

Inspection report
Overley Hall School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 894/6003

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 21 - 24 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. An inspector from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) carried out inspection activities in co-ordination with Ofsted inspectors and contributed to the evidence base for the inspection.

Information about the school

Overley Hall School provides education and care for up to 22 students aged from 9 to 19 years. At the time of the inspection there were 21 students at the school, 14 boys and 7 girls. It accepts students from a wide geographical area and currently from a range of local authorities in England and one in Wales.

The school serves the needs of students with severe learning difficulties, autism, epilepsy and associated challenging behaviours. The school aims to provide a happy, safe and secure learning environment where each student has equality of opportunity to access a curriculum designed to meet individual needs. There is a clearly expressed aspiration that *'every member of the school is treated with respect and is valued as an individual'*.

The care accommodation is in a modified Victorian building which has undergone considerable refurbishment recently. The care facilities are classified as a children's home for the purposes of registration and inspection. The school facilities adjoin the care accommodation and are housed in prefabricated and demountable buildings. The school has been approved by the Department for Education and Skills since July 2002.

Summary of main findings

Overley Hall School provides a good educational experience for its students through a broad and developing curriculum, effective teaching and high standards of care. It meets almost all regulatory requirements and has no significant weaknesses. The very good relationships between staff and students result in a positive, non-threatening learning environment in which students are able to participate and achieve success.

What the school does well:

- its teaching team provides high quality education for students in safe, well-managed learning environments;
- its planning for the education of its students meets the needs of individuals and provides good challenge and good pace to learning;

- it encourages high quality relationships between teaching staff, care staff and students that promote good levels of trust and good social development;
- it ensures high levels of engagement of its students through skilled teaching and high standards of care; and
- it provides a good range of extra-curricular visits which play a significant part in the education and social development of its students.

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

- provide the local authorities funding a student with an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of that student.

Next Steps

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

- continue to develop the curriculum to provide a cohesive programme for continuity and progression in students' learning;
- withdraw all but the current versions of policies, making it clear whether they apply to both care and education settings ; and
- provide a chair/a bed in the surgery for students who are injured.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school is developing a broad curriculum which reflects its aim of providing ‘a happy, safe and secure learning environment where each student has equality of opportunity to access a curriculum designed to meet their individual needs, and where every member of the school is treated with respect and valued as an individual’.

The curriculum policy specifies what subject areas will be taught. These are not yet fully supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work in all subjects. The school recognises that this is an area which requires further development in order to provide a cohesive programme which offers clear continuity and progression in students’ learning.

The curriculum is designed to promote students’ independence and to develop their life skills; it also includes literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Other key skills which are developed in all lessons include communication, physical development and social skills. Design and technology, incorporating woodwork and food technology, is also taught within school, and all students have sex education and some religious education (RE). There is a very good range of activities available to students within the extensive grounds of the school. For example, there is a large walled garden, which offers excellent opportunities for horticulture, and a nature trail is being developed which will provide opportunities for out-of-class learning.

Students up to the age of 14 follow a modified National Curriculum, which is designed to provide equality of opportunity. The detailed half-termly planning for this group indicates that, in addition to the above curriculum, science, history, music, art and physical education (PE) are taught. This provides a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of the students as specified in their statements of special educational needs. Students are taught on a one-to-one basis, and they are able to work at their own pace and level in an individually tailored programme.

Older students aged 14 to 19 benefit from access to externally accredited courses, such as Accreditation for Life and Living Skills (ALL) which covers leisure, community, environment, home management and the world of work. This enables the young people to develop life skills within a clearly defined framework and gain accreditation for these key skills. Students also have the opportunity to work towards Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) National Skills Profile both at school and in the local Telford College of Art and Technology. Courses are offered in ICT, performing arts and PE. The curriculum offered to the older students fulfils the aims of the school and provides a wealth of enrichment.

The curriculum is enhanced by off-site visits. Some are extended educational visits, which include a residential trip and a day trip to the Severn Valley Railway, and others are regular outings to local amenities, such as the public swimming pool,

where students have the opportunity to follow the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) National Swim Awards. Environmental trips involving an extended walk are much enjoyed by the students, particularly as this involves a picnic, the food for which they have chosen themselves. Other activities include canoeing and shopping trips. This curriculum is planned to provide opportunities for students to begin to integrate with the wider community, thereby increasing their confidence and raising their self-esteem.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good. In many lessons there are outstanding features which enable students to develop their skills, understanding and enhance their self-esteem. Students enjoy their learning and make good progress. They are encouraged to take responsibility, for example, by going shopping in a supervised group to buy food, and they are given opportunities to make choices.

A major strength of the school is the dedicated teaching team. Teachers and teaching assistants provide a range of learning experiences to stimulate and engage the young people. Teachers carefully guide their teaching assistants to ensure that students are challenged and achieve well. Support is generally provided on a one-to-one basis, and this enables the level and pace of work to be tailored to the individual's specific needs. Teaching assistants work with all the students in their group, so that they benefit from experiencing relationships with different members of staff.

The very good relationships between staff and students result in a positive, non-threatening learning environment in which students are able to participate and achieve success. Staff are excellent role models for the students, and their consistent use of non-confrontational strategies in managing behaviour helps to maintain a calm ethos throughout the school.

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is used very effectively to provide equal learning opportunities for all students. For example, during circle time students are helped to identify their timetable for the day using PECS, so they are aware of their specific schedule of activities. Regular consolidation of work enables students to gain confidence in their learning. In one lesson observed a game was used to revise earlier work, and, in another, careful planning ensured that the students were fully engaged revisiting and also extending their learning through a variety of activities. Resources appropriate to students' abilities and interests are used to stimulate engagement and promote discussion. For example, during an art and craft lesson one student was fascinated by a tube which, she discovered, not only magnified the volume of her voice, but also provided her with a different perspective when she looked through it, and the teacher built on this discovery to extend the student's learning.

Where teaching is less effective the variety of teaching strategies used is limited, and the work is not differentiated sufficiently to meet the needs of all the learners. In particular the higher achievers are not always sufficiently challenged. Time is not always used to maximum effect in all lessons, and an absence of engaging activities

or resources for use when students have completed their work occasionally results in missed learning opportunities.

The school has recently introduced a new framework for assessment and is currently supporting its implementation across the school. Progress is described in smaller steps using the assessment, so that students' achievement can be determined more accurately, and the outcomes can be used to plan more effectively. Records kept include regularly monitored individual education plans (IEPs), and personal, social, health and emotional (PSHE) targets. These targets are set each lunchtime in order to support the development of social skills in less structured environments. The use of recorded data is still being developed in order to evaluate students' performance and hence support effective lesson planning.

Students complete externally accredited courses successfully, such as ALL, which are taught within school. All of the eligible students have attained their Core Skills, many have achieved the Introductory Grade and over half have achieved the First Grade. Students also attend the local Arts and Technology College, where they follow the National Skills Profile accredited programme. This enables students to study within the community. The school has recently begun to implement a base line assessment in order to provide an indicator of the school's value added performance.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. Staff encourage students to express their views and to listen to each other. Circle time is used to develop communication, and all students are expected to participate, either by giving a verbal response or by another method, for example by using PECS or by signing. The sharing of news and the carefully guided subsequent sessions in which everyone is valued help students to increase their confidence.

Many students are aware of the level of behaviour required of them in different environments. Staff promote good table manners at lunchtimes, and have high expectations of the students when they are out of school. The observed behaviour of the students whilst they were at the public swimming pool was outstanding. Their good manners and considerate behaviour were exemplary. Other people using the pool were treated with respect.

The PSHE curriculum, which is a core element of the school's timetable, promotes the development of students' social skills and their self-awareness. Within the school students are expected to contribute to their community by helping each other and by carrying out appropriate tasks. For example, prior to an environmental trip, one student collected the coats of his classmates and made sure he had the right coat for the right person. Many of the students are very supportive of each other,

and take trouble to involve the less able in their group. They enjoy each other's successes, and applaud one another for both effort and achievement.

The school celebrates different festivals, for example Diwali and the Chinese New Year, which extend students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures and religions by providing multi-sensory experiences for them. In one outstanding lesson different breads from around the world were used to provide a multicultural experience. Further opportunities to explore moral and social issues are provided by extra-curricular events, such as Red Nose Day and UNICEF's Day for Change.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the students

Overley Hall provides a secure and safe environment for the education and care of students. In both care and classroom environments there is good supervision from appropriately qualified staff. Levels of supervision are high, with one-to-one staffing during teaching sessions and two staff to four students for lunchtime supervision. Teachers, teaching assistants and care staff work in a well co-ordinated way to provide for students, and they show good understanding of students' needs. It is clear that students have positive relationships with other students and with teachers and carers, from which they are gaining benefit. Good leadership sets the standards for care and education that staff readily adhere to.

The good practice in the welfare, health and safety of students is directed and supported through a suite of policy documents. These policies cover all required areas such as, anti-bullying, health and safety, and child protection. There is some replication of policies, such as that on bullying, that could lead to lack of clarity. Most policies have the date on which they were last reviewed and these are all appropriately recent. It is not always clear whether the policies apply to both care and education settings.

The school has effective policies on educational visits and records of risk assessments for out-of-school activities and individual students. These are kept systematically and were made readily available to inspectors. The school organises a good range of out-of-school activities in a safe way that helps students' development. Good management and organisation are seen also in the maintenance of such things as fire and safety equipment, the compliance with risk assessments by the fire service, electrical checks and other health and safety requirements. The management and control of medication are secure and its issue is recorded effectively.

Care and respect for the individual are clear imperatives in the school, and are seen both in policies and in practice. When the management of students requires sanctions, these are guided by clearly defined policies, and records are made of all sanction activity. Based on good personal and professional relationships, the sanctions do not allow impact on the meals, mail or daily living needs of students. There is a well-structured and consistent approach by the whole staff to prevent

harm to students. These physical intervention procedures used in behaviour management are carried out appropriately.

The school has disabled access to the ground floor. The school's own review has led it to explore ways of improving access and the playground. It has engaged professional advice to generate a specification for the work to be done, and is setting about a tendering process. These developments have been thoroughly discussed at senior management team meetings and there are clear plans to bring about improvements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff working at Overley Hall have been subject to checks by the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children. These checks, and the associated administration, are carried out systematically. It is clear from records kept by the school that their procedures for appointment of staff fully meet requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable for their purpose. The care accommodation has recently been refurbished as part of a scheme to raise standards. The common areas are well decorated, and include well-lit and appropriately equipped kitchen areas and comfortable lounge areas. Students have individual bedrooms that are also well decorated, with students taking part in the choice of colours and other details. The students and their families are encouraged to 'personalise' their bedrooms. This has been done to good effect, producing rooms that are homely and unique for each student.

Refurbishment and development have also been well executed in the old stable block, which is situated at one side of an extensive walled garden. The conversion of the stables has produced workshops for construction and working with wood. Alongside, the 'coach house' has a large and flexible space suitable for concerts and other such events. The walled garden is maintained through collaboration between the Overley Hall staff and Shrewsbury College of Art and Technology. The college runs an adult education class for people with learning disabilities in the recently converted stable block. Access to the stable block facilities is separate from the school and from residential accommodation. These arrangements ensure that the education of students in the school is not disrupted.

Education takes place in a number of pre-fabricated demountable buildings. These provide warm and well-ventilated spaces for students and staff to work. Each

classroom is designed for flexible use, with both carpet and vinyl floor covering of different areas allowing for a range of activities. While the flooring in all parts of the premises are in generally good condition, in one classroom, there is damage to the vinyl flooring that, while not yet a tripping hazard, needs to be monitored for further deterioration and appropriate action taken. The furniture is appropriate to the needs of students and for a range of purposes. Each class has its own base room but has access to specialist areas such as those for food technology and for ICT. These areas are equipped appropriately and are fit for purpose. While the surgery has ready access to a toilet and has appropriate facilities, such as a washbasin, it lacks the facility for injured or sick students to sit down or recline to receive medical treatment. Classrooms and other parts of the school are frequently cleaned, are tidy, and in a hygienic state.

The school has ensured that students can evacuate the buildings safely in emergency situations. All exit routes are clearly signed and safety checks, for such things as fire equipment and electrical installation, are managed well and are carefully recorded. Areas of the school that present a possible source of danger to pupils are kept carefully locked. For example, the cleaning materials store, where caustic and irritant chemicals are kept, is padlocked at high level, as is the access door to the hydrotherapy pool. The premises for education and care are well-maintained and are overall satisfactorily decorated.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school has an attractive prospectus which contains much relevant information. Additional essential documents, which must be supplied to parents and other interested parties, are now available as insertions for the prospectus.

The school has not yet made arrangements to inform the local authorities of income received and expenditure incurred for each of the students they fund at the school.

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

- *provide the local authorities funding students with an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of that student (paragraph 6(7)).*

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

The school has clear and recently reviewed school procedures for handling complaints. It has now ensured that parents are aware that they may request a copy of the complaints procedure. Records of informal complaints are kept which give appropriate details of the complaint and its resolution.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Overley Hall School			
DfES Number:	894/6003			
Type of school:	Residential Special School			
Status:	Independent			
Age range of students:	9 - 19 years			
Gender of students:	Mixed			
Number on roll (full-time students):	Boys: 14	Girls: 7	Total: 21	
Number of boarders:	Boys: 14	Girls: 7	Total: 21	
Number of students with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 14	Girls: 7	Total: 21	
Annual fees (boarders):	£114,000 - £148,500			
Address of school:	Overley Hall School Wellington TF6 5HE			
Telephone number:	01952 740262			
Fax number:	01952 740262			
Email address:	Info@overleyhall.com			
Headteacher:	Ms Gill Flannery			
Proprietor:	Mr and Mrs P Brown			
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ian Richardson			
Date of inspection:	21 - 24 March 2006			

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