

Inspection report

The Pace Centre

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 825/6031

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 23 - 26 January 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

The PACE Centre is an independent special school for boys and girls with motor disorders such as cerebral palsy and related learning difficulties. It was founded in 1990 as a partnership between parents and professionals. The PACE Centre is located in Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire, within easy reach of road and rail services. At the time of the inspection there were 25 full-time and 30 part-time pupils on roll between the ages of six months and twelve years. Seven pupils are funded under the Nursery Scheme.

The school's work is based on the philosophy, principles and practices of Conductive Education. It is complemented by therapeutic approaches and the school's own programmes of study. The school works in close collaboration with other professionals involved with the pupils and their families.

The school provides outreach and follow-up services to support pupils in schools and in their own homes. Sessional care is offered up to three times a week to pupils who have left the school and are being educated in other local schools. Parent and Child groups and sensory motor development sessions are held in a special school in Chesham about ten miles from the school.

The PACE Centre believes in *'providing an education where pupils' needs as a whole person are addressed within the family and community. Education at PACE means everything that a child needs to learn in order to participate actively in their daily lives. It strives to give a positive learning environment where pupils' own motivation and intention are paramount'*.

Summary of main findings

The PACE Centre is an outstanding school. It provides education of excellent quality and meets its aims and mission statement successfully. The pupils and their families benefit from the effective management and clear educational vision of the head teacher. All the staff have a high level of commitment and work hard to provide purposeful and relevant learning opportunities for pupils. Teaching is outstanding, assessment is excellent and, as a result, pupils develop into highly motivated learners who make very good progress towards independence. The integrated curriculum, designed around an in-depth knowledge of each pupil, is excellent. There is a high level of care and pupils' well-being is of the utmost importance.

What the school does well:

- it provides outstanding teaching which is underpinned by excellent assessment procedures and detailed lesson planning;
- it organises highly skilled professionals to work in trans-disciplinary teams and use their expertise to plan effective learning programmes for groups and individuals;
- it offers rich learning opportunities to pupils through its successful integration of the elements of Conductive Education with the Foundation Stage Guidance and the National Curriculum;
- its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good;
- it has developed very effective working partnerships with parents; and
- its successful outreach programme provides support, advice and training to parents and others in the community.

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

The school meets all the requirements.

Next steps

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

- continue to develop and extend the training and outreach work; and
- develop appropriate provision for secondary age pupils.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of curriculum provision for pupils' academic, physical and personal development is outstanding. The curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative. It is developed from the philosophy, principles and practices of Conductive Education and incorporates successfully the Foundation Stage Guidance and the National Curriculum and religious education. The aspirations of the school's curricular documents are fully met.

There is a clear focus on helping pupils to develop skills in communication, listening, literacy and numeracy. Reading skills are promoted effectively across the curriculum. History, geography and science are taught through a range of topics in ways which capture pupils' interest and ensure that they remain on task. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support pupils' learning. It builds on the early experiences pupils have with a range of less complex electronic equipment. At every stage of their development pupils have access to a wide range and variety of appropriate resources and well-designed equipment which promote enquiry and reasoning skills.

The whole curriculum has a clear focus on the development of pupils' independent life skills. Self-care is deeply ingrained in all the school's work. Problem-solving tasks have a high profile in all learning programmes. Pupils with complex learning difficulties are provided with a modified Key Stage 1 curriculum. For all other pupils of compulsory school age the National Curriculum is modified to meet their specific needs.

The baby and child development curriculum includes every day home activities, sensory and movement experiences, hand skills, play and communication. These activities provide very young children with a range of valuable stimuli to enable them to begin to make sense of their environment and respond to the people they meet.

The curriculum for three to five year-olds is very well planned around the six areas of learning outlined in the Foundation Stage Guidance. All activities take into account pupils' levels of motor and sensory development. Pupils show curiosity and interest in the activities and are eager to experiment and investigate.

Curriculum planning at all levels is very carefully linked to the needs of individual pupils. The school has a detailed curriculum statement effectively supported by clear, good quality policies and schemes of work for each subject. The medium-term plans are so constructed that there is seamless integration of the elements of Conductive Education and the appropriate national guidance. The plans provide a very good framework for assessment and an excellent support for teachers. The school is reviewing the policies and schemes of work for design and technology and music in order to increase accessibility to the subjects for all pupils.

Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is excellent. The programme is clearly focussed on the development of pupils' individual needs and themes are reinforced both in and out of all lessons. Mealtimes are an important strand of Conductive Education. Pupils' independence and self-help skills are promoted effectively as teachers encourage correct positioning for eating and the correct hand hold when they use the modified utensils.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is excellent and it is a major strength of the school. The teaching by the multi-professional team working in a trans-disciplinary manner enables all pupils to acquire new knowledge and skills and make very good progress. Lessons are carefully planned, realistic objectives identified and appropriate strategies used. The planning is linked to the pupils' individual education plans and the school's curriculum. A significant factor in the planning process is the effective way the staff work collaboratively. They write detailed group and individual plans that include all aspects of the rich and imaginative curriculum offered by the school. Pupils benefit greatly from such an approach.

The lessons are imbued with a clear sense of purpose and a sharp focus on what pupils should learn. Teachers have high expectations and plan stimulating and challenging activities with appropriate goals. They use a wide range of teaching strategies including clear explanations, demonstration and very good questioning techniques designed to improve pupils' levels of understanding.

Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent. All staff show consideration, courtesy and respect towards pupils at all times. Teachers use praise, humour and encouragement effectively. Pupils are fully at ease and know they are valued by everyone in the school. They have complete trust and confidence in their teachers and respond in positive, determined and enthusiastic ways to all the activities. The sense of 'family' within the school community fosters a feeling of security and peace. This is a strong feature of the school.

In order to implement the complex education system very detailed assessments and observations are carried out by each specialist. Such assessment is a highly significant strength of the school. Early intervention is the key element which determines the programme of learning provided by the school. Parents play a vital part in providing information about their child's skills and abilities in the home. An initial full assessment is carried out between six to eight weeks after a pupil is admitted. This includes sensory, cognitive and academic assessments to allow therapists to work with pupils in an intensive way. Conductive Education assessment provides information about pupils' neurological and orthopaedic status. Teachers have an excellent understanding of the needs, aptitudes and prior attainment of each pupil as a result of early intervention and rigorous assessment procedures. Further assessments are made against the criteria identified in national guidance. Self-assessment is an important part of each lesson. Pupils are expected to evaluate their work and identify what needs to be done in order to improve their performance.

Where it is appropriate for a pupil to be taught individually or in a small group the structure of the day is modified to accommodate this need. The individual teaching sessions are very intense, requiring concentrated effort and determination from the pupils who give of their best at all times. The requirements of pupils with statements of special educational need are fully met.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils is very good. It is reflected in the pupils' level of confidence, social relationships and behaviour. The care shown by staff to pupils is of the highest order and results in the pupils developing high self-esteem and gaining a greater awareness of the world around them. For example, staff are adept at creating situations where pupils succeed in circumstances where the line between success and failure can be very thin. As a result, success builds on success and pupils' self-confidence quickly improves.

Pupils enter school happily at the start of each day. They have complete trust in the staff, who are excellent role models for them. As a result pupils communicate readily with them and with other adults. Pupils' social and moral development has a strong emphasis within the school. Pupils value the rewards system and glow with pride when they receive a smiley face for effort and achievement. They are encouraged to accept responsibility for their own learning when they review their progress at the end of lessons. Pupils develop an increasing awareness of being a member of a group and are encouraged to play a part within it, for example helping others, taking turns and sharing toys. At lunch time pupils play games together and have special jobs such as giving out towels at the end of the meal.

Pupils learn about world faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism from the religious education programme. The study of a village in India as a school topic helps them become aware of other cultures and societies. This knowledge has been reinforced by the visit of a Muslim parent to talk about Islam. These experiences contribute positively to pupils' awareness of the rich diversity of society.

The curriculum is considerably enriched through a wide range of visits and visitors such as the police, the fire brigade and a pupil's granny, all of whom help to make pupils aware of the community around them. Pupils' education is further enhanced by visits to the local library, the fire station and a local garden nursery. These experiences help to strengthen the pupils' understanding of the wider world.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes excellent provision for its pupils' welfare, health and safety. It takes its responsibilities seriously in this respect and all the required policies are in place. There is a very clear and thoughtfully written policy which emphasises the importance of reinforcing positive behaviour. Pupils are rewarded for good behaviour and hard work through a merit system which is clearly understood by most pupils. Although the school has an appropriate anti-bullying policy, its procedures have never had to be implemented.

All staff are alert to issues to protect pupils from any possible abuse. There is a named child protection officer who has received appropriate training. This will be updated in March this year. Pupils are very closely supervised throughout the day. Sensitive care is always taken to ensure pupils' positions are safe and comfortable as this is an important element in Conductive Education. Staff are constantly on the alert for any signs of discomfort, particularly in pupils with limited communication skills.

The school has satisfactory provision for fire safety. Pupils' safety on school visits is given a high priority and detailed risk assessments are undertaken for all off-site activities. The school has an appropriate written policy for First Aid. There are nine staff who have basic First Aid training and three have attended the four-day course. In addition there are two qualified nurses in the school. The school keeps detailed accident and incident books.

The admission and attendance registers are kept in good order.

The school duly meets the accessibility requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has an annual policy to check that this remains the case or if provision could be improved.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate and effective procedures for the recruitment and retention of staff. Prior to staff appointments being confirmed, checks are made regarding their suitability to work with children, their prior experience, medical fitness, identity and qualifications. All staff work for a probationary period of three months before they are offered full-time appointments.

The staff includes teachers, conductors, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and classroom assistants who work effectively in trans-disciplinary teams to support pupils' learning. All the staff are well qualified for the type of education provided by the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The purpose-built premises are delightful and provide very good and appropriate surroundings for pupils' learning. They are bright, cheerful and welcoming and are maintained to a very high standard both in décor and fittings. They are further enhanced by some attractive displays of pupils' work. The five main classrooms are spacious and are fitted with high quality and appropriate equipment to support pupils' physical needs. All classrooms have adjacent washrooms and toilet facilities and some have baths. For a number of pupils a sage bath is an important therapy to help them relax and prepare for the day. There are some specialist rooms such as the one equipped for light therapy. Corridors and doors are wide so as to allow easy movement for all pupils. Facilities for pupils who are ill are adequate.

The leased room in a Chesham school is highly suitable and very well equipped. Pupils benefit from the use of the light therapy room on these premises.

Outside play space is limited at the school but is wholly appropriate for the pupils. There are some small, suitable play spaces where group activities can take place.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

A core aim of the PACE Centre is to work *'in partnership with the children's families from the earliest possible stage in their child's development'*. With this aim at the forefront of its work it strives to provide high quality information for parents and others who work with the pupils. It clearly succeeds in its aim. Parents feel well informed and supported by the school. A parent spoke of her appreciation of the school's work by saying: *'I don't know where we would be without it.'* Parents believe that their children are well taught and that the school is well run.

A high priority is given to parental involvement. The warm and friendly ethos of the school promotes the notion of partnership. Parents are recognised as the prime educators of their children. There is an open door policy and parents are encouraged to contact staff if they have any concerns. The parents who responded to the questionnaire said they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem. They indicate a high degree of satisfaction and confidence in the school.

New parents are given a very informative handbook which covers the wide range of the school's procedures, policies and organisation. Friendly newsletters are published regularly and contain details of current and forth-coming events, and pupils' achievements. Curriculum policies and information about aspects relating to such issues as health and safety are made available to parents. At the end of each day, pupils take home their 'Communication Books' which contain instructions about the stretching exercises they need to practise at home, with illustrations so that parents can communicate effectively with them.

The school provides very full and detailed annual reports to inform parents about their child's progress and achievement. In addition, parents receive valuable information at the annual review of their child's statement of educational need. Parents have regular opportunities for formal and informal meetings with staff to discuss their child's needs. Parents feel they are very well informed about their child's progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school's procedure for handling complaints meets all the statutory requirements. A suitable emphasis is given to resolving complaints informally but clear comprehensive arrangements are in place for addressing them formally, if necessary. There has been no need for a formal panel hearing at the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The PACE Centre
DfES Number:	825/6031
Type of school:	Special day school for pupils with motor disorders and related learning difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	0 - 12 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 18 Girls: 7 Total: 25
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 16 Girls: 14 Total: 30
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 31 Girls: 19 Total: 50
Annual fees (day pupils):	£ 25,774 - £33,032
Address of school:	Philip Green House Coventon Road Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP19 9JL
Telephone number:	01296 392739
Fax number:	01296 334836
Email address:	pacecentre@virgin.net
Headteacher:	Mrs Amanda Richardson
Proprietor:	The Pace Centre Registered Charity
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs P Hoey
Date of inspection:	23 - 26 January 2006

© Crown copyright 2006. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

School inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The website lists Ofsted independent school inspection reports, together with information on the work Ofsted does in the independent sector.