

Inspection report
Tumblewood Community School
Independent special school
DfES ref no: 865/6034

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 9 - 12 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

Tumblewood Community School is a small residential project working with vulnerable girls aged 11 to 18 years who have complex emotional and behavioural support needs and require extensive therapeutic and educational support and development. At the time of the inspection the school had 5 full-time pupils aged between 13 and 16 and 3 part-time resident pupils over the age of 16 who attended the local further education college for most of the week, and also attended lessons at the school on one afternoon per week.

The school's aim is *'to offer a range of educational opportunities to all members of the school with an emphasis on the needs of the individual within the requirements of the law... The project aims to work with high-risk behaviours and to challenge presenting patterns in order to achieve placement success and reintegrate into the community.'*

Summary of main findings

Tumblewood Community School has a very strong ethos and set of values to which all staff are firmly committed, to the benefit of all pupils. The school's curriculum provides an appropriate blend of education and therapeutic care and maintains a strong focus on the personal, social and independent living skills of all pupils. The quality of teaching is satisfactory, and the quality of care and support for pupils is very high. Staff exhibit particularly good initiative in addressing the emotional and behavioural difficulties of the pupils, and dealing with them in a firm and supportive manner. The school monitors closely and reports regularly on the educational, emotional and behavioural development of each individual pupil. Regular community meetings and frequent extra-curricular activities contribute strongly to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is careful and rigorous in its consideration of the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. The quality of staff is high, and the school's physical resources are satisfactory. The school has detailed policies and effective procedures in place and it communicates regularly and effectively with external stakeholders.

What the school does well:

- it provides a therapeutic programme of high quality which adds significant value to the development of the pupils;
- its academic and support staff provide a very high quality of support and care;

- its pupils are empowered to adopt and exhibit responsibility through the community meetings programme;
- it provides a varied programme of enrichment;
- it strongly promotes pupils' personal, social and independent living skills;
- all its staff are good at managing pupils' attitudes and behaviour and directing their learning; and
- it regularly and comprehensively monitors and reviews pupils' progress.

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

- ensure that the curriculum fulfils all the requirements specified in pupils' statements.

Next Steps

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

- stabilise the teaching team and reduce the rate of staff turnover;
- broaden the religious education (RE) curriculum and develop a more comprehensive scheme of work for this area; and
- improve the quality of accommodation to create more specialist areas for physical education (PE), science and design and technology;

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school has a clear and comprehensive curriculum and supporting policy that is suitably adapted to fulfil virtually all the needs of pupils. Subjects taught include English, mathematics, humanities, personal, social, and health education (PSHE), art and design, drama, dance, singing, physical activities and food technology. The curriculum ensures that pupils acquire appropriate skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. The breadth of the curriculum in RE is relatively narrow.

There is a particularly strong focus throughout the school on the development of personal and social skills, which are central to much of the lesson planning. Academic staff, pupils and support workers also consider these areas at the community meetings that take place before and after school each day. These meetings form a central part of the effective running of the school.

Post-16 pupils who are resident at the school attend as full-time students at the local college where they undertake a 'Next Steps' programme. One afternoon per week they also study for the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) certificate at the school, which addresses a broad range of topics including PSHE, art-related activities and independent living skills.

Teachers have detailed schemes of work and lesson plans which provide an overview of the intended learning outcomes, activities and resources and consider the specific needs of individual pupils, particularly those with statements. Individual lessons cater well for the additional support needs identified in pupils' statements. The breadth of the curriculum meets the requirements specified in the statements for all pupils providing a full range of subjects specified in the National Curriculum, with the exception of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3.

Central to the school's purpose and values is an individualised therapeutic programme for all pupils. The programme has clearly defined aims, and runs in conjunction with the education and care programme. It is provided through regular group sessions, individual play therapy, and through extra-curricular activities and project work which takes place during holiday periods. These activities include work placements on a local farm, riding, gymnastics, ballet, badminton and language tuition. There is also an outdoor swimming pool at the school which pupils use extensively in the summer. The project weeks which run during school holiday periods include activities such as art and design, dance and drama workshops, theatre trips, ice-skating, compilation of a newsletter, trips to local places of interest such as the beach and the city of Bath, and trips abroad.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching in all lessons observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and about a third of lessons were good. The school has recently had to cope with high staff turnover, departure of key teachers at very short notice and

significant use of supply teachers. It has managed the situation well, but as many of the pupils have attachment disorders, high staff turnover poses a risk to the effectiveness of the teaching team.

Invariably the focus in lessons is as much on developing pupils' social and basic skills as on those specific to the academic subject. Every lesson observed during the inspection presented a significant challenge to the teachers to manage the attitude and behaviour of the pupils and enable learning activities to take place effectively. Teachers use a wide variety of strategies and techniques skilfully to address these issues to ensure that learning is taking place and that pupils make progress. Invariably teachers do not adhere strictly to the activities specified in the plans, but use their initiative to manage the group dynamic within the lesson, and devise alternative strategies to address the core learning objectives. For example, one pupil completely disengaged from a science lesson. The teacher set up a competition with the support assistant, which captured the curiosity of the pupil and successfully drew her back into the lesson. In an English lesson, the teacher overcame a similar withdrawal by engaging the pupil in creating a collage and then used question and answer to explore the primary lesson objectives with the pupil whilst she worked on the collage. In a performing arts lesson the teacher skilfully involved all pupils in singing karaoke, which quickly developed a strong bond and mutual respect between members of the group.

Given their intermittent prior education and the significant behavioural, emotional and educational support needs of all the pupils, the standard of work produced by them is satisfactory. There are many examples of well-constructed and neatly presented work displayed in the classrooms. The work produced by pupils in their exercise books and on paper during the inspection was more mixed in quality, and on occasions pupils take insufficient care over the presentation and content of their work. However, on other occasions pupils produce work to a high standard. For example, in an English lesson one pupil produced a highly thought-provoking and emotive poem which dealt with a range of sensitive issues close to the pupil's heart. Another pupil worked creatively and industriously during an art lesson to produce a very good binker tapestry design in the style of Mondrian.

Assessment strategies are rigorous and detailed. Teachers provide a high level of verbal encouragement, praise and formative feedback to pupils. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of pupils' progress. Every six months the progress of each pupil is assessed by an educational psychologist. These assessments are used in conjunction with the teachers' assessments to assess the progress of each pupil on a monthly basis, and inform the work plan and target setting for each pupil.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *ensure that the curriculum fulfils all the requirements specified in pupils' statements (paragraph 1(2)(e)).*

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

There is good provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils flourish in the school's supportive environment. The therapeutic programme helps pupils to develop their self-awareness, so they come to understand and deal with their anger and anxieties. Their behaviour improves, as does their ability to form relationships with others. They grow in confidence and self-esteem.

Each day starts with a community meeting, in which pupils identify issues and problems that they are facing. They learn to articulate their feelings without becoming angry or emotional, and ask for support when they feel the need.

Pupils have a good understanding of the rules and sanctions in the school's community, and they generally accept and abide by these. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well; they are calm yet assertive and provide good role models for pupils to follow. Pupils usually rise to the high expectations set for them.

As pupils mature they take increasing responsibility for themselves, and the development of their independence skills is a strength. Younger girls take responsibility for their pocket money, as well as tasks such as looking after fish in the aquarium. The bungalow in the residential accommodation allows pupils over 16 to become more self-reliant. Here, pupils manage their weekly allowance, budget, plan, shop for and prepare meals, and clean their rooms and communal areas. They travel to college using public transport.

There is a wealth of opportunities for pupils to socialise. A varied programme of evening activities and project weeks during school holidays provide a rich social life as well as sources of cultural development. Pupils choose to go out some evenings, taking part in activities such as bowling; some attend clubs in the community, such as Sea Cadets. Pupils also contribute to the local community by working in a charity shop, helping out at a community farm, and raising money for charities. Staff ensure that pupils who do not have White British backgrounds explore their own cultures, and share and celebrate aspects of these with their friends in the school. However, a relatively narrow religious education curriculum restricts the opportunities for pupils to learn about beliefs and customs associated with non-Christian world religions.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Staff attach great importance to the health, safety and welfare of the pupils, and provide good standards of care in both the education and residential settings. The good relationships between staff and pupils underpin this important aspect of the

school's work. A raft of detailed policies informs their work, including those for child protection, health and safety and behaviour management. Policies are implemented consistently well and health and safety checks are carried out rigorously and with sufficient frequency. Detailed records of incidents and accidents are maintained; these show what actions are taken and when sanctions are applied, and the school is careful to inform all those that should be notified. Risks are carefully assessed and suitable action is taken to ensure the safety of pupils and staff. Levels of supervision are good, and there are sufficient First Aiders to ensure that there is always cover. Admissions and attendance are recorded as required.

There are good arrangements for the induction of pupils, and the key worker system provides each young person with access to a trusted and supportive adult. Liaison with other professionals such as those from the social and health services ensures that pupils have additional support and that their welfare needs are met. Pupils have a voice, particularly through the community meetings, and their viewpoints are heard. Where it is appropriate to do so, the school supports pupils in maintaining links with their natural parents and siblings.

Handover meetings between each shift of carers are effective in ensuring that education and care staff have a good understanding of the issues affecting individual pupils each day. They are conducted in a professional manner and thoroughly documented.

The carefully planned therapeutic programme is a strength. Through activities such as play therapy and group work, pupils are well supported in making emotional adjustments and coming to terms with difficulties that they have experienced in the past.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

All the school's staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at the appropriate level. For new staff the school carries out appropriate checks on identity, previous employment history, medical fitness and qualifications prior to confirmation of their appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The main building provides a reception area, office space, a visitors' room, a staffroom, a community room for meetings and weekly assemblies, and a multi-media room that includes a library and computer stations.

The education block houses three spacious classrooms with storage facilities and a play therapy room. There are no specialist teaching areas for physical education, science or design and technology, but some food technology activities take place in the residential accommodation. There are sufficient toilets for pupils and staff although these are situated in portable accommodation separate from other buildings. The project's business plan shows that further improvements to the accommodation are planned. For instance, a Dutch barn on the site is soon to be renovated to form an indoor leisure area and toilets.

The grounds include a variety of recreational areas. There is a hard-standing playground, a pleasant lawned area, an outdoor swimming pool that is fenced off, and a large field.

A recent addition is a chalet that provides accommodation for visiting parents and office space for the project manager.

Residential accommodation meets the required standards. Girls' bedrooms reflect their choices of decoration and communal areas are well maintained and suitably homely. Floor coverings are generally of good quality.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school communicates effectively with parents, prospective parents and other key stakeholders via its prospectus, regular meetings and case conferences. Documentation provides a thorough insight into the nature of the school, including appropriate contact details, the school's stated aims, ethos, curriculum content, admissions policy and information on the progress made by pupils in the previous academic year.

In accordance with the regulations, the school has a comprehensive range of policies that are listed in the prospectus, the full versions of which are available to staff, students and external stakeholders on request. These are currently undergoing review, and whilst they fulfil the regulatory requirements, several policies lack clarity and are not particularly user-friendly.

External stakeholders and parents are well informed of pupils' progress and achievements through regular detailed reports which cover the key curriculum subjects and also behavioural developments.

The school has made arrangements to ensure that, following this inspection, all parents and relevant stakeholders will receive a full report.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school includes a summary of its complaints policy and procedures in the prospectus, and a more detailed complaints policy is available on request.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Tumblewood Community School
DfES Number:	865/6034
Type of school:	Special: therapeutic school working with children with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 0 Girls: 5 Total: 5
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 0 Girls: 3 Total: 3
Number of boarders:	Boys: 0 Girls: 8 Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 0 Girls: 4 Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils):	£15,000 - £30,000
Annual fees (boarders):	£150,000 - £200,000
Address of school:	The Laurels 4 Hawkeridge Road Heywood Westbury Wiltshire BA13 4LF
Telephone number:	01373 284466
Fax number:	01373 824321
Email address:	imtectumblewood@aol.com
Headteacher:	Helen Twiggs
Proprietor:	Sue Hortop and John Kearney
Reporting Inspector:	Peter Nelson (HMI)
Date of inspection:	9 - 12 January 2006

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