

Inspection report

Clarence High School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 343/6131

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 3 - 5 July 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

Clarence High School is part of Nugent Care, a charity run by trustees operating from Liverpool since the 1880s, which offers a diverse range of social and educational provision. The school, which has been open since 1984, is residential with approved status, and is licensed for 119 pupils. A proportion of that number is for day places for pupils referred from neighbouring local education authorities. The school currently provides places for 41 pupils, 15 of whom are residential and 26 are day pupils. At the time of inspection pupils in Years 10 were on work experience and eight Year 11 pupils had completed their compulsory schooling but were still on roll. Pupils admitted are between the ages of 7 and 17 years and have statements of special educational needs (SEN), with their primary disabilities identified as emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD). Five young people are in the care of their local authority. There are no young people from ethnic minorities. There are increasing numbers of pupils on the autistic spectrum. The school provides a Catholic ethos, but admits those of all creeds. It occupies a large and imposing building, and is situated in a quiet residential area of Merseyside, set in extensive playing fields.

The school's mission statement states that: *'Clarence High School provides a safe and caring environment in which young people are encouraged to maximise the opportunities for physical, emotional and intellectual growth.'*

Summary of main findings

Clarence High School is an outstanding school where every child matters. The school meets its aims in full. The quality of the curriculum is outstanding because of the significant range of activities which support and enrich all subjects. The quality of teaching and learning is also excellent because pupils are placed firmly at the centre of the learning process. Staff go to great lengths to ensure pupils' well-being, and consequently the standard of care, welfare and health and safety is of the highest quality. The very warm and secure relationships within the school provide the context in which pupils make significant progress. An outstanding programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is reinforced by an imaginative programme of work-related learning and an equally successful programme of sporting activities which have a significant effect on pupils' physical development, self-esteem and morale. The range and quality of the accommodation and resources for pupils are also first class. The systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress are rigorous, but also succinct, and are easily accessible to parents and external agencies. The vision and commitment of the Principal and staff have turned the school into a place where pupils really want to be.

What the school does well:

- the vision and direction of the Principal and the commitment of the staff promote a caring and 'can-do' ethos which enables all pupils to thrive and make significant progress;
- it encourages pupils to make a full contribution to the running of their school, which significantly raises their self-esteem and increases their maturity;
- it provides an outstanding programme of personal and social development for pupils, combined with very clear moral leadership by staff;
- it knows and understands the individual needs of all its pupils and plans its curriculum and teaching activities to match these successfully;
- it provides an outstanding programme of work-related activities which support pupils' acquisition of skills for independence; and
- it provides an exemplary range of enrichment activities which extends pupils' perspectives of the wider world.

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 point for development:

- improve the marking and grading of pupils' work to enable them to understand what they need to do to make even more progress.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which reflects its aims exactly. There are very high expectations by the staff that all pupils can achieve their potential, and the curriculum is structured to ensure that this is so. The school provides all the subjects of the National Curriculum and all pupils have the opportunity to take some form of General Certificate of Secondary Education examination courses (GCSEs) or accredited qualifications in their final two years of education. As a consequence, pupils who have previously had fractured educational experiences are turned away from negative attitudes to learning toward those which are positive and provide them with very rewarding outcomes.

The 'can-do' ethos reflects the individualised nature of curriculum planning, which is based on each pupil's particular needs. For example, some pupils have very low self-esteem and consequently lack confidence. To address the issue the school provides opportunities for riding lessons, with the express purpose of improving their confidence. The school also nurtures talent and provides opportunities for individual pupils to increase their skills, for example in sport and music. The impact of these strategies is seen in the confident and relaxed way such pupils begin to interact with adults, and their peers, in a very short space of time. In the classroom the content of lessons is tailored to the specific needs of the pupils. Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching of basic skills. Schemes of work and long- and medium-term planning of subjects are of a very high quality.

The enrichment activities which support each subject are specific to the needs of the pupils, which are often visual and tactile, and engage them in practical activities which support learning very effectively. For example, role play was used to reinforce the effective use of language in a literacy lesson. The school recently put on a production of *'Blood Brothers'* which, besides enhancing pupils' dramatic skills, significantly increased their self-esteem and confidence. Sporting opportunities are outstanding and the school recently won the Football Association Charter Standards Schools' Award, competing against every type of school in the North West of England, and is entered for the national award later this year.

The programme of PSHCE is outstanding. While the framework of the subject is taught discretely, elements are threaded through all subjects of the curriculum. This is also an area where practical activities support pupils' learning experiences. Excellent use is made of the local community for citizenship. Pupils visit the courts to view cases, attend trade and careers fairs and have contact with local colleges. Visitors from a range of organisations as varied as the armed services, animal welfare groups and Liverpool University, provide an enriching perspective of the wider world. As a result of these experiences and contacts pupils become confident in expressing themselves to a variety of audiences and in asserting their independence.

Work-related learning is also a strength of the school. Its success is rooted in the vision of the co-ordinator. She has ensured that every lesson for older pupils contains a work-related element. The school also has very good quality support from the local Connexions adviser, who visits pupils regularly. A full programme of work experience is available to all Year 10 pupils and placements are tailored to the individual needs of each. The wide variety of work placements is organised and monitored well by the co-ordinator and staff, who go to great lengths to ensure that placements are successful. With the co-operation of the pupils, a mini-enterprise scheme has been established for which they take responsibility. Several times a year they organise the preparation and cooking of ethnic meals, which are offered to staff, who pay a negotiated price. The pupils are rewarded with certificates from a local bank and a meal for themselves in a restaurant. This teaches them the principle of receiving appropriate rewards for their efforts.

There is encouragement for all pupils to look beyond the school towards the opportunities in the wider world. There are clear expectations by staff that all pupils will achieve to their full potential. By the time pupils are ready to leave, the outcomes for them are very positive. For example, this year all pupils leaving at the age of 16 will go into full-time employment or full-time further education.

The stability and the professionalism of the teaching and support staff make the major contribution to the school's successful curricular provision.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is outstanding. The hallmarks of very good teaching were seen in the majority of lessons: high expectations of what pupils can achieve, very good planning for individual needs of pupils, challenging activities, a crisp pace of delivery and stimulating material and resources. Underpinning this professionalism are the excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and among teaching teams in the classroom.

Pupils make very good progress. Each year the number of GCSEs pupils have entered has risen considerably. This reflects the high expectations of staff that pupils can achieve in line with many of their peers in other schools. Challenging activities in the classroom bring out some interesting responses from pupils. For example, in a PSHCE lesson on European cultures they were initially very reluctant to try the range of different foods which the teaching assistant had painstakingly prepared, but, with persuasion eventually agreed to taste them, and even enjoyed the experience. Older pupils in a lesson on the holocaust showed great maturity in their questioning of events in the Warsaw ghetto, generating a discussion on why the Jews, who significantly outnumbered their guards, could not fight back. Very effective use of resources modified to the use of individual pupils, particularly ICT, makes a considerable impact on their progress. Lower attainers in a mathematics lesson made significant advances in their understanding of negative numbers on a graph because, as visual learners, they could control the plotting of co-ordinates on the interactive whiteboard. The teamwork of all adults who work in the classroom is outstanding. Teaching assistants are well prepared and make a valuable contribution to both the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are excellent. The school carries out an assessment of pupils' attainment on admission and this provides a clear baseline of information from which targets are set for improvement. Alongside academic achievement the school monitors pupils' attendance and personal development. Pupils contribute to termly targets for academic, personal and social achievement in their individual education plans set by tutors and key workers. The targets are based on pupil progress reports on all subjects, which contain levels of achievement set against National Curriculum levels, along with effort grades. All pupils carry their progress and target cards with them. These are marked at the end of every lesson and provide them with the opportunity to evaluate their own progress. Recording and monitoring are very well organised and make a significant contribution to pupils' progress. However, the marking of work is not sufficiently informative or robust in some instances to enable pupils to understand what they need to do to make even more progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes outstanding provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted through excellent assemblies, called 'gatherings', and in uplifting lessons which give them the opportunity to *'think and act beyond self'*. There is an underpinning Christian ethos in the school which promotes learning and caring as paramount, and a strong emphasis is also placed on pupils' social development. At all times pupils are polite to visitors and respectful towards staff and each other. They take responsibility for their actions, and, above all, after they have been in the school a short while, begin to have self-belief in their abilities and potential.

The school has a clear moral code, which is upheld and applied consistently and universally by staff. This enables pupils to learn to distinguish right from wrong and to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. The outcomes of such successful spiritual and moral development are most easily and palpably measured in a range of activities which clearly indicate pupils' social development, both as individuals, and as members of the wider society. Last year, for example, pupils raised money for the Tsunami Appeal, and to purchase a brace for a fellow pupil who had seriously damaged his back.

In PSHCE lessons, pupils learn about public services. They also learn about the application of principles such as human rights. Pupils involve themselves vigorously in practical citizenship. A flourishing school council, with burgeoning self-confidence, asserts itself in decision-making in a range of school activities from choice of uniform to the establishment of a pupils' common room. It has a voice at the annual general meeting of the trustees of the charity responsible for the school. The system of peer mentoring, where pupils volunteer to take responsibility for others by supporting and listening to them, provides further opportunities for them to display their maturity.

Pupils learn about other religions in religious education classes. They are encouraged to appreciate the rich diversity of cultural differences through practical experiences which they enjoy. For example, pupils are introduced to a range of foods associated with festivals such as Diwali and Chanukah. The 'gathering' room is bedecked with the flags of nations of the world, and they often form the focal point of discussions about cultural diversity.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils, and some elements of the provision are excellent exemplars of care. A well thought out range of policies and procedures addresses all aspects of pupils' welfare. All incidents involving pupils' welfare are logged and recorded in detail, and the school is quick to respond with appropriate action. Detailed positive behaviour and anti-bullying policies outline the school's ethos and approach to sanctions and rewards. The school prefers the use of the latter whenever possible. This is allied to a very strong and pleasant family atmosphere, and relationships in the school between adults and pupils are excellent. Pupils enjoy school, sometimes for the first time. The importance of pupils' welfare, health and safety, both within and outside school, is given highest priority. Pupils are closely supervised, in a supporting rather than restricting role, and this safeguards their safety and well-being at all times. There is always at least one member of staff on duty who is qualified in First Aid. All the sites of the school are safe places in which to work and learn.

When visits are undertaken, detailed risk assessments are implemented most effectively. Policies and practices are suitably augmented by checks and advice from health and safety professionals, including those which relate to fire safety. There are regular evacuation practices in both the school and residential homes.

Staff are well deployed to ensure pupils' safety, have a clear understanding of school policies, particularly those which relate to child protection, and implement them sensibly and sensitively. Admission and attendance registers are kept and administered to comply with the regulations.

The school's detailed three-year accessibility plan is predicated on a substantial audit of premises and therefore effectively fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

To quote a pupil's recent letter of thanks on leaving the school: *'Clarence High School is a special school because it looks after special children in a special way.'*

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is very thorough in ensuring that all staff are suitable to work with its pupils. Checks at an enhanced level are made with the Criminal Records Bureau, referees contacted and qualifications and medical fitness checked and recorded.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

Educational and residential accommodation is of a very high standard. Some of the accommodation is outstanding. Over time, judicious changes to the usage of the rooms means that there is now a very good range of specialist rooms for teaching design and technology, science and ICT. Fittings are appropriate and the flooring is universally safe. Rooms are in a good state of repair; they are safe and hygienic and are well lit, heated and ventilated. Toilets and washing areas are numerous and meet all requirements.

Some areas of accommodation in particular make a significant contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. An excellent full-size gymnasium of the highest specification and a purpose-built drama theatre offer the school, and the local community, outstanding facilities for the promotion of sports and drama. The school's very high levels of success in local and regional sport is testimony to the investment the school has made in providing such facilities. Extensive outside areas include spacious grassed and hard areas. The light and airy dining area is arranged on a café basis and provides a friendly and communal environment at mealtimes.

The high standards of the educational accommodation are replicated in the high standards of the residential accommodation. A very strongly focussed plan on students' needs has resulted in the refurbishment of the three residential houses, which now offer the young people family-style residential accommodation to the highest standards. The accommodation fosters a sense of community living, making an effective contribution to pupils' self-esteem and self-worth.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school prospectus and the statement of purpose give parents, carers and other partners very clear and accessible information about the aims of the school and what it has to offer. This is also true of the pupil progress reports issued to all interested parties annually. These are exemplary, being focussed, very informative and accessible.

The school provides detailed information on each pupil to the local authority responsible for them. There is good liaison between the school and external agencies and referring authorities play their part effectively in monitoring the provision for the young people in their care.

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 an independent member of the local community.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Clarence High school
DfES Number:	343/6131
Type of school:	Special residential school (emotional, social and behavioural difficulties)
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	7 - 17 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 31 Girls: 10 Total: 41
Number of boarders:	Boys: 12 Girls: 3 Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 31 Girls: 10 Total: 41
Annual fees (day pupils):	From £37,461
Annual fees (boarders):	From £51,885
Address of school:	31 West Lane Freshfield Merseyside L37 7AZ
Telephone number:	01704 872151
Fax number:	01704 831001
Email address:	Clarence.High@nugentcare.org
Principal:	Mr Donagh McKillop
Proprietor:	Nugent Care
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Helen Maskew
Date of inspection:	3 - 5 July 2006

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