of time.

The policy on accessibility outlines how the DDA applies to the school. The school has not yet drawn up a three-year plan aimed at improving accessibility to the premises and curriculum. Staff intend to do this in conjunction with the Parish Council.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

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

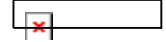
- promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with Circular DfES/0027/2004: 'Safeguarding Children in Education' (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve access to the premises and the curriculum.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



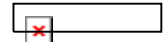
This newly-established school is well supported by its board of management which has ensured rigorous systems for the appointment of suitable staff. As a result, the school has a strong staff team committed to pupils' social, behavioural and academic achievement and to the future development of the school. All new staff serve a two month probationary period during which they are carefully supported and monitored by senior staff. During this time they do not work with pupils unsupervised.

Appropriate checks are made through the Criminal Records Bureau on all appointed candidates. Currently the school is awaiting confirmation of clearance on one member of staff who has already taken up a probationary post which does not involve direct supervision of pupils. References and medical fitness are checked prior to appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The premises are suitable for the pupils currently on roll but have no specialist teaching areas suitable for the full-time education of Key Stage 3 pupils. The school has exclusive use of two classrooms and shares the use of the large hall with several community groups on a few occasions during the week. The staff ensure that pupils are safeguarded and their education is not interrupted by these other users. The pupils and staff will be performing their Christmas play for a group of retired people from the local community who use the hall regularly. This will give pupils a good experience of performing in front of wider audiences.

The classrooms are small but stimulating learning areas which are well furnished and resourced appropriately for the ages of the pupils currently on roll. The large hall provides a good play area for pupils in which they can ride their bikes and other large equipment and so develop their co-ordination. There is no outdoor play space adjoining the premises. In fine weather the school makes use of a local park which is a short walk away. This arrangement is suitable for the pupils who are currently on roll but would not be satisfactory if the school admitted pupils below the age of five.

There is no medical room for pupils who are sick but the school makes suitable arrangements to ensure pupils' comfort and privacy until parents collect them. The premises are clean and well decorated but the temperatures in the hall and toilets are too cold.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets nearly all the requirements except one.

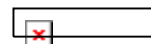
What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

should:

- Ensure that heating in the school is satisfactory and in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(p)).

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



Staff work in close partnership with parents and provide them with good information through regular conversations and in writing. A bright and helpful information pack is sent to all prospective pupils. This provides useful information for parents.

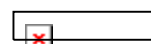
All pupils work towards very specific targets which are assessed and recorded continuously. Parents receive copies of all targets and every half term parents visit the school to observe their children being taught. On this visit parents meet with a consultant and a written summary of their children's progress in functional communication skills, learning skills and life skills is provided. Parents use this information to reinforce the school's strategies at home.

Information regarding pupils' progress against National Curriculum levels and 'P' scales in some subjects is now being recorded using an appropriate system. This shows pupils' progress is precise, small steps and is used as a basis for subsequent target setting. Annual reports are being introduced at the end of this term which will include information on pupils' achievement in all areas of the curriculum.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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



The school has a detailed complaints procedure and the way in which they handle the rare complaints received meets regulations in all but one respect. The school does not currently log issues which are raised in conversation or record how these issues were resolved. Complaints are rare because parents are very satisfied with the quality of education provided and the progress their children make.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

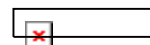
The school meets nearly all the requirements except one.

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

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

- keep written records of all complaints indicating whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceed to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)).

School details



Name of school:	The Quest School For Autistic Children		
DfES ref number:	886/6108		
Type of school:	Special		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	4 - 13 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 3,	Girls 1,	Total 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 3,	Girls 1,	Total 4
Annual fees (day pupils):	£27,000		
Address of school:	Offham Village Hall Church Lane Offham Kent ME19 5NY		
E-mail address:	Quest.school@internet-uk.net		
Telephone number:	01634 255000		
Fax number:	01634 250555		
Headteacher:	Mrs Anne Martin		
Proprietor:	Private Limited Company, The Quest School for Autistic Children, Company Number 4669567		
Lead Inspector:	Helen Sharpe		
Dates of inspection:	29 November - 2 December 2004		

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