

Inspection report

The Old School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 937/6092

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 16 - 19 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 Old School is an independent co-educational special school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years with educational needs related to social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, including those within autistic spectrum disorder. There are currently 28 pupils on roll, 19 boys and 9 girls. All were referred and funded by local authorities and all have a statement of their special educational need (SEN). The school was registered and approved by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for day and residential provision in 1999. A material change to day provision was sought and granted in 2003. All pupils attend using transport provided by their local authority. The accommodation is housed in an extended, refurbished primary school building previously used by the local authority (LEA). Attainment on entry is almost always below or well below that expected for pupils' ages.

Summary of main findings

The Old School is a very good school with some outstanding features. It meets its stated aims and all of the regulations. The school's managers are highly innovative and have a clear vision for its future development, which results in excellent care for its pupils. It provides a broad, enriched curriculum, which is carefully matched to pupils' needs and its comprehensive assessments monitor their progress very effectively. Its good and sometimes excellent teaching ensures that the pupils make good or very good progress and achieve well. At the heart of the school's work is the promotion of pupils' self-esteem and well being, so that they gain greater confidence and independence in addition to academic success. The school has a well-qualified and experienced staff team who work hard, know their pupils well and prepare them successfully for the next stage of their education. There is good communication with parents and carers who strongly support the school. Particularly good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance pupils' learning.

What the school does well:

- it has developed a broad and enriched curriculum which is relevant to the pupils' needs and it uses ICT effectively to support their learning;
- it has very good systems in place for assessing pupils' attainment and very robust record-keeping procedures for monitoring their progress;
- its highly challenging teaching enables pupils to make good or very good progress, this is reflected in their academic achievement;

- it provides very successfully for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional development, and prepares them well for the next stage of learning; and
- it has excellent provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety.

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

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

Next Steps

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

- extend the range of external accreditation to include a wider range of vocational courses; and
- continue to build links with local schools.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. It meets the requirement, set out in pupils' statements of special educational needs, for access to the National Curriculum. There are strengths in most subjects but especially in French, science, art and design, physical education, ICT and in personal, social and health education (PSHE). These subjects are supported with a good combination of specialist resources and subject expertise and this results in pupils achieving well. The curriculum is enriched with a wide range of extra activities and in particular those provided after school on three days each week. Several visitors bring a variety of additional skills and cultural experiences, such as animation and photography in art and design or African drumming.

The curriculum is thoroughly planned as a result of the keen insight and managerial skills used in developing pupils' learning opportunities. These reflect the age and interests of all pupils and are particularly well adapted to their learning difficulties. A good balance is achieved in the allocation of time to each subject. Work and activities are well attuned to meeting pupils' needs in relation to their academic, vocational and personal development. By the time pupils reach Years 10 and 11, they have a good choice of accredited courses, which provide appropriate challenge and ensure that all have the opportunity to gain qualifications.

The school is developing links with mainstream secondary schools locally and nationally. Perceptive leadership of the curriculum means the school effectively avoids any risk of isolation and keeps closely in touch with mainstream innovations. A current thrust concerns developing a programme of work-related learning, which is being guided through contacts with a secondary school in Rochdale. This builds on existing good provision for careers guidance and work experience. A new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) applied science course has involved pupils in exploring and contrasting local small and industrial scale businesses. As a result they are discovering possible new career options. This together with good careers guidance and work experience, gives pupils great breadth in what they can consider as their future options.

Very successful personal development is at the heart of pupils becoming effective as learners and much has been accomplished in placing this as a priority at the core of the school's work. The 'Personal Dimensions' programme incorporates PSHE and citizenship within the whole curriculum and is embedded in the ethos of the school. This ensures that sufficient weight is given to preparing pupils well for the challenges and responsibility of adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and there is a significant proportion of teaching that is excellent. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. The most common feature of the very best lessons is the high expectations teachers have

about what pupils can achieve. These lessons have good pace, build on prior learning and engage pupils in tasks which are interactive, interesting and motivating. Pupils are always given carefully planned, individual, short-term goals against which their achievement can be measured. The outcomes are then shared with them and this has a very positive impact on their learning.

The knowledge that all staff have of each pupil's abilities, needs and potential underpins the good teaching achieved in the majority of lessons. This knowledge is used effectively to manage their behaviour and to fill in the many gaps in their education. In Key Stage 3 all pupils have additional targeted support through the 'Communication Opportunity Group' programme. This helps pupils to develop their interpersonal and communication skills. In a session observed, pupils participated in role play activities which demonstrated how to engage in friendly greetings as well as persuasive arguments.

There is a wide range of subject knowledge and expertise among the staff. Specialist teaching takes place in most subjects and effective use is made of visiting professionals, such as art specialists and performing theatre groups to enhance pupils' learning. Learning Support Staff know the pupils well and are an important part of the staff team. They provide valuable continuity and support for pupils who are taught different subjects by different teachers. They also run extended day activities three times per week including a homework club.

In spite of their histories of disrupted education and, for some, their initial resistance to learning, the majority of pupils quickly show a strong impetus to learn, enjoy their lessons and are proud of their achievements. As a result, by the time they are sixteen when they are entered for GCSE examinations; all pupils achieve at least five A-G passes. This represents very good progress when compared with their attainment on entry. The results of Entry Level Certificate examinations also show similarly good achievement. The majority of those entered achieve the higher grades.

The quality of assessment and record-keeping is very good. Following a period of initial assessment each pupil has a personalised learning plan which contains academic and behaviour targets. Staff make regular assessments of each aspect of pupils' development to monitor their progress. Class groups are small and as a result pupils receive daily feedback in class about their performance in individual subjects. Behaviour in class and around school is carefully monitored through the pupil diary system. The end of day whole school meeting is used well to evaluate behaviour and celebrate achievement. The careful organisation of all assessments and records demonstrates clearly the interrelationship between pupils' social, emotional, behavioural and intellectual development

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is enhanced by an effective system of pastoral care. On admission, each pupil is allocated a key worker who acts as a mentor and liaises with parents, carers and other staff. The well-planned 'Personal Dimensions' programme permeates the whole curriculum and ensures that all staff are able to make a contribution to pupils' emotional, physical, social and personal development. As a consequence, pupils increase in self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence while they are at the school. Part of French lessons for example, focused discussions on the vocabulary of Les Émotions, which enabled pupils to explore issues such as behaviour, relationships and feelings. The school prepares its pupils well for the next stage of their education. Each year it arranges a "What's Next Evening" for older pupils and their parents to meet representatives from further education colleges. As a result of this, over the past three years all Year 11 pupils have gone on to further education colleges.

The provision for pupils' moral development is supported effectively by the school's system of sanctions and rewards, which helps them to distinguish between right and wrong. A spirit of mutual respect exists between pupils and staff. Despite their difficulties, pupils' attitudes toward staff and visitors are good. Pupils are well aware of the problems they have with their behaviour and are able to discuss these in confidence with their key worker, who is readily available during the school day. Provision for pupils' social development is promoted effectively through the taught curriculum and the good range of extra-curricular activities offered, such as the lunch time drama club or through the many activities available during the extended days. Meal times are good social occasions and reflect a family setting where staff and pupils eat together. All pupils are encouraged to take part in initiatives in the wider community and there are many examples of pupils working for others. A number of pupils have received The Princess Diana award for helping to maintain the local war memorial, the church garden and especially for their weekly work with a group of senior citizens.

Religious education, art, music, history and geography lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to learn about their own culture and the faiths, cultures and beliefs of others. Pupils' multicultural awareness is good, for example an annual international day is held where they get the opportunity to sample the food, music and culture of a European country. In art, younger pupils recently made masks from different countries, such as Africa and South America, and are now learning about their symbolic significance.

Pupils' spirituality is also promoted well through art, music, science and daily assemblies. The assembly observed provided pupils with a good insight into the needs of people in the developing world. Pupils are encouraged to carry out charitable deeds each day and their efforts are recognised and celebrated in whole school meetings at the end of each day.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The excellent high quality care and painstaking attention to detail ensure the welfare, health and safety of each individual are at the heart of the school's priorities. The extensive knowledge and skills of staff in meeting the needs of each pupil have contributed to the excellent provision. Pupils thrive as a result and feel safe and secure. Several staff are trained in First Aid and fire safety precautions are displayed clearly and are understood by all staff and pupils. The proprietors have addressed the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and the school maintains appropriate admission and attendance registers.

Very good attention is given to promoting healthy lifestyles across the curriculum, particularly through the physical education programme and the provision of a healthy and well-balanced diet. Pupils are made very aware of the facts of staying healthy. For example in the GCSE applied science course, Year 11 pupils have carried out investigations into the school's fire safety procedures and its First Aid competences. This involved a thorough monitoring of the school's practices and has served very well to raise awareness of staying safe.

Pupils' behaviour is managed very well. Procedures are clearly articulated and used effectively and consistently by staff. The circumstances for the use of exclusion are clearly defined and these are strictly adhered to, which results occasionally in pupils being temporarily excluded for unacceptable behaviour. Despite their many difficulties the vast majority of pupils respond most positively to the high expectations of the school. As a result many form good relationships and show respect for one another. Relationships between pupils and staff are especially strong, with the result that a great deal of trust is established and most problems can be resolved quickly and in a dignified manner.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is jointly led and managed by two headteachers who are also the proprietors of OS Education Limited. It has effective administrative systems in place to ensure the suitability of newly appointed staff. Appropriate checks, including enhanced checks through the Criminal Records Bureau, are made prior to the appointment of all adults employed by the school. Other checks carried out, before appointments are confirmed, include those on the authenticity of references, on medical fitness and on qualifications.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The school has been suitably adapted from its previous purpose as a Victorian primary school building. The rooms used earlier as residential accommodation have been creatively converted into additional classrooms and offices. While many classrooms are small they are appropriate in size for the groups who use them. There is a large room sufficient to hold whole school assemblies and indoor recreational room areas where pupils can socialise at break times. The overall feel is homely and this has a positive impact on pupils being calm and happy.

There are a good number of classrooms and several are dedicated to specialist teaching including science, ICT, design and technology, food technology and art. A large outdoor building has been converted into a library. These rooms are all equipped well for their purposes. Good quality computers are available in each teaching area and several classrooms have digital whiteboards, all of which are used to good effect by staff and pupils. Teachers have their own work spaces, most of which are individual offices and this benefits them in planning and managing their other responsibilities.

Outside there are hard surfaces and grassed areas available for recreation and games. The school makes good use of a nearby sports centre for teaching physical education.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The information for parents and others is wide ranging and of good quality. The handbook for parents is detailed and together with the prospectus ensures that parents have all the information required. The majority of parents responded very positively to the questionnaire and this shows that they hold the school in high esteem. This is supported further by the many letters received by the school from parents of past pupils praising their work. Parents and carers are provided with regular updates on their children's progress through open evenings, Annual Review meetings and end of year reports. They are always consulted on major decisions affecting their children.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a clear policy for handling complaints. Alongside initial informal measures, there are well-structured formal procedures by which complaints can be

considered fairly and objectively. The complaints panel includes three member of the local community. A simplified version is available for pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The Old School
DfES Number:	937/6092
Type of school:	Special day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 19 Girls: 9 Total: 28
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 19 Girls: 9 Total: 28
Annual fees (day pupils):	£38,250
Address of school:	Church End Ansley Nuneaton Warwickshire CV10 0QR
Telephone number:	02476394801
Fax number:	02476396535
Email address:	oldschool@btconnect.com
Headteacher:	Mr Michael Ross & Ms Pauline Garrett
Proprietor:	OS Education Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Ms Sheila Boyle
Date of inspection:	16 - 19 January 2006

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