

# MACINTYRE SCHOOL

Reference: 291/00/SS

A report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

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## MACINTYRE SCHOOL

27-28 June 2000

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#### **BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Name of school	MacIntyre School
Type of school	Special (for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties)
Status	Independent
Age range of pupils	10 to 19 years
Principal	Mrs H Willdridge

Address of school	The Old Manor House, Leighton Road, Wingrave, Buckinghamshire HP22 4PD
Telephone	01296 681274
Name and address of appropriate authority	MacIntyre Care, 602 South Seventh Street, Central Milton Keynes, BUCKS MK9 2JA
Local education authority area	Buckinghamshire
Unique reference number	110564
Name of reporting inspector	Mr D Gardiner HMI
Dates of inspection	27-28 June 2000

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## **INTRODUCTION**

MacIntyre School is situated in Wingrave, near Aylesbury and Leighton Buzzard in Buckinghamshire. It is an independent, residential special school for up to 34 pupils aged 10 to 19 who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. It is operated by MacIntyre Care. There are 33 pupils on roll, of whom 17 are boys and 16 are girls. All the pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need and are placed at the school by several local education authorities (LEAs), mainly from southern England. Almost all of the pupils have additional needs, such as sensory or physical difficulties, epilepsy, or present challenging behaviours. Many pupils have severe communication difficulties and use Signalong, Makaton and Rebus symbols to aid their communication. Pupils come from a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds, with some pupils coming from ethnic-minority families where English is an additional language. All of the pupils are resident for 52 weeks each year, though strong links with homes are maintained.

The school was inspected under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in April 1996. The inspection was critical of a number of aspects of the work of the school. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in May 1997 and by an HMI and an Additional Inspector in March 1998 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and to address the key issues in the inspection report of April 1996.

The school was inspected again in May 1998 for two days by two Additional Inspectors, under the School Inspections Act 1996, Section 3. The inspection drew on evidence from the visit in March 1998, and was critical of many aspects of the work of the school. In accordance with the same Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in February, May and November 1999 and in March 2000 to assess the progress it was making to address the key issues in the inspection report of May 1998.

In June 2000, one HMI and an Additional Inspector inspected the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under the School Inspections Act 1996, Section 3, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a Section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Fifteen lessons or parts of lessons were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch-times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the principal and senior staff. Informal discussions were held with other teachers, classroom support staff and residential care staff. All of the residential houses were visited briefly. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 1998 and the action plan prepared by the principal and MacIntyre Care to address those key issues.

It is inappropriate to judge the attainment of the pupils for whom the school caters against age-related national expectations or averages. Judgements about progress and references to attainment take account of information contained in the pupils' Statements of Special Educational Need, annual reviews and individual education plans.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

In accordance with Section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The main findings of the inspection are:

- pupils made at least satisfactory progress in all the lessons. In six of the 15 lessons, pupils made good progress. There is evidence in the pupils' records that they are making at least satisfactory progress over a longer period of time. The use of signing and symbols, which is developing throughout the school, has improved the ability of pupils to communicate. The introduction of work from the national literacy and numeracy strategies has had a positive impact on the progress made by pupils. Individual pupils have made good progress in the reduction of obsessive or self-injuring behaviours;
- pupils generally behave well in lessons. They settle to work quickly, are engaged in the activities and persevere. Those pupils who are highly distractible are allowed to have brief periods of time away from the work but then readily settle to their tasks;
- the quality of teaching has steadily improved since the inspection of May 1998 and was at least satisfactory in all the lessons; it was good in one third of the lessons. The effective work by support staff in lessons contributes to the quality of the teaching. The good quality teamwork by teachers and support staff, particularly in the management of difficult behaviours, which is done sensitively but firmly, is a strength of the school;

- the lessons where the quality of teaching is good or better are characterised by good planning, with clear learning objectives and roles for support staff. This is not consistent across all lessons. Generally lessons are conducted at a satisfactory and sometimes brisk pace, though this sometimes falters towards the end, as pupils tire;
- the curriculum for pupils of statutory school age is based on the programmes of study of the National Curriculum and includes work based on the national literacy and numeracy strategies. Work is matched to the targets in pupils' individual education and care plans. There is good practice in the writing of sharply focused targets which are capable of evaluation to indicate progress, but as yet not all targets reach this standard;
- the post-16 curriculum is based on nationally produced materials that are being fine-tuned to meet the particular needs of the students. There is evidence of careful assessment of the attainment and progress of students, which contributes to detailed reports. Students also have opportunities to gain external accreditation;
- the teaching accommodation is used well, but the layout of the accommodation and the lack of some specialist areas continue to present difficulties. There are plans to remedy these difficulties, but as yet there is no firm date for the work;
- the residential accommodation, based in purpose-built houses, is of very good quality. Together with the good care arrangements, this provides very good quality residential provision for the pupils and is a significant strength of the school. There is very good practice in one of the residential houses of involvement in a life-skills course. This now needs to be extended to other houses in order to reflect an integrated 24-hour curriculum;
- resources for learning and in the residential homes have been improved. There is a good range of books and computer equipment available, though the latter is not yet used to maximum benefit, particularly for pupils with severe communication difficulties;
- the principal, appointed since the inspection of May 1998, provides strong and effective leadership of the work of the school and residential provision, and has played a significant part in its improvement. There is good support from the heads of lower and upper school and from the head of care, but there is no post of deputy headteacher. This has restricted the time and opportunity for senior managers to routinely monitor the quality of planning and teaching and to ensure consistency in the implementation of policies. The school has made effective use of external support, but this is not on a sufficiently frequent basis to replace the necessary internal monitoring;
- the school and the residential provision support the personal development of the pupils. Staff know the pupils well, and relationships between staff and pupils are good. Staff provide good role models for the pupils and make clear what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to make choices and do so well. Regular assemblies allow for pupils' spiritual and moral development. Arrangements for visits, particularly during the activity weeks in the autumn and summer terms, provide good opportunities for social and cultural development.

## **KEY ISSUES**

In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the organisation, principal, senior managers and staff need to:

- consolidate and build upon the improved progress made by pupils;
- raise further the quality of teaching, including lesson planning, and improve consistency throughout the school;
- build upon the existing good practice in assessment and the writing of targets in pupils' individual education and care plans to ensure consistent implementation throughout the school;
- improve the use of information technology in order to improve pupils' communication skills, particularly for those pupils with the most severe communication difficulties;
- ensure that the senior managers of the school have the time to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of planning and teaching on a regular and systematic basis;
- move forward with the planned replacement of the teaching accommodation in order to address the recognised deficiencies and difficulties.

## **INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Standards of achievement**

Pupils enter the school with very limited attainments, due to the severity of their learning difficulties, which are often accompanied by additional sensory or physical problems. Very few of the pupils are able to communicate verbally. Many of the pupils also present challenging, obsessive or self-injuring behaviours. They make at least satisfactory progress in all lessons. In six of the 15 lessons inspected, pupils made good progress. There is evidence in the pupils' records that they are making at least satisfactory progress over a longer period of time.

The use of signing and symbols, which is developing throughout the school, has improved the ability of the pupils to communicate. Pupils are able to sit in a group and to join in the daily "hello session". They are able to recognise their own photograph, and in some cases their own name, from a choice of two or more. They respond to the greeting song and anticipate when it is their turn. They are able to choose which drink or snack they wish to have and indicate this choice using signs or symbols, or, in a few cases, speech.

Introduction of work from the National Literacy Strategy has had a positive impact on the progress made by pupils. Pupils are able to sit in a group and listen to a story. They enjoy the experience of those stories which have accompanying sensory objects. They recognise symbols representing words in the story and are able to sign responses and take part.

The early stages of the National Numeracy Strategy have also had a positive impact. Younger pupils can count and match items to numbers. Older pupils count to a higher level and recognise numerical symbols, matching these to the correct number of objects. Some pupils recognise shapes, such as squares, circles and triangles, and sort these into separate groups.

Pupils are developing an awareness and understanding of early scientific concepts and are able to take part in investigations. Some of the pupils are able to operate computers, using single switches or large roller balls, though this work could be further extended to more of the pupils. Progress in other subjects is satisfactory.

Individual pupils have also made good progress in the reduction of obsessive or self-injuring behaviours and are now much more a part of the class group, joining in the activities. Pupils generally behave well in lessons. They settle to work quickly, are engaged in the activities and remain on task. Those pupils who are highly distractible work with an adult in a screened area and are allowed to have brief periods of time away from the activity when they have completed a task. They then settle to work again quickly.

### **Quality of education**

The quality of teaching has improved steadily on each of the monitoring visits made since the inspection of May 1998. It is at least satisfactory in all the lessons. It was good in five lessons and very good in one. The good quality of the work with individual pupils by classroom assistants contributes effectively to the lessons. The quality of the teamwork by teachers and support staff, particularly in the management of pupils with difficult behaviours, which is done sensitively but firmly, is a strength of the school.

The lessons where the quality of teaching is good or better are characterised by good planning, with clear learning objectives and roles for the support staff. This is not yet consistent across all lessons. Generally lessons are conducted at a satisfactory and sometimes brisk pace, though this sometimes falters towards the end, as the pupils tire.

Most teaching, classroom support and care staff have benefited from a year-long course, provided by an external college and leading to accreditation. This has assisted in updating and enhancing skills, giving a common framework within which staff work. The high turnover of care staff, however, has reduced the benefit of this, but there are good arrangements for the induction of new staff, which include the essential elements of the course.

The curriculum for pupils of statutory school age is based on the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, suitably modified to meet the particular needs of the pupils. It includes work based on the national literacy and numeracy strategies. Work is matched well to the targets in pupils' individual education and care plans, meeting the particular needs of individual pupils. There is good practice in the writing of sharply focused targets, which are capable of evaluation to indicate progress. Not all individual education plans contain such clear targets, and this is an area on which the school is continuing to work.

The curriculum for post-16 students is based on nationally produced materials, which have been introduced over the past year. The materials are being fine-tuned and adapted to meet the particular needs of the students. It is important that lessons are planned to include clear details of the specific learning objectives for the particular lesson, rather than annotated references to learning objectives of the scheme. There is

evidence of careful assessment of the attainment and progress made by the students, which contribute to detailed reports on their progress for parents, carers and placing LEAs. Students have the opportunity to gain external accreditation of their progress through the Award Scheme of the Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

The teaching accommodation is used well and is sufficient for the number of pupils and students, but the layout of the accommodation and the lack of a specialist area for design and technology continue to present difficulties. The organisation has plans to replace the teaching accommodation in order to remedy these difficulties, but there is no firm date for this to take place.

The residential accommodation is separate from the teaching accommodation, so that there is a clear division between the pupils' homes and going to school. The residential accommodation, based in new purpose-built houses, is of very good quality. Together with the good care arrangements, which are well organised by the head of care and carefully supervised by the heads of each house, this provides very good quality residential provision for the pupils and is a significant strength of the school.

There is very good practice in one of the residential houses, where care staff have taken responsibility for the development of the life-skills module of the ASDAN course for post-16 students, and undertake work which contributes to the award. This now needs to be extended so that it takes place in the other residential houses where older students live, in order to contribute to an integrated 24-hour curriculum.

Resources for learning in the school and resources in the residential houses have been improved. There is a good range of books and computer equipment available, though the latter is not yet used to maximum benefit, particularly for pupils with severe communication difficulties. Signing and symbols are also used in the residential houses, as well as in the school, and this aids and supports pupils' communication.

### **Management and efficiency of the school**

The principal, appointed since the inspection of May 1998, has previous experience as a headteacher and has brought a clear educational focus to the work of the school. She has been a significant factor in the improvement of the quality of provision. She has a clear vision for the work of the school and provides strong and effective leadership of the school and the residential provision. There is good support from the heads of lower and upper school, the welfare officer and from the head of care, but there is no post of deputy headteacher. This has restricted the time and opportunity for senior management to monitor routinely the quality of planning and teaching and to ensure consistency in the implementation of policies. For a period, both the principal and the head of care were diverted from work in the school by additional responsibility for a separate off-site provision maintained by the organisation, but this has now been transferred to separate management. The recruitment, retention and induction of new residential care staff still take up a significant amount of their time.

The school has made effective use of external support, including purchasing support from Buckinghamshire LEA's inspector for special educational needs. This has been

valued and will be missed, as the inspector is leaving the LEA to take up another post. An advisory group has been established to consider initiatives and policies presented by the principal and this has proved useful. However, such external support is not on a sufficiently frequent basis to replace the necessary internal monitoring by the senior management of the school.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

The school and the residential provision support the personal development of the pupils and students. Staff know the pupils well, and relationships between staff and pupils are good. Staff provide good role models for the pupils and make clear what is right and wrong, and what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Regular well-conducted lower-school assemblies contribute to pupils' spiritual development and provide opportunities for the pupils to think about spiritual and moral issues at their own level.

Pupils are given regular opportunities to make and indicate choices and do so well. This contributes to their social development. Arrangements for visits, particularly during the activity weeks in the autumn and summer term which involve all staff, provide good opportunities for social and cultural development. The independence of pupils is fostered and encouraged as much as possible, within their limitations, with careful regard for their safety.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN**

### **Key Issue 1: to improve pupils' rate of progress in English, mathematics, science and information technology**

The school has successfully improved pupils' progress in all these subjects. The introduction of work based on the national literacy and numeracy strategies and related staff in-service training have helped raise progress in English and mathematics. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress in science and information technology, though there is scope for further improvement in both of these subjects.

### **Key Issue 2: to provide positive, informed leadership, developing a strategic view of the school's development, and monitoring and evaluation procedures**

The school has successfully addressed this key issue. The appointment of a new principal since the inspection of May 1998 has provided experienced leadership and management. The principal provides effective leadership and management, supported by the two heads of lower and upper school, the welfare officer and by the head of care. She has a clear vision for the future of the school, shared by staff, who are proud of the improvements in the quality of education and residential care. Outline plans for future development, prepared by the principal, have been considered and adopted by the advisory group and the senior management of the organisation responsible for the running of the school. The recent appointment of a director, responsible for education and training, has increased the level of professional input available to the school. The lack of a post of deputy headteacher limits the opportunity available to senior managers to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, but members of the senior management team undertake this, within the time available to them.



**Key Issue 3: to improve the quality of teaching by developing a consistent approach to lesson planning, which includes setting clear, individual learning objectives for pupils and students**

The school has satisfactorily addressed this key issue. There is a whole-school approach to lesson planning, which sets clear learning objectives for the lesson and relates these to the targets in individual pupils' education and care plans. This has been adopted throughout the school, though there are some variations in the consistency of its application. The best practice clearly identifies the learning objectives for the lesson and how these will be interpreted for individual pupils, and specifies the roles of the teacher and learning support staff in working with the pupils. Practice is more consistent in the lower school than the upper school, where learning objectives need to be specified in detail, rather than by reference to the objectives of the curriculum materials. This is an area which requires careful and ongoing monitoring by senior management in order to ensure that there is consistency across the school.

**Key Issue 4: to provide appropriate planned induction and appraisal for all staff, to include teachers, learning support assistants, care assistants and administrative staff**

This key issue has been successfully addressed by the school. The organisation responsible for the operation of the school has adopted a common policy and procedures for the induction of new staff. Additional elements recognise the particular needs of a residential special school and are effectively used to provide good induction for staff. Existing staff have benefited from the long course by an external provider, which was attended by teachers, learning support staff and residential care staff. This has provided a common core for the work of the school. There are effective arrangements for the supervision and appraisal of all staff, which are carried out by members of the senior management team and senior staff.

**Key Issue 5: to develop an overview of the curriculum, both in and after school, and improve the quality of curriculum planning in the long and medium-term, ensuring that appropriate National Curriculum requirements are met**

The school has successfully addressed this key issue. There is a clear overview of the curriculum for pupils of statutory age, which is based on the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, appropriately modified to meet the particular needs of the pupils. This is supplemented by a curriculum for post-16 students which consolidates earlier work, meets their particular needs and leads to external accreditation through the ASDAN award. The planning for lessons and for the medium and long-term teaching of the curriculum has improved significantly. There is a greater recognition of the part played by the residential element of the school, and evening and weekend activities contribute to the pupils' overall development.

**Key Issue 6: to develop the assessment and recording procedures by streamlining them, and use the information to plan the work of pupils**

This key issue has been successfully addressed by the school. Procedures have been streamlined to assess effectively and record the progress made by the pupils. The

records contribute to the writing of good reports, which are sent to parents, carers and placing LEAs. The greater emphasis on assessment and recording has helped to raise staff expectations and also contributes to the planning of suitable work.

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