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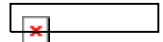
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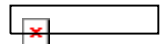
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Introduction and summary

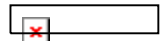


Purpose and scope of the inspection



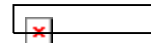
This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school



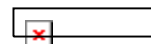
Wessex College opened in 2001 and was registered by the Department for Education and Skills in 2002. It moved to its present site in 2004. It is a special school for up to 10 boys and girls with social, emotional and behavioural disorders (SEBD) who are between the ages of 11 and 16 years. On admission to the school pupils have attainment levels below those expected of similar age pupils. Many have experienced long periods of disrupted education resulting from truancy and exclusion. Five pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN) which in addition to SEBD also identify learning difficulties such as dyspraxia, dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. At the time of the inspection there were 8 pupils on roll, 4 boys and 4 girls. They live in accommodation away from the school which is provided by the company, Wessex College Ltd. These small family units are inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection and all have received recent positive reports.

Summary of main findings



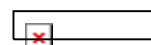
Wessex College successfully re-engages pupils in the process of education. It fulfils its central aim of creating for its pupils 'success through opportunity'. It provides a broad curriculum which enables pupils to capitalise on their interests. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning and all achieve accreditation in national examinations. Meticulous planning accounts for the many good procedures which support pupils' personal development, and these are managed very effectively. Staff provide a high standard of care and there are very good procedures to ensure pupils' well-being and safety. Teaching is satisfactory, although the narrow range of teachers' expertise limits its impact. Assessment of learning is weak. There are insufficient resources to fully support the range of learning. The school leadership has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and the capacity to address these.

What the school does well



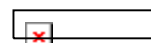
- it provides a good curriculum within which staff work very hard to provide a range of educational opportunities and which result in positive experiences of learning for pupils;
- it provides structure to the lives of pupils and focuses well on their individual needs, enabling them to make good progress in managing their behaviour;
- it skilfully nurtures the attitudes of pupils so that they adopt more positive behaviours and beliefs;
- its staff respect and relate well to pupils; they enable them to retain their dignity when they are distressed;
- it creates a positive ethos within which staff act as good role models and which encourages pupils to consider the effect of their behaviour on others; and
- it provides very well for pupils' health, welfare and safety.

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



- improve the quality of teaching and assessment as outlined in section 1 of this report;
- provide financial information to local authorities who place pupils at the school; and
- ensure that the school's complaints policy complies with the regulations as specified in section 7.

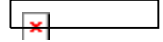
What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



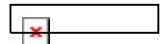
In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

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

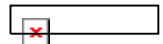
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



The school's curriculum policy is clear and has a stated aim to provide the whole of the National Curriculum. It does this successfully. Where pupils have a statement of SEN the curriculum is appropriately modified to take into account their specific needs. The curriculum is well planned and enables pupils to make progress even though they may be admitted to or leave the school at different stages of the academic year. The subject matter is appropriate for secondary age pupils. The timetable has a good balance between subjects and this supports the breadth of the curriculum. Sufficient time is available to teach the whole range of subjects.

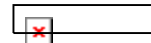
The curriculum is based upon flexible use of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) units of study. This is a sound approach, which enables pupils to follow personalised study programmes. For example, one pupil is following a course in business studies which will lead to national accreditation at GCSE level. Other units of study are chosen which consider and reflect the interests of pupils, for example parenting skills are developed through a child development module. It is a strength of the provision overall that it responds well to the needs of individual pupils. Individually tailored packages of learning are provided and where necessary small groups are formed so that these become mutually supportive experiences.

The school has good policies for each subject, which set out clear expectations on how these will be taught. There are appropriate schemes of work, which guide the teaching and bring planned continuity to the learning and progress achieved by pupils.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum provides a good range of topics which help pupils develop their self-esteem and form constructive relationships. These topics also enable pupils to consider the world beyond their immediate concerns and the contributions they can make in the wider world. Citizenship and careers education are incorporated into this provision. Careers education is further supported through opportunities for work experience, according to the individual capability of each pupil to sustain a work placement.

The school has achieved much in the relatively short period of its existence, although it has yet to reach the high standards it has set itself. The planning and management of the curriculum are detailed. The school takes good account of the attainment and attitudes of pupils and has put together a programme which is appropriate to their needs. Further work remains to be done in developing aspects of the provision, such as a curriculum for younger or less able pupils in which literacy skills have a higher profile. The school recognises this and has planned to implement the Key Stage 3 national strategy for literacy and numeracy.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Parents and carers unanimously agreed, in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, that the teaching benefited their children. Although pupils are admitted to the school with negative views of learning and histories of severely disrupted education, teachers and their assistants successfully re-engage pupils with learning. Most pupils achieve accreditation in either General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), English and mathematics or Entry Level Certificates in a range of AQA study units. It remains that because they are few in number, teachers are unable to provide the full range of expertise necessary to fully extend the learning achieved by pupils. However, teachers make good allowances in their lesson plans for the different attainments of pupils. The school is endeavouring to address this through the employment of sessional tutors with specific skills.

A hallmark of the teaching is the good relationships which exist between staff and pupils. Teachers recognise the fragility of relationships between some pupils. They use this knowledge to place pupils in the most effective working groups. Although pupils were well behaved during the time of inspection, encouraging them to concentrate on their learning represented a continual challenge to staff. Staff show considerable expertise in managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils respect staff and they often complete their work because of the good quality relationships which exist between them. Teachers are also expert at reading signs of frustration in pupils. Where this happens they use subtle techniques to re-direct the activity. The outcome is that most pupils remain on task throughout lessons.

The attitudes of pupils during lessons are satisfactory. In a science lesson, for example, the pupils worked independently on topics such as the digestive process and the senses. Only one pupil felt it necessary to work apart from the group. All completed their tasks successfully and achieved an understanding of their individual topic. Discussion with pupils indicated that they all felt they were achieving more at Wessex College than they had in previous placements.

Provision for higher attaining pupils is better than that for lower attaining pupils. This is because higher attaining pupils are more motivated as they see their effort bringing success. They are also more able to follow the more complex demands in textbooks as they work individually. Despite this, discussion with pupils, especially those of higher attainment, indicated that they felt the teaching could be more challenging. The work done by all pupils is based upon their needs as identified within their statements of SEN. Staff identify progress through reference to National Curriculum level descriptors. In some cases their unfamiliarity with these levels raises doubts about their accuracy.

Although resources which support learning are satisfactory, those for lower attaining pupils lack the necessary range. This limits and restricts the ways in which these pupils can develop their knowledge and understanding. This is particularly the case in the development of literacy. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to draft and re-draft written work as well as to undertake research using the internet.

A weakness in teaching is that objectives for each lesson are not shared with pupils. It is hard for pupils to identify what it is they need to learn. This also makes it difficult for teachers to assess the impact of their teaching. Invariably an end-of-lesson summary or plenary is omitted. Lessons lack the structure which would allow for a variation in pace or method.

When pupils are admitted to the school they undertake a series of tests which identifies their attainment. This valuable information is used to supplement each pupil's education plan. It is not however, effectively used as a basis to establish further progress. Assessment in lessons is used infrequently. Marking of work is not carried out consistently and pupils are often unaware of what they need to do in order to improve. The school does not have a common system to record

assessment information and it is therefore difficult to track pupils' progress across subjects.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

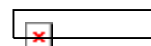
No.

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:

- demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught (paragraph 1(3)(e));
- ensure that classroom resources are of adequate quality, quantity and range and use these effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)); and
- put in place a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

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



Provision for pupils' moral and social development is good and for their spiritual and cultural development it is satisfactory.

The school is successful in raising pupils' self-esteem and developing their self-confidence. This is supported through visits to outdoor pursuits centres where pupils take part in climbing, canoeing, raft-building and horse-riding. Pupils speak with pride when describing their participation in these activities. Pupils also have individual tutorial sessions where they are encouraged to reflect on their progress and identify targets for improvement. Informal discussions at breaks and lunchtimes between staff and pupils help to establish an accepting environment in which pupils feel safe and supported.

Pupils' moral education is supported effectively by the school's positive ethos. A 'Staff relationships with young people' policy sets out how staff should encourage honesty and mutual respect and set high standards for personal behaviour. Staff provide good role models, adopting a calm and respectful approach when reminding pupils of the correct way to behave. This encourages pupils to consider how they themselves might act and to develop a greater understanding of the impact their behaviour has on others. A selected theme for each week promotes the discussion of moral issues in PSHE and citizenship, such as 'community', 'respect', 'values' and 'honesty'.

Pupils' social development and the improvement of their behaviour are high priorities for the school. Effort and acceptable behaviour around the school are recognised through a voucher system. This involves pupils earning points for good behaviour and exchanging these for additional pocket money. The school also encourages pupils to consider the consequences of their actions through 'reparation', for example by paying a small contribution towards the cost of any deliberate damage. Following any incident of misbehaviour pupils are involved in discussing strategies and setting targets for improvement. Pupils review their progress against these targets at the end of each week. Their social development is supported well by the PSHE curriculum which includes topics on healthy lifestyle, personal finance, sex education and relationships.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to show initiative, for example when they decorate the common room or organise displays of their work. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory in lessons and around the school. Many are learning to work alongside and co-operate with their peers, although

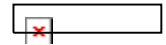
some find it difficult to listen to the views of others and take turns.

Pupils learn about public institutions and services through the citizenship curriculum, when they study such topics as 'You and the law'. Pupils also develop knowledge of the wider community through visits to the local library, job centre and a sports centre. The religious education curriculum effectively supports the development of pupils' cultural awareness through study of the major faiths. This programme is supported by visits to places such as Salisbury cathedral, although there are few religious artefacts which support this learning. Pupils further develop their cultural awareness when they use recipes from around the world to cook meals or visit historic sites, such as a local castle, the Roman baths in Bath, Stonehenge and an old iron works.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school's provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is very good.

There is a comprehensive range of policies in place to safeguard pupils' welfare and safety which includes child protection, anti-bullying and health and safety. There are good levels of staffing and suitable policies to guide staff in their supervision of pupils. These policies include guidelines to follow when taking pupils on visits away from school.

Positive behaviour management approaches are used consistently across the school. These have a focus which helps pupils discuss ways they can improve their behaviour. There are very positive relationships between staff and pupils which enable pupils to discuss freely their feelings and to raise any concerns. Staff receive appropriate training in the use of physical restraint and use this in a measured and respectful way to help calm pupils who become distressed or display severely challenging behaviour. All incidents of behaviour requiring sanctions or such restraint are recorded thoroughly and logged in bound books.

New pupils receive a 'Things you may need to know about Wessex College' booklet which contains useful information on rules, the school's approach to managing behaviour and what pupils should do if they are bullied or need someone to talk to. Individual therapy is provided for those pupils who require it. The school has a no-smoking policy in the building and supports pupils who wish to stop smoking.

The school has a good fire safety policy and the procedures supporting this have been approved by the local Fire Authority. All staff receive training in fire safety and are aware of their responsibilities in the event of any emergency. The school carries out regular fire drills and keeps a record to show that alarms and fire-fighting equipment are serviced appropriately.

There is First Aid cover available at all times during the day and several staff are qualified in First Aid. There is a detailed policy for the administration of medicines and the relevant procedures are followed rigorously. The school maintains a daily attendance register and also keeps an admission register which contains the required information.

The school has not yet drawn up an accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

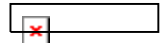
Yes.

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 the accessibility of the premises.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

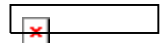


The school has sound procedures for the appointment of staff based on its recruitment and selection policy. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school keeps detailed records to show that staff qualifications and identity are checked and that references are taken up with previous employers. Medical checks are also carried out prior to staff being confirmed in their appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The school is located in a former Georgian-style residence, which has had several different uses during its lifetime. It now provides good accommodation for the school. All teaching areas are of sufficient size and include fittings appropriate to the ages of the pupils.

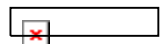
The building is in good repair and is well decorated. The school management is developing the accommodation to include specialist facilities such as those for art, design and technology (DT), food technology and ICT. The provision for art and DT is not yet complete. The school uses nearby amenities to supplement the opportunities for pupils. Among these is the local swimming pool and riding stables. Despite a previous recommendation there is no library, which pupils could use for research or reading. However, the computer facility is linked to the internet.

There is a small garden, but in the event of inclement weather the school makes good indoor provision for pupils to enjoy their breaks.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school provides detailed information for parents and carers of prospective pupils with a prospectus and a statement of purpose. These documents have been recently updated and set out clearly the school's approach to teaching pupils with complex SEBD needs. Information includes a description of the school's aims, organisation, staffing, curriculum, anti-bullying policy and arrangements for safeguarding pupils' welfare. There is also an outline of the school's referral and admission procedures and the overall academic performance of pupils in the previous school year. Parents are informed in the prospectus that they may, on request, receive a copy of the complaints procedure as well as copies of the anti-bullying, child protection and health and safety policies.

The school seeks to keep in regular contact with parents and carers, encouraging them to visit the school and sending home examples of good work completed by pupils. An annual report is compiled on each pupil. These reports contain information on pupils' progress in each subject, and identify their achievement in relation to National Curriculum levels.

All pupils at the school are funded by their home authorities which pay a single fee, inclusive of the costs for both residential care and education. The school does not provide an annual account of income received nor a breakdown of how this money is spent.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

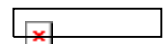
The school meets all except one of the requirements.

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 for local authorities (and on request to the Secretary of State) an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each pupil they fund (paragraph 6(7)).

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



Although the school publishes a complaints procedure, for use by pupils and for the information of parents, it does not comply with the regulations. The requirements are listed below.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

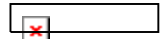
What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- set out in the procedure clear timescales for its management (paragraph 7(c));
- allow for complaints to be first considered at an informal level (paragraph 7(d));
- provide for a complaint to be made in writing if parents are not satisfied with the response to an informal complaint (paragraph 7e));
- where parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint provide for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));

- where there is a panel hearing of a complaint ensure that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));
- allow for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));
- provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors and headteachers, and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i));
- keep written records of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)); and
- ensure that that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

School details



Name of school:	Wessex College		
DfES ref number:	865/6035		
Type of school:	Special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural disorders		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 4,	Girls 4,	Total 8
Number of boarders:	Boys 4,	Girls 4,	Total 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 4,	Girls 1,	Total 5
Annual fees (day pupils):	£45,500		
Address of school:	Wessex Lodge Nunney Road Frome Somerset BA11 4LA		
E-mail address:	theoffice@wessexcollege.co.uk		
Telephone number:	01985 218486		
Fax number:	01985 218347		
Headteacher:	Ms C Smith		
Proprietor:	Wessex College Ltd.		
Lead Inspector:	Mr Tom Smith		
Dates of inspection:	6 - 9 June 2005		