

# **Inspection report**

## **Heath Farm School**

**Independent special school**

**DfES ref no: 886/6060**

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

**Dates of inspection: 13 - 15 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**

Heath Farm School occupies a converted farm and outbuildings in a small village in Kent. It is approved for 70 pupils, although there are only 30 currently on roll. This is far fewer than when the school was last inspected in 1999. The youngest pupils now in attendance are aged nine years. Pupils in the primary department are in two classes that are grouped according to ability rather than age. Secondary-aged pupils are grouped by age in five mixed ability classes. A very few younger secondary-aged pupils find it difficult to attend classes in the main school. They are taught for most of the time in a very recently opened nurture unit referred to as the Cottage, although they integrate with their peers for some lessons in the afternoons.

There have been some significant changes in the management of the school in the past year. The headteacher has only been in post since January 2006. Although the school has been open since 1993, it was only acquired by its current proprietor in 2005. Acorn Care and Education own a number of similar schools across the country. The majority of Heath Farm pupils are looked after children. Most are with foster parents arranged through Heath Farm Family Services, although some are fostered with other independent agencies or with their birth parents. Pupils' attainments upon entry to the school are depressed compared with national expectations because of their disturbed education and disrupted family circumstances. All pupils have English as their first language and the vast majority have a statement of special educational need.

The school's aim is to *'meet the educational, social and welfare needs of children through the creation of a caring, supportive and stimulating atmosphere'*.

### **Summary of main findings**

Heath Farm School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Pupils are taught well in some lessons, but across the school their learning and achievements are satisfactory rather than good. Opportunities for better progress are hampered by ineffective assessment procedures and some insecure management of pupils' challenging behaviour. The school provides a good quality curriculum, with a strong focus on accredited examinations and work-related learning in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' personal development is promoted well. The school provides a safe and caring environment. The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. Thorough checks are made on potential staff. The school provides most, but not all, of the information it is required to make available to carers and local authorities. There is a complaints procedure in place, but it has some significant omissions.

**What the school does well:**

- it provides pupils in Years 10 and 11 with an effective, age-appropriate curriculum that prepares them well for leaving school;
- it encourages the establishment of high quality relationships between staff and pupils by treating pupils fairly and respectfully;
- it develops strong links with foster carers, enabling them to support pupils' learning; and
- it has in place effective policies and procedures that ensure pupils' health, safety and well-being.

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

- develop lesson planning and implement assessment frameworks and procedures as detailed in section 1 of this report;
- make sure that its policy for managing pupils' behaviour is implemented consistently;
- ensure that the facility for sick pupils meets requirements;
- make available all the information detailed in section 6 of this report; and
- develop a complaints procedure that contains all the information detailed in section 7 of this report.

**What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:**

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

# COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

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

### The quality of the curriculum

The school provides its pupils with a good range of learning opportunities. This is rooted in a considered curriculum policy and appropriate outline planning, although the more detailed subject schemes of work are of variable quality. Taught time is broadly in line with recommendations, but not all of it is used effectively. For instance, the tutorial sessions at the end of the day are not planned and there is no consistent focus. Therefore, they have limited value.

Primary-aged pupils and those in Years 7 – 9 follow the National Curriculum. This provides them with a broad range of experiences and meets the curriculum requirements of those pupils with a statement of special educational need. There is a strong focus on promoting literacy and numeracy skills through the adaptation and implementation of the national strategies. Those very few pupils who are Cottage-based also follow a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils' personal development is promoted effectively through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 also benefit from the PSHE and citizenship programmes, but with added dimensions. Work-related learning and a careers education programme that begins in Year 9 are developed well. There are also effective links with local colleges. The school works with partners such as *Kent Works* to provide a range of work experience placements, and negotiates directly with some employers to develop extended placements for those pupils for whom it is considered appropriate. The citizenship course takes on a practical dimension when pupils work together on school community projects as part of their citizenship General Certificate of Secondary Education coursework. This examination is one of a good range of nationally accredited courses that pupils can follow. Pupils are prepared well for leaving school.

### The quality of teaching and assessment

Although pupils learn well in some lessons, their learning and progress overall are satisfactory rather than good. Pupils' achievements across the school are no better than this because on too many occasions some pupils' behaviour or their absence from lessons, have an adverse effect on their learning or that of others. Shortcomings in lesson planning and associated weaknesses in assessment procedures also have a negative impact on pupils' overall progress.

The best lessons are characterised by high quality relationships, teachers' good subject knowledge and effectively targeted adult support. On these occasions, pupil management is secure and this enables teachers to have high expectations of behaviour. Consequently, teachers provide challenging activities and pupils follow well-established classroom routines. Pupils achieve well in these sessions. At other times, too much learning time is lost as teachers strive to engage pupils in the lesson. This reflects the absence of coherent pupil behaviour plans and effective

whole school strategies for dealing with internal truancy and relatively low key classroom disruptions.

The school has much work to do in developing an assessment framework and in improving the quality of lesson planning. Lesson plans are too imprecise. Teachers do not discriminate between the long-term aims of units of work and what they anticipate pupils will learn in individual sessions. The absence of these anticipated learning outcomes means that teachers are not always in a position to evaluate the progress that pupils make in a single lesson. This shortcoming is compounded by the absence of detailed assessment procedures. The net result is that there is too much slack in the cycle of evaluating individual pupils' achievements and using this information to plan future lessons. In addition, the quality of individual education plans is much too variable and this restricts the school's ability to measure pupils' achievements towards their individual targets.

***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:*

- *ensure teachers develop better understanding of pupils' prior attainments and take this into account in lesson planning (paragraph 1(3)(d));*
- *develop a framework for assessing pupils' work regularly and thoroughly so that assessment information can be used to inform lesson planning (paragraph 1(3)(g)); and*
- *implement procedures for evaluating pupil performance by reference to its own aims (paragraph 1(4)).*

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

The school promotes pupils' personal development well. The encouragement of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins much of its work. The school's effectiveness in this respect enables pupils to improve their self-esteem and confidence. The school is also achieving some success in increasing pupils' awareness of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. However, the school recognises that its behaviour management policy is not wholly effective and procedures need reviewing.

Pupils' spiritual development is rarely developed in a planned and formal way. However, it is frequently encouraged incidentally through the school's general ethos and elements of the PSHE programme. This helps pupils to experience and think about things that are outside their everyday lives. As a result, they begin to develop a more mature approach to dealing with changing and challenging situations.

The school functions as a community within which mutual respect is nurtured through high quality, trusting relationships. This culture is a major contributor to the effective promotion of pupils' moral and social development. Staff provide strong guidance and support, and pupils can choose to go to any member of staff to discuss difficulties they might be experiencing. The schools' investment in developing powerful working partnerships with carers supports its work in this area. Social and moral issues are considered in a planned way in the well-structured PSHE and citizenship programmes, but teachers address these issues in other lessons too as opportunities present themselves. Overall, the school's provision encourages pupils to value themselves and each other, and develops in them a belief that they can make a worthwhile contribution to the community.

Subjects such as music, art, English literature and religious education make good contributions to enhancing pupils' understanding of their own and others' cultures. However, pupils would benefit further from a more structured approach to preparing them for life in a multi-cultural society.

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

Yes.

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

The school takes good care of its pupils. It has an extensive range of rigorous policies and procedures to protect them and to support their welfare. These address issues such as health and safety, anti-bullying, First Aid, fire safety and child protection. They are supported by well-documented risk assessments and close supervision by staff. Consequently, the school is a safe environment and pupils are equally well cared for when they are off-site making use of community facilities. The pupils feel confident that any concerns they have will be dealt with speedily, openly and effectively.

A comprehensive policy indicates how pupils' good behaviour will be encouraged and how the school will respond to any unacceptable actions. However, this policy is not wholly effective in the way it is implemented. Some individuals' disruptive behaviour affects their own learning and, on occasions, that of others. The school maintains effective logs of sanctions applied for serious disciplinary offences, and detailed records of incidents, physical interventions that staff have to make, and pupils' absence without permission. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in the required manner.

Senior managers have not yet carried out an audit of the building in order to develop an action plan to meet the requirements of the DDA.

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

*The school complies with all but one of the requirements.*

***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:*

- *ensure the policy for behaviour management is implemented effectively (paragraph 3(2)(d)).*

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

*In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:*

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

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

The school has systematic and secure systems for checking the background and suitability of prospective staff. It is careful in checking applicants' qualifications, previous experience and references. All staff are subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level.

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

Yes.

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

The school is a converted farm and a number of associated outbuildings set in extensive grounds. The alterations have enabled the development of appropriately-sized general classrooms and also specialist areas, such as those for science, art and information and communication technology. The large grounds and the school's location on a quiet country road mean that pupils have ample play areas, and they can disembark very safely from their daily organised transport.

All buildings are weatherproof, and there are adequate levels of heating, lighting and ventilation. The acoustics are satisfactory. The accommodation is clean and tidy and is generally maintained to an acceptable standard. The quality of internal decoration and floor coverings is variable. They are generally acceptable but some floor coverings are stained and will need replacing soon. Furniture and fittings generally meet the needs of pupils of this age range, although some are old and show signs of wear.

There are sufficient washrooms for pupils and staff, and a designated room for pupils who are unwell. While this facility is situated close to toilets, it does not contain a washbasin.

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

*The school complies with all but one of the requirements.*

***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:*

- *ensure that the facility for sick pupils contains a washbasin (paragraph 5(l)).*

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

Foster carers and local authorities are provided with most of the information the school is required to make available. This is contained in either the school prospectus or in the report that the school has just begun to produce and distribute. These documents provide carers with basic information about the school. This includes contact details for the headteacher and proprietor and a list of the staff and their qualifications. They also contain information about the school's aims, curriculum and the arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions. The school report contains particulars of pupils' academic performance during the preceding school year, as well as data about the number of complaints, and their outcomes, during the same period. The school's documentation also provides information about its provision for meeting the learning and non-educational needs of pupils with statements of special education need. Although the documentation is in place, carers are not provided with copies of policies relating to health and safety and child protection and nor are they told that they can request them.

The school produces good quality reports about pupils' development and progress. It does this in the annual reports to parents and in the reports it produces for local authorities in preparation for looked after children reviews and the annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational need. However, local authorities that fund pupils are not provided with information about how the fee for each pupil is broken down to support different elements of the school's expenditure.

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

*The school meets most but not all of the requirements.*

### ***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:*

- *inform parents and carers that policies relating to child protection and health and safety are available on request (paragraph 6(2)(h)); and*
- *submit an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of any registered pupil who is wholly or partly funded by a local authority to that 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 has procedures for pupils and their carers to lodge complaints, but they are incomplete. Carers confirm that they know they may make a complaint informally initially, and then formalise it if they feel it has not been resolved to their satisfaction. The procedure indicates the timescales for most stages of the process,



but not all. A significant shortcoming in the procedures relates to the constitution and responsibilities of the panel that may be convened to investigate formal complaints. There is no indication that panel members will not have been involved in any matters related to the complaint. No reference is made as to whether the panel will have at least one member who is independent of the school, or any comment about the panel's authority to make findings and recommendations. The procedure does not make it explicit that written records are maintained of all complaints, or that these records and all other relevant correspondence will be kept confidential.

***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:*

- *establish clear timescales for all stages involved in handling a complaint (paragraph 7(c));*
- *ensure that any panel appointed to hear a complaint contains at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));*
- *enable any complaints panel to have on it one person who is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));*
- *include in the complaints procedure provision for the panel to make findings and recommendations and to give copies of them to all the parties involved (paragraph 7(i));*
- *indicate in the procedure that written records are kept of all complaints showing at what stage they are resolved (paragraph 7(j)); and*
- *ensure that the complaints procedure includes provision for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Heath Farm School
DfES Number:	886/6060
Type of school:	Special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	5 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 24      Girls: 6      Total: 30
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 21      Girls: 4      Total: 25
Annual fees (day pupils):	£27,900
Address of school:	Heath Farm Charing Heath Ashford TN27 0AX
Telephone number:	01233 712030
Fax number:	01233 712066
Email address:	jcromwell@heathfarm.org
Headteacher:	Ms E Cornish
Proprietor:	Acorn Care and Education
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Mike Kell
Date of inspection:	13 - 15 March 2006

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