

Inspection report

The Bridge School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 873/6033

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: March 6 - 9 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 Bridge School is an independent special school, which is part of the Elite Children's Care Limited. The school was first registered in September 2005 and provides for up to 40 pupils aged 10 to 16 years with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are placed in children's homes and foster homes supported by the parent company and have been unable to maintain school places within the mainstream sector. Pupils mainly come from East Anglia and the neighbouring counties. Currently the school has twelve pupils on roll. Nine have statements of special educational need (SEN). The school is located in Wisbech in the premises of a former hotel which has been converted for use as a school with residential accommodation. There is currently one boarder.

The school aims to establish a culture in which the pupils are able to learn and develop the skills and knowledge required to enable them to become fulfilled and independent adults. Wherever possible, pupils are assisted in entering mainstream education.

Summary of main findings

In the short time since its opening last September, the school has been successful in getting itself established. It provides satisfactory education for its pupils. They follow a relevant curriculum largely based on the National Curriculum and older pupils achieve General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) accreditation and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation (ASDAN) awards.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some that is good. Staff have very good relationships with pupils which assist the pupils in improving their behaviour and attitudes to education. The school places a high priority on literacy and numeracy which benefit from effective planning, as do the ASDAN programmes. Whilst provision for pupils' personal development is good, the curriculum for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) needs further development. The school has suitable plans to improve this area.

Assessment procedures are effective in English and mathematics, although this is not always reflected in lesson planning. The monitoring of pupils' behaviour is a strength of the provision.

What the school does well:

- it provides a broad curriculum with an appropriate focus on key skills, which also enables the pupils to achieve accreditation;
- it strikes a good balance between the provision for pupils' academic and social needs;
- it closely monitors pupils' well-being and encourages them to adopt a healthy lifestyle;
- its communication with carers is very effective;
- its staff work well as a team, act as good role models, and promote a very good ethos which encourages pupils to develop positive relationships with them and each other; and
- in a short time it has done well to become securely established.

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

- fully develop schemes of work and improve the detail of all lesson plans to take account of pupils' individual learning needs and recent guidance about teaching strategies, as identified in section 1 of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum that meets its stated aim to provide a broad and balanced programme for the pupils so that they can fulfil their potential. All subjects of the National Curriculum are offered, with English and mathematics having a suitably high emphasis. Older pupils are able to follow ASDAN programmes that focus on the key skills required and also enable pupils to develop personal interests such as sport and to explore the world of work and the wider community. In order to do this they are required to plan a personalised programme of study. There is also very good attention given to promoting the pupils' safety, health and well-being. The provision for PSHCE uses a commercial scheme and is bolstered by specialist input when considering health issues such as relationships and drugs education. Where pupils have statements of SEN, their requirements are wholly fulfilled. The use of individual education plans (IEP's) to guide learning is satisfactory. The plans are regularly reviewed and each pupil is involved in discussion of the outcomes.

The planning for English, mathematics and ASDAN is the most secure and provides effective individualised learning opportunities. In most other subjects, detailed planning is at an earlier stage: this is largely due to the short time the school has been operational in its new premises, with recently appointed staff. The school does, however, appreciate the need to provide a broad curriculum that offers equality of opportunity and meets the social and behavioural needs of the pupils.

The school recognises the need to continue the development of detailed schemes of work for all subjects based on recent national guidance and to take account of curricular initiatives for pupils aged 14 years and over.

Literacy and numeracy skills are promoted well when taught within English and mathematics. These skills are also addressed in other subjects, where pupils' speaking and listening are particularly strong. Pupils are encouraged to express their views and to query anything they do not understand. This enables them to become more confident learners. Most pupils find writing difficult and are thus less keen to practise. The development of writing, especially creative writing and comprehension, is less effective than speaking and listening, although information and communication technology (ICT) is used regularly.

The timetable provides an appropriate balance of time for subjects, although at just over 21 hours per week, it is less than recommended for secondary-aged pupils. Most pupils lose little time during the day and lessons usually start promptly.

When college links and opportunities for work experience are made available these have proved to be very effective and the school is pursuing the extension of this provision.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is satisfactory, although there is some teaching that is good. The good teaching is typified by highly appropriate content, full engagement of pupils and high expectations. The quality of lesson planning in English, mathematics and ASDAN programmes is good, although in some lessons the planning for pupils' individual needs lacks sufficient precision and reference to IEP's. However, the quality of teaching is, nonetheless, satisfactory due to the strong commitment by teachers to engage the pupils in learning.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good and permeates other areas of the curriculum such as ASDAN, science, ICT and food technology. The teaching of skills in speaking and listening is particularly effective and is successful in most lessons. In one PSHCE lesson, a pupil spoke thoughtfully about the sensitive issue of prejudice and how all people should be valued.

In most lessons pupils respond well to the good role models that staff provide. The staff remain calm in the face of provocation and ensure that disputes are brought to a conclusion that respects the dignity of each pupil. The relationships between some pupils are sometimes fractious and class grouping take some account of these difficulties. When conflicts do occur, the staff manage them very well and seek to re-engage the pupils in learning at the earliest opportunity. Occasionally, some pupils refuse to learn and leave the classroom for significant lengths of time. Pupils are reminded regularly that they have a responsibility to behave appropriately. They are aware of the behaviour monitoring system that is used very effectively by all staff.

Good achievement by the pupils is also marked in how successfully they engage in learning and adopt more positive attitudes to study. The school monitors this very effectively and presents the pupils with differentiated challenges based on their recent behaviour. Key to the success of this system is the consistent application of the criteria by all staff.

The strongest teaching is evident where the lessons have good pace, precise plans, variety in teaching methods and high levels of challenge that build securely upon previous learning. A pupil following ASDAN said: *'It's okay, I know how to create my action plan for this module'*. This was an accurate judgement of his own learning as he went on to plan what he needed to do to successfully complete the unit of work.

Some lessons, particularly double lessons, are too long for some pupils who complain of being bored. Some teachers also rely too heavily on worksheets where too little account has been taken of the text's complexity.

There are very good relationships between staff and pupils. The pupils overwhelmingly report that they are able to confide in at least one member of staff: *'I know they want the best for me'*. These relationships underpin every aspect of the school's work and encourage the pupils to have confidence in their ability to achieve. In a games lesson, the pupils cooperated very well, showed genuine sporting behaviour and maintained excellent behaviour even when one pupil had the ball accidentally kicked at his head.

The assessment of pupils' learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers show a very good understanding of pupils' attainment and use this knowledge to plan further learning. Teachers make judgements about the pupils' levels of attainment and appropriate support is sought to ensure that these judgements are moderated, notably in English and ASDAN studies. The assessment of pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning is very strong.

The pupils' achievements are regularly reported, although sometimes the academic content focuses too heavily on attitudes to work rather than gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Marking of pupils' work often contains supportive comments, such as: 'Well done!' The effectiveness of these is not as strong as it could be as pupils are not always given indicators as to how they might make their work even better.

The resources in lessons are adequate and they are used effectively. There are some shortages, for example in ICT, where there is an absence of programs to support literacy and there is one digital camera available for all pupils and staff. Classroom walls display good guidance for study.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but two 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:

- *plan lessons consistently to include effective teaching methods and suitable activities (paragraph 1(3)(c)); and*
- *ensure that the needs and prior attainments of the pupils are taken into account when planning lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d)).*

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

The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and pupils make good progress. In line with the aims of the school, pupils build up effectively the self-knowledge, self-confidence and self-esteem that are at the heart of the school's ethos.

Pupils' personal and social development is very well promoted through the opportunities provided for interaction with their teachers, with each other and with a local college. Whenever possible, pupils are involved in sports' activities within the community such as football, golf and swimming and this contributes to the development of sportsmanship and fair play.

The school has a family atmosphere, with very good relationships. Every encouragement is given to pupils to enable them to participate fully. There are many occasions for discussion, for pupils to consider the implications of their actions on

others and to distinguish right from wrong. The behaviour policy is applied consistently with good successes. Staff are extremely patient and professional when dealing with challenging behaviour, although all pupils were courteous and respectful to the inspectors.

Pupils are encouraged to be involved in their community. They take responsibility for tidying up and returning equipment. They work with the caretaker to repair damages. They learn to care for those less fortunate by supporting charities. However, further opportunities to help them take on responsibility and use their own initiative are not always taken. They learn about life in England and are being equipped with the vital life skills they need. They are developing cultural awareness by visiting places of educational interest, by learning French and through working with other people from different religions and cultures.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Pupils' welfare and well-being are safeguarded consistently. All policies for the care of pupils are in place. The quality of care and concern afforded to each pupil is good. The small number of pupils in each class means they receive very good levels of attention and supervision from staff. Pupils are happy to be at the school.

The policy for child protection reflects the current guidance and relates to practice at the school. There is a nominated person for child protection matters and all staff are due to receive training that will maintain their already high levels of awareness. Risk assessments are thorough and include proper procedures for school based and off-site activities such as residential trips and work experience. Supervision of pupils is good at all times and opportunities to endanger themselves or others are minimised.

Health and safety issues are given a high priority. There is good provision for First Aid, with two nominated and qualified staff on site. There are secure procedures, which record fire-alarm testing and which ensure that electrical equipment meets safety requirements.

Attendance and admission registers are maintained correctly and incidents properly recorded. The behaviour policy is unambiguous and understood by pupils. Rewards and sanctions are clearly made known to them. Pupils take good account of how their behaviour is monitored. All incidents are recorded appropriately.

The school has recently devised an outline plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are appropriate systems in place to ensure the suitability of staff prior to the confirmation of their appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The Bridge School is situated in the heart of Wisbech with good opportunities to visit places of educational interest nearby. The listed building has recently been suitably refurbished so that the school is very well maintained and in good decorative order to meet its purpose.

There are sufficient classrooms of an adequate size often enhanced by good displays of pupils' work. Pupils work, either individually or in small groups, so that there is ample space. There are specialist rooms for most subject areas and a large dining hall. There are plans to refurbish the meeting room with games activities. One of the boarding rooms is used as a medical room when required. Although a quiet area has been set aside in the English room for leisure reading, there is no designated library and this restricts the opportunity for pupils to engage in independent learning.

There is sufficient outdoor play space, plus a small grassy area with a bench. The school also makes additional provision by frequent trips to the park, and other community sports centres.

The boarding accommodation is of high quality, with spacious bedrooms all having ensuite bathrooms.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The quality of information provided for parents and others is good. The school has produced a helpful booklet for carers and prospective carers that describes how the school is organised and operates.

Individual records are readily available to carers who have easy daily access to teachers, receive frequent written reports and have regular meetings about how well the pupil is doing. Each pupil has a home-to-school book in which both teachers and carers write comments. The daily handover sessions are particularly valuable. This is a successful means of communication. The school has good relationships with the local authority and provides ready information about the progress of the pupils with statements of SEN. Information for annual reviews is supplied as required.

Details of the school's complaints procedure, its staff and their qualifications are readily available at the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school's policy for handling complaints is clearly written, referred to in carers' information and readily available in school. It is still in draft form and therefore when finalised carers should be notified of the policy review. Analysis of the pre-inspection questionnaire sent to carers shows that they feel positive about contacting the school should they have a concern.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The Bridge School
DfES Number:	873/6033
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	10 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 11 Girls: 1 Total: 12
Number of boarders:	Boys: 1 Girls: 0 Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 9 Girls: 0 Total: 9
Annual fees (day pupils):	£24,000 - £30,000
Annual fees (boarders):	£128,000 - £148,000
Address of school:	10A - 14 South Brink Wisbech Cambridgeshire PE13 1JJ
Telephone number:	01945 427276
Fax number:	01945 429043
Email address:	Stuart.mason@farrowhouse.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Stuart Mason
Proprietor:	Elite Children's Care Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Greg Sorrell
Date of inspection:	March 6 - 9 2006

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