

# **Inspection report**

## **Chelfham Senior School**

**Independent special school**

**DfES ref no: 878/6039**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 23 – 25 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**

Chelfham Senior School is an approved independent residential special school which provides education for boys with severe emotional, social and behavioural needs. Occasionally, the school admits day pupils, although none currently attend. The school occupies two rural sites near Tavistock in Devon. Each site consists of a large Victorian house with adjacent buildings. The main school site at Bere Alston provides education for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. The continuing education department admits students aged 15 to 19 years and is at Kilworthy House, approximately ten miles away. The school is in the ownership of The Priory Group, which owns several other establishments providing education for children with special educational needs.

Currently 61 boys attend the school. Many pupils and students have experienced difficulty with their previous care placements and several have a history of disrupted schooling. Most pupils and students have additional learning and communication difficulties and all have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). The school offers provision for 52 weeks of the year although just under one third of boys attend for 38 weeks. Most pupils and students attend from counties in the South of England and they are encouraged to make home visits wherever possible. Places are funded by boys' local education authorities, or in the case of a few, by their local health authority.

The school aims to provide a caring environment where pupils and students learn to control their behaviour and achieve their academic potential. Appropriate behaviour is rewarded through praise and rewards and some pupils and students receive regular counselling. The school seeks to provide the full National Curriculum for pupils. There is a strong emphasis on pupils at Bere Alston improving their self-esteem through participation in a programme of outdoor pursuits. Students attending Kilworthy House are offered vocational courses and programmes to improve their independent living skills.

### **Summary of main findings**

Chelfham Senior School provides a caring environment where pupils and students become more confident and enterprising young people. The young people behave well. The school is successful in achieving its aim to improve pupils' self-esteem through the extensive programme of outdoor pursuits. Pupils and students make satisfactory progress in their academic work. The vocational courses and independence programme are effective in preparing students for leaving school.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes it is good. The recently appointed headteacher has introduced many positive changes which are beginning to raise standards further. Several staff are new in post and are in the process of updating the planning for their subject responsibilities. Teachers do not use assessment information consistently when planning their lessons, so tasks are not always well matched to pupils' ability. Education and care staff are a committed team and share the same sensitive approach towards managing pupils' and students' behaviour.

The school provides a broad curriculum. Appropriate accredited courses are offered and the curriculum is supported by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. The school has forged close links with the local community. .

**What the school does well:**

- it provides a broad curriculum supported by a good range of extra-curricular activities and strong links with the local community;
- it encourages pupils and students to have positive attitudes and to behave well in lessons and around the school;
- staff are sensitive to pupils' and students' emotional and behavioural needs and provide a high standard of care; and
- the outdoor pursuits programme very effectively promotes pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

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

- use assessment information to plan teaching so all pupils can make progress;
- implement the action plans that were written following the fire safety audit; and
- provide further information for parents and other partners as noted in section 6 of this report.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

## **1. The quality of education provided by the school**

### **The quality of the curriculum**

There is a detailed curriculum policy in place, supported by good long- and medium-term subject plans. All pupils follow the National Curriculum and the requirements of statements of special education need are met fully. The length of the taught week is broadly in line with the recommendation for this age group. Appropriate amounts of time are devoted to each subject area and pupils and students receive a broad and balanced curriculum. There is satisfactory provision for promoting the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. All pupils in Year 10 and most in Year 11 follow a suitably flexible and modified Key Stage 4 curriculum on the Bere Alston site. This enables them to follow an appropriate range of nationally accredited courses including General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) entry level and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). In a few cases, pupils pursue particular interests, such as GCSE Spanish, through the school's strong links with local schools and colleges. The promotion of pupils' personal development is a strong feature of the curriculum. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) course and careers programme make good contributions to enhancing pupils' personal skills and for preparing them for leaving school.

A few pupils in Year 11 join post-16 students on the Kilworthy House site. They follow a curriculum that focuses more on vocational areas and the development of work-related and independent life skills. These young people also follow a core curriculum of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). All courses are externally accredited, ensuring that pupils and students receive recognition for their success. Good links with the community are used to provide work experience placements. Planning for pupils in Key Stage 4 to ensure progression in their learning as they move between the Bere Alston and Kilworthy House sites is underdeveloped.

On the Bere Alston site, the outdoor and adventure activities programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. In addition to learning teamwork skills, pupils also receive accreditation for completing activities, for example through the mountain bike proficiency test, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and a national navigation award. Learning opportunities are also extended very well by the programme of events provided by the care staff which take place after school and at weekends.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. In all the lessons seen teaching was at least satisfactory and in just over one third it was good. Teachers and support staff have a good rapport with young people and use praise effectively to recognise their efforts.

In the best lessons, teachers maintain a brisk pace and use a variety of resources. This helps the learners to concentrate. A good example was seen in a PSHE lesson

where students discussed the needs required for independence. An extract describing a childhood memory was read to the class and visual prompts were used to enable students to read key words. In some lessons experiments and practical demonstrations are used well to stimulate interest and to encourage the class to draw conclusions.

Teachers have high expectations and their plans make it clear what the class are expected to learn. At the end of the lesson pupils and students are involved in discussing their progress and reviewing their work. They leave the lesson pleased with their achievements. Teaching assistants make an effective contribution to the lesson because they know pupils' and students' level of ability and are able to give the right amount of support. In less successful lessons, assessment information describing individual levels of ability is not used to inform lesson planning. As a result, pupils' targets for learning are too general and tasks are not sufficiently focused on the next steps to be achieved. In some lessons, teaching is satisfactory rather than good due to a lack of pace and a failure to use a variety of resources to capture interest. This results in a slower rate of work and progress.

Staff across the school manage behaviour sensitively and consistently. Consequently most young people behave well and work hard. A small but significant number do not always attend lessons due to their behavioural difficulties. These pupils and students have individual plans to manage their behaviour which are followed consistently.

Teachers demonstrate sound knowledge of the range of National Curriculum subjects and the vocational curriculum for post-16 students. Several staff are new in post and are developing their subject expertise. Some teachers do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of how to plan effectively for the needs of lower achievers. There are some good examples of the use of pictures and symbols to aid communication. However, teachers do not all follow a consistent approach to the teaching of literacy across the school.

Resources to support teaching and learning are broadly satisfactory. There is appropriate equipment to support the teaching of practical subjects and all pupils and students have regular access to a computer. Resources to support the teaching of reading to lower achieving pupils and artefacts to support the teaching of religious education, history and geography are underdeveloped.

There are satisfactory systems in place for assessing progress. These include the use of National Curriculum levels or 'P' levels (performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with SEN working towards the first level of the National Curriculum), reading tests and an emotional and behavioural development record. Some of these tests have been introduced within the past year and have not been in place long enough to show accurately all pupils' and students' progress. Students' who follow the vocational and accredited courses have their progress recorded effectively as they complete course modules.

Pupils and students make satisfactory progress relative to their ability. A large number gain entry level examination passes each year in several subjects. Pupils and students with more complex learning needs make slower progress due to the

limited range of strategies used to support them. The majority make good progress in managing their behaviour. Post-16 students and those in Year 11 demonstrate increasing levels of maturity and independence.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all except one of the requirements.*

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

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

- *use assessment information to plan teaching so all pupils and students can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).*

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

The school supports pupils' and students' moral and social development very effectively and makes satisfactory provision for their spiritual and cultural development.

Young people's self-esteem is enhanced through their participation in the wide range of outdoor pursuits. These include orienteering, climbing, mountain biking and horse riding. Participants speak highly of these activities and they clearly generate excitement and increase self-confidence. Pupils and students are taught how to consider their emotions and understand the feelings of others in PSHE lessons. However, opportunities for reflection and the development of spiritual awareness are limited.

There is a positive ethos in the school which is very effective in supporting moral education. Staff set a good example by treating young people with respect. Pupils and students are made aware of acceptable behaviour when qualities such as 'being helpful' or 'sharing' are recognised in weekly assemblies. The awarding of 'talents' in Bere Alston and 'points' in Kilworthy House are used effectively to reinforce appropriate behaviour. Staff encourage pupils and students to discuss how well they have behaved and to consider the consequences of their actions. They behave sensibly in lessons and around the school, respond to the respect shown by adults and relate well to each other. They are also polite and courteous with visitors.

Pupils and students are encouraged to take responsibility and develop their social skills. This occurs when pupils sit down together to eat and take turns to clear away at the end of the meal. Advocacy sessions at Kilworthy House help students to manage their anger and improve their relationships with others. The school and student councils enable pupils and students to discuss the work of the school and make recommendations for improvement. Their suggestions have resulted in improved meals, changed arrangements for independent travel and the installation of a stereo in each residential unit. At Kilworthy House, students take responsibility for tending the vegetable garden and help look after animals.

Pupils and students learn about public institutions and services through the community and citizenship courses. These are supported by visits to local fire, police and ambulance services and the use of sports and leisure facilities. These visits provide pupils and students with knowledge of their own culture. Knowledge of other cultures is promoted when they cook different foods in food technology lessons and when they study African culture in art and music. However, this is not supported by any planned programme of visits to cultural centres or places of worship, or by the celebration of religious festivals in assemblies. Pupils' and students' awareness of wider issues is developed when they raise money for charity, for example by sponsoring a child in Africa.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

Care and welfare are high priorities. There are comprehensive policies for dealing with bullying, for child protection and for the safety of activities off-site. There is a high number of staff on duty and young people are supervised effectively throughout the day. They are monitored, managed and cared for equally well during out-of-school hours. Inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) made an unannounced visit to the residential units in May 2005. They concluded that the school met the necessary standards for ensuring that boarders were healthy and stayed safe.

Adults' expectations of behaviour are well understood by the pupils. Members of staff are consistent in implementing an effective policy and procedures for promoting good behaviour and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Appropriately completed written records are maintained of any sanctions that are applied.

The school is very vigilant in most ways to ensure the health and safety of its pupils. There are appropriate policies and procedures, and many risk assessments are carried out. A comprehensive policy encompasses all aspects of First Aid. A number of staff are trained First Aiders, and the name of the designated daily First Aider is displayed clearly. The admission and attendance registers are completed correctly. However, the school has not yet fully implemented the action plans that were drawn up following the fire safety risk assessment completed in November 2004

An independent audit was conducted in November 2004 to evaluate the accessibility of the premises for disabled pupils, parents and visitors. The action plan that has since been drawn up ensures that the school complies fully with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all except one of the requirements.*

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

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

- *ensure that it has a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (paragraph 3(5)).*

**4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

There are effective measures in place to confirm the suitability of prospective employees. The school follows up references, checks qualifications and confirms the medical fitness of applicants to carry out their duties. Following the CSCI visit in May 2005, inspectors noted that there was no evidence that longer serving members of the residential care staff had undergone Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. This has been remedied. Checks at an enhanced level have been made with the CRB for all staff.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The standard of the premises and accommodation is satisfactory. On both sites the premises are well maintained and there is a high standard of hygiene and cleanliness. There have been several recent improvements to both sites and they provide attractive environments for learning. Classrooms on both sites are small but are of adequate size for the number of pupils and students using them.

At Bere Alston there is a residential house with an office, dining rooms and recreational areas. A separate education unit provides three classrooms, a gymnasium, a small library and specialist rooms for food technology, art, science and ICT. Pottery and design and technology are provided in an additional building. There is suitable space for outside play provided by an all weather pitch and there are grassed areas with picnic benches.

Kilworthy House contains residential accommodation on the first floor. On the ground floor there are four general classrooms, common room and literacy room. Two buildings for horticulture and craft activities, an art room and a further classroom are located separately in the grounds. The grounds provide a pleasant setting for outdoor recreation and include lawns, a pond and a football pitch.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.



## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school is only partially successful in providing prospective parents with all the information it is required to make available. The prospectus and accompanying documents provide useful information. This includes the school's aims, an outline of the curriculum and the admissions policy. Parents also receive details about pupils' successes in public examinations during the previous year. However, there are a number of important omissions that the school is now addressing. The headteacher is not named, and there is no reference to the proprietor's name or how he may be contacted at all times. Also, there is no reference to the school's provision for pupils with statements of special educational need and for those whose first language is not English.

Parents are not told that they can request details of the number of staff employed at the school, with a summary of their qualifications, or that they can ask for particulars of specific school policies and procedures. These include discipline, sanctions and exclusions. Parents know how they can register a complaint, but they are not routinely informed about the number of formal complaints made during the preceding school year.

The school provides good information to parents and local authorities about pupils' progress and they are pleased with the work of the school. Annual reports to parents give them useful information about their children's academic achievements and personal development. Annual reviews of statements of SEN, 'looked after children' reviews and personal education planning meetings all receive detailed submissions from the school.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

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

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

- include the name of the headteacher in the information provided to prospective parents (paragraph 6(2)(a));*
- provide parents with the name of the proprietor and address for correspondence during both term time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which contact may be made at all times (paragraph 6(2)(b));*
- give parents particulars of the school's policy on discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e));*
- explain to parents the particulars of educational and welfare provision it provides for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f));*

- *point out to parents that policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety and the promotion of good behaviour are available on request (paragraph 6(2)(h));*
- *provide information relating to the number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)); and*
- *make available to parents details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).*

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

The school has a clear policy which meets all the regulations. The procedure sets out how parents, carers and representatives of placing authorities may make informal or formal complaints to the school. A copy of the school complaints policy is sent to the parents and carers of all newly admitted pupils and students and to placing authorities.

In response to the parental questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection, almost all parents agree that they understand the school's procedure for handling complaints.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Chelfham Senior School
DfES Number:	878/6039
Type of school:	Special, boarding
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	61
Number of boarders:	61
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	61
Annual fees:	Vary according to individual pupils' needs. Range: £69,720 - £103,824 (38 weeks) £119,244 - £173,040 (52 weeks)
Address of school:	Chelfham Senior School Bere Alston Yelverton Devon PL20 7EX
Telephone number:	01822 840379
Fax number:	01822 841489
Email address:	chelfhamseniorschool@priorygroup.com
Headteacher:	Mr Will Crosby
Proprietor:	Mr Stephen Bradshaw, Priory Education Services
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Andrew Redpath HMI
Date of inspection:	23 – 25 January 2006

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