

Inspection report

Appleford School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 865/6008

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 20 - 23 March 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A 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

Appleford School is a co-educational, approved residential special school for pupils aged 7 to 13 years with dyslexia and associated learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, there were 84 pupils on roll: 53 boarders and 31 day pupils. Thirteen pupils have statements of special educational need and the remainder have varying degrees of learning disability. The school was established in 1988 on its present site, on the outskirts of the village of Shrewton near Amesbury.

The school aims to *'restore self-confidence so that pupils believe in themselves and become more aware of what they can achieve'* and intends to enable most pupils to return to mainstream education.

Summary of main findings

Appleford School is a good school which meets its stated aim and has many strengths. There is an explicit and clear sense of purpose shared by the staff. Teaching is predominantly good and much is outstanding. Pupils learn well and develop self-belief and maturity. The curriculum is well planned and successfully meets the needs of dyslexic pupils. The pastoral care of pupils is a significant strength.

What the school does well:

- its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent;
- its teaching is predominantly good and much is outstanding, and is underpinned by very effective assessment;
- its curriculum is good and considerably enriched by the interesting and comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities;
- its pastoral care and welfare are of a high quality; and
- its pupils behave well, become good learners and make good progress.

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

- ensure that a full employment history is obtained for all prospective employees; and

- prepare an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of any pupil registered at the school who is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, and submit that account to the local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State.

Next Steps

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

- a review of its marking policy; and
- an extension of its monitoring of teaching and learning.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good. It is broad and planned well to meet the needs of the pupils. There is a strong and very appropriate emphasis on teaching English and mathematics, and all the subjects of the National Curriculum are included. Each subject has a very clear policy and schemes of work that reflect the overall curriculum policy that is given to parents. Pupils are organised into junior, middle and senior groups for teaching, and the two-year programme for each section ensures that they continue to learn new work and make progress from year-to-year.

At the last inspection there was a weakness in the curriculum for science. This has been improved dramatically and is now highly successful. It is very broad and includes a great deal of investigative work, which the pupils commented on as helping them to learn. They echo the prime aim of the subject saying '*science is fun*'. The programme for design and technology is also greatly improved. Pupils study textiles, cooking and designing and making, for example creating totem poles similar to those of Native Americans. This is very well linked to the art and design curriculum. Whole-school activities are very successful, such as the recent Tudor Day, when, following extensive research and learning about the period, pupils and staff dressed in costume and experienced archery and falconry, a Tudor banquet, and period dancing.

Pupils with statements of special educational need are very well catered for. Pupils say that the additional provision of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy is very beneficial.

The skills of speaking and listening, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are included in all subjects. Great care is taken to identify technical language, make opportunities for pupils to read and write and to include calculations where possible. Pupils have their work for each subject saved in folders in their own files on the computers.

There is an effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, which provides pupils with very good preparation for adult life and reflects the ethos of the school very well. Pupils are helped to form views on respect, trust and honesty and to value friendship. Aspects of the curriculum such as education in drug and alcohol misuse, and in conflict resolution, help them to maintain healthy lifestyles. There are satisfactory opportunities for pupils to learn about what is entailed in various occupations. There are many visitors to the school, among them fire-fighters and magistrates, who talk to pupils about their roles.

The curriculum is enriched through many extra activities. Many pupils take advantage of instrumental tuition. Drumming and acoustic guitar are very popular. After school there is an excellent selection of sporting and other opportunities, and mostly pupils are able to make their own choices. Occasionally pupils are selected to take part in specific activities such as working in a group with the speech and

language and occupational therapists. The very good physical education (PE) programme in school is particularly enhanced by activities including swimming, cross-country, bouldering, rugby and horse riding. Additionally there are regular sports fixtures with other schools. Other leisure opportunities include working on computers, country dancing, producing a school newspaper and card and board games. Pupils who are usually non-resident are able to stay over-night when, for instance, they attend the judo session as this does not finish until later in the evening. School productions involve the whole school and are very professionally mounted. Residential visits abroad and in this country help pupils to become more self-reliant. Local facilities are used very well to support pupils' learning, including visits to Lulworth Cove and studies of Shrewton in geography. There is a very good range of additional provision for pupils in residence. They talk enthusiastically of going swimming, to the cinema or ice skating at the weekend.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is predominantly good and much is outstanding. A significant proportion of the teaching is demanding and, as a result, pupils work hard, make good progress and achieve well. Staff are well qualified and many have additional qualifications for working with pupils who have special needs.

Planning is always systematic and conscientious, with learning objectives identified in most cases. In the best lessons, teachers' planning identifies precisely what pupils will learn, shares these objectives with them, and uses an appropriate range of approaches to structure the learning. The planning format includes a list of pupils in the group and some teachers usefully include specific information on individual pupils, ensuring attention to their particular learning needs. Several teachers have established the practice of making a brief evaluation of each lesson, informing their short-term planning effectively.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong, particularly in English, mathematics, science, physical education and ICT. Teachers place an emphasis on pupils' learning and using the specialist vocabulary of the subject: in mathematics, for example, where pupils used the language of shape with accuracy and confidence. Where teaching is most effective, teachers display considerable knowledge and expertise in using specialist strategies and resources to address directly the needs of dyslexic pupils. Multi-sensory approaches are used imaginatively and to good effect in pupils' learning. For example, in science, junior pupils were delighted and intrigued by the challenge of building 'strong' sandcastles and made very good progress. Where lessons are less effective, planning is too general and the tasks set take too little account of the differing strengths and needs of the class.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy rightly has a high priority and, with ICT, is skilfully integrated throughout the curriculum. This results in a consistent emphasis on these key skills, helping pupils to become progressively more secure in their acquisition. Teachers know pupils' capabilities and needs very well and the small class numbers allow consistent individual support, which contributes strongly to pupils' good progress. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils contribute strongly to pupils' learning and to their growing self-esteem and confidence. Teachers use praise and encouragement to help pupils to believe in

themselves while at the same time setting high expectations for them. Pupils have some limited opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning as when in history and science they were set tasks to research independently. This offers a good model for wider dissemination. Learning support assistants contribute valuably to pupils' learning, especially where their intervention is planned clearly. In some lessons, however, their support activities are not integrated into the learning objectives adequately and this results in inefficient use of their time.

In discussion, pupils of all ages made it clear that they enjoy school and believe that they are making progress. Pupils' behaviour is generally good and where their conduct is distractible or anxious, teachers respond calmly and constructively. Homework contributes to pupils' learning by building usefully, and sometimes imaginatively, on work covered in class. Older pupils believe that homework prepares them well for the next stage of their schooling.

Marking is regular and conscientious and the best examples make plain to pupils why their work is good and what they need to do next to make progress. There is a written marking policy, but it lacks detail and, crucially, lacks the requirement to give pupils information on how to improve their work. It also makes no mention of the need to use assessment as part of a planning cycle.

Assessment is well established throughout the school. All pupils are comprehensively assessed on entry by the use of a variety of nationally validated tests to ascertain their levels of competence and to identify their needs. The specialist input of the occupational and speech and language therapists enhances this assessment. Subject departments have developed regular and coherent procedures to ensure that pupils' progress is regularly monitored and recorded. In English and mathematics a comprehensive range of appropriate tests and assessments ensures that pupils' progress is constantly tracked and recorded. Pupils' work in science and ICT is regularly and effectively assessed against National Curriculum levels of attainment. No formal testing is undertaken in the humanities but teachers assess pupils' work and effort both fortnightly and at the end of topic modules. The assessments of pupils' progress and achievement in all subjects informs the very good quality reports sent twice yearly to parents.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. The main aim of the school is to rebuild and maintain each pupil's self-confidence and this is evident in all aspects of school life. Staff in the school and in the residential provision use praise and encouragement to build pupils' self-esteem. In a relatively short time, pupils who initially find it very difficult indeed to communicate with their peers talk in front of whole groups and accept awards in whole-school assemblies with great confidence. The very clear systems for setting targets on individual education plans and for achieving a number of plus and minus awards ensure that the pupils know what they need to do to improve. The

comprehensive sporting and enrichment activities help pupils to establish their physical and practical capabilities and they strive to improve their performances.

There is a very clear moral code in the school which is supported well through work in PSHE. Pupils have a very strong sense of fairness and are very aware of the difference between right and wrong. The reward systems are clearly understood and valued by pupils, who, for example, are proud to wear badges showing they have gained the most stars during the week. The regular citizenship day is excellent for helping pupils to explore a broad range of issues. A recent visit by a magistrate led to much discussion on types and severity of punishments for wrong-doers. From activities such as these, and sessions in PSHE on local government and the electoral system, they learn a great deal about public institutions and services in this country.

Excellent opportunities are made for pupils to contribute to the life of the school and to the wider community. In residence, they have a variety of jobs, which are decided on a weekly or termly basis and range from checking tidiness to willingly volunteering for extra chores. There are many opportunities for taking responsibility, including acting as dinner table monitors, house captains and prefects. Members of the school council take their role very seriously. Through their representations, a number of changes have been made to improve aspects of school life such as alterations to the school uniform. They also help to decide which charities should be supported in the many fund-raising activities that occur during each year. The annual production is watched by pupils from a local primary school.

The provision for pupils' cultural development is excellent. Pupils learn about a range of cultures through topics studied, for example, in humanities and in art and design. In a recent exploration of life and death in Ancient Egypt, for example, pupils researched and made models of gods, mummies and even a life-size sarcophagus. Pupils learn about the impact of humankind on the environment in other countries, exploring issues such as conservation and pollution. Aspects of the major world religions and the work of a range of artists are studied, and older pupils write poems using special forms such as Lantern and Haiku.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The ethos of the school, its policies, the relationships between pupils and staff, and between pupils themselves, all strongly promote the welfare, health and safety of the pupils.

The school provides very clear guidance for staff in all aspects of welfare, health and safety. Extensive policies, procedures and arrangements for health and safety are outlined and understood. Good practice in monitoring helps to ensure that all systems are fully implemented. Risk assessments are carried out for all activities involving pupils. Fire safety is given a high priority. There are frequent professional checks on fire alarms and extinguishers, and the school has recently installed

automatic closures on the fire-doors. Electrical equipment is well maintained and regularly checked.

Accidents and incidents are carefully recorded and are held securely. There are suitable arrangements for pupils who may become ill. The school has clear First Aid procedures and almost half of the staff are qualified First Aiders.

Pastoral care and welfare arrangements are very good for all pupils, boarders and day pupils. Staff know pupils' needs and abilities very well and relationships are very good. Pupils are friendly and cooperative with one another. There are adequate levels of adult supervision at all times. In the houses, the house parents provide a well-organised routine which helps pupils to gain in self-reliance and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to help one another and to take care of their house.

Care staff and teaching staff work together very successfully. Care staff work towards common aims and objectives for learning in PSHE. They help to support a wide variety of additional learning and leisure pursuits and activities and these help pupils to make progress. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to choose from these activities, but there are no facilities for them to make their own snacks or drinks if they wish to do so. Pupils make good friendships in school and often choose to have friends spend a weekend at home with them.

Pupils are aware of the need to eat healthily and to take regular exercise, and in the main they do so, except when buying things during the twice weekly tuck times. Meals are taken together in the school dining hall in a communal and pleasant atmosphere. Pupils are given a say in planning future menus. Food is plentiful and nutritious and there is a well-balanced diet. There is always a selection of fresh fruit available and drinking water is available in the houses and classrooms.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has a clear set of procedures for the recruitment of staff but the requirement to verify candidates' previous employment has not been applied consistently. The school has recently amended its practice to ensure the inclusion of this element in the future recruitment of all staff.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that a full employment history is obtained for all prospective employees (paragraph 4(c)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school premises are of good quality and the accommodation is well maintained.

Well-equipped specialist rooms for science, ICT, art and design, and music contribute substantially to the high quality teaching and learning. There is an excellent sports hall which is used effectively for PE and sports as well as music and drama activities and the school productions. Other general classrooms are of a reasonable size, except in the junior school, where the classrooms are small and limit practical activities. Some classrooms provide stimulating and interesting learning environments and all are well maintained and decorated.

The residential accommodation in the two boarding houses is of a good standard. There are a sufficient number of large, well-maintained and pleasantly decorated dormitories and bathrooms. Pupils put up posters and pictures to personalise the space and make their bedrooms more homely. Food preparation and cooking areas are hygienic and suitably equipped. The cleaning of residential and teaching areas is very efficient. Each of the houses has its own sick bay.

There is a good area of hard standing for pupils' playtimes and the grassed and planted grounds are spacious and in good order. There is an excellent playing field with facilities for rugby, soccer, cricket and athletics, and a fenced hard surface area for tennis, basketball and other racquet games. The adventure play area provides additional recreational space, and a small garden and greenhouse encourage gardening activities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides an interesting range of good quality information for its parents and prospective parents. The prospectus includes a well-considered and useful introduction to the organisation of the school, the curriculum and the range of specialist support available to pupils. The aims and ethos of the school are clearly expressed and the attention to detail gives evidence of careful thought about what information will be most helpful to its readers.

The response of parents who completed the questionnaire sent out before the inspection was overwhelmingly supportive. Their views reflected significant satisfaction with the school, which they feel is well run. They believe their children like the school, behave sensibly, are taught effectively and make good progress.

Communication at an informal level is encouraged and parents have regular opportunities each week for informal meetings with teachers, as well as more formal termly meetings. The termly publication, *Appleford News*, provides a stylish newsletter for parents with good quality photographs and reproductions of pupils' work. The information covers various aspects of school life and represents much

thought and effort in keeping parents informed. It celebrates pupils' success across the curriculum from work in history to success in equestrian competition, all building their sense of achievement.

Reports of a very good quality are sent out twice a year. These are exceptionally detailed, giving parents precise information about their children's strengths and weaknesses in each subject, and setting clear targets for the future.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *prepare an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of any pupil registered at the school who is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, and submit that account to the local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 6(7)).*

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

The school's arrangements for handling complaints place a suitable emphasis on informal resolution but also have clear procedures for formal stages should they be necessary. A clear pamphlet provides a useful step-by-step guide for parents.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Appleford School
DfES Number:	865/6008
Type of school:	Special - approved residential school for pupils with dyslexia and associated learning difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	7 - 13 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 70 Girls: 14 Total: 84
Number of boarders:	Boys: 44 Girls: 9 Total: 53
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 11 Girls: 2 Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils):	£12,831
Annual fees (boarders):	£19,131
Address of school:	Elston Lane Shrewton Salisbury Wiltshire SP3 4HL
Telephone number:	01980 621020
Fax number:	01980 621366
Email address:	secretary@appleford.wilts.sch.uk
Headteacher:	Ms Stella Wilson
Proprietor:	Dr Peter Gardner & Mr Mark Petherick
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Eileen McAndrew
Date of inspection:	20 - 23 March 2006

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