

Inspection report

Upper Forge School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 894/6005

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 17 – 20 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

Upper Forge School is an independent, day special school located in Coalbrookdale. It is one of several similar provisions operated nationally by the parent company, Castle Care Limited, which provides care, education and therapeutic treatment for pupils with severe and specific emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are five boys on roll. The school accepts pupils aged between 12 and 17 years and they remain at the school for two years or longer. No pupil has a statement of special educational need (SEN) but all are in public care and placed at the school by their respective home authority, as a result of court proceedings. Pupils live in a residence, some five miles from the school. Prior to their admission, pupils have experienced considerable disruption to their education and their attainment levels are below those of similar aged pupils.

The school aims to ensure that pupils:

- *can feel confident in the staff and be sure that their needs will be catered for;*
- *are treated with respect, kindness, and understanding;*
- *are encouraged to discover and question, explore and investigate, reflect and understand, in all subjects of the curriculum;*
- *are encouraged to persevere and to know and cope positively with both success and failure; and*
- *are able to care for themselves.*

Summary of main findings

Upper Forge School successfully achieves its aims of enabling pupils to value learning and increase their self-esteem. It accomplishes this through a combination of good teaching, appropriate therapies and outstanding behaviour management. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they state they enjoy being at the school. By the time they leave, pupils are well prepared for their next phase of education or training. The curriculum provides a satisfactory basis for pupils to make progress and to become accredited in national examinations. The breadth of the curriculum and the balance of subjects need further consideration. Assessment processes, although effective, do not always lead to challenges that are most appropriate to the attainment of each pupil. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and these form a good basis of mutual understanding and respect. Pupils' behaviour is monitored rigorously and they are given effective support to improve. Resources are generally unsatisfactory and information and communication technology (ICT) is used insufficiently to support learning. Accommodation is satisfactory but the lack of specialist facilities inhibits learning in some subjects. Provision for the cultural development of pupils is weak.

What the school does well:

- it provides good teaching which successfully re-engages pupils in learning and enables them to make good progress;
- staff provide very good role models which encourage pupils to relate well to each other and establish positive relationships;
- it enables pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour because there are clear guidelines and they are given appropriate support;
- it ensures that pupils receive therapeutic support to address their specific difficulties;
- it provides a good transition programme which offers additional opportunities in further education; and
- it promotes the confidence and self-esteem of pupils through a range of good opportunities for personal development.

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

- provide classroom resources of an adequate quality and range and ensure that these are used effectively; and
- extend the opportunities for pupils to acquire a deeper appreciation of other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.

Next Steps

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

- review the breadth and balance of the curriculum, particularly for post-16 pupils, in order to provide appropriate challenges to their learning and, where necessary, engage the services of subject specialists;
- develop more substantial links with the residential provision in ways that broaden the social and cultural opportunities for pupils; and
- ensure that the assessment processes are targeted more effectively to determine the next stages of learning for each pupil.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school currently provides for pupils in Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and post-16. They are taught in a single group of five pupils. This enables teachers to provide appropriate individual support throughout all lessons. The curriculum follows the requirements of the National Curriculum and includes the subjects of English, mathematics and science as well as geography, history, art, ICT, physical education and general studies. Pupils generally attain levels in the average to low average range.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and it enables pupils to make progress in learning. The school has worked hard to put in place effective schemes of work, which cover the subjects it provides. The range of subjects is limited because there are only two teachers. The organisation of subjects on the timetable is also unbalanced. The expertise of both teachers, within their main subjects, is very good and the curriculum for these areas is correspondingly better. The provision for other subjects, such as science, geography, history and art lacks challenge for pupils. This results from the combination of a lack of specific expertise and of specialist facilities. Despite this, the staff work very hard to provide opportunities relevant to the needs of pupils and as a result they successfully re-engage them in learning.

The development of literacy and numeracy is very good. When pupils arrive at the school their baseline test results indicate poor knowledge and skills. Through very good teaching and a stimulating curriculum in English and mathematics this situation is reversed, resulting in pupils developing a keen interest in literature and rapidly improving numeracy skills. These provide a sound basis for other learning.

A weakness in the curriculum is that planning does not sufficiently take into account the areas of interest particular to post-16 pupils. The dilemma for the school is that these pupils do not arrive with the basic skills necessary to access a curriculum most appropriate to their needs. However, the school does provide an effective school-leaving programme for these pupils. This includes opportunities within the work place to rehearse and consolidate classroom and work-related skills. The outcome is that these pupils make up the lost ground and by the time they leave they are prepared well for further study or training.

By the time pupils leave the school they achieve accreditation in a range of national qualifications. All pupils have achieved accreditation in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) at bronze level; one pupil has continued this award to silver level. All eligible pupils have also achieved Entry Level qualifications in English and mathematics.

Personal, social and health education is provided through the ASDAN and the science curriculum. The school aims to work in conjunction with staff and therapists at the pupils' residence, but there are no clear links between the work undertaken in school and that offered in the residence.

The quality of teaching and assessment

When pupils are first admitted to the school they have previously experienced a severely disrupted education. Records indicate that they have very negative views about learning. This is further compounded by fragile temperaments and they represent a considerable challenge to the skills of the teachers. Although there are two teachers at the school, they also have similar duties at other establishments owned by the company. They offer a commitment equivalent to one full-time teacher.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In some lessons it is very good or outstanding. A considerable strength of the teaching is the very good quality relationships that pupils have with teachers. These enable pupils to accept challenges which have a positive impact on their achievements. Consequently, pupils make good progress. In lessons which are less effective, teachers do not have the subject expertise to provide appropriate challenges to pupils' learning.

Lessons are characterised by clear explanations to pupils of what they are about to learn. Objectives are posted on the board at the beginning of each day and consistently referred to during the appropriate lesson. This enables pupils to take full responsibility for their learning. They show interest in their work and put in considerable effort.

Teachers' skills in behaviour management are outstanding. Through a quiet and determined insistence on high standards they enable pupils to achieve exceptional standards of behaviour. They use methods which include a positive emphasis on the development of acceptable behaviour and attitudes by pupils. Pupils fully understand what is required of them and willingly subscribe to the classroom ethos and discipline. Their attitudes are exemplary. Pupils are courteous to the teachers as well as to their peers. For example, in a lesson in which they presented a critique of the book they were reading, the conclusion of each presentation was greeted with applause. During other lessons pupils encourage and offer help to their classmates. These attitudes reflect the respect and courtesy which teachers show to pupils.

Assessment procedures are sound and used to determine the progress made by pupils, but the outcomes to these are not used effectively to influence what pupils need to learn next. Pupils are given very good verbal feedback about the work they do and are provided with guidelines on how they can make the outcomes better. Assessment is also used in ways which encourage pupils to record their own achievements. This is a short-term gain as the results are insufficiently evaluated by teachers and used effectively in later lesson planning. Because they record their own achievements pupils have growing files of evidence which are a source of pride to them all. Pupils gain accreditation through national awards, such as ASDAN and Entry Level subjects.

Resources to support learning are unsatisfactory. They lack the range and quality which would enable teachers to provide rigorous and stimulating challenges to pupils' knowledge, or to encourage pupils to pursue their own lines of enquiry. There is too much dependence on the use of worksheets. These restrict pupils' ability to develop their thinking in subjects such as history and geography. The use of ICT is

a weakness. The current provision includes outdated hardware which is limited in the software it is able to run. The school has already identified this issue within its school development plan.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *provide classroom resources, which are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and use these effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).*

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory but their wider cultural development is unsatisfactory. Pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem is promoted well through their achievements in lessons. The use of appropriate opportunities for external accreditation helps to give pupils a taste of success in learning, often for the first time. There is good provision to develop pupils' self-confidence in classes, for example, by leading warm-up activities in numeracy lessons.

There are limited opportunities for personal reflection or for representatives of local faith groups to visit the school in order to broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding. Personal development is promoted well through a responsibility programme, which develops independence, so that a number of pupils embark on college placements.

Their sense of right and wrong is reinforced well by clearly defined rules and high expectations. As a result, pupils normally behave very well and act responsibly. The weekly therapy sessions provided at the residence play an important part in developing acceptance of their offences and teach them that the cycle of re-offending can be broken. Some pupils have participated in a forum at the House of Commons. This resulted in some pupils expressing views about their experiences in care.

The school teaches an eight-week cultural awareness module in the autumn term. This covers major religions and provides aspects of cultural development. However, if pupils join the school after this time, they miss this element and there are no further cultural development opportunities throughout the year. Some insights into other cultures are provided through the cooking of national dishes, but such opportunities are insufficient.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *enable the pupils to acquire a deeper appreciation of other cultures and in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony (paragraph 2(e)).*

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

There is good attention to pupils' welfare, health, and safety. Pupils are treated with care, courtesy and respect. They report that they feel safe and that the school deals well with any issues of bullying. The school has a comprehensive child protection policy, which meets the requirements. This policy indicates that there is to be a designated person on the school site, but it does not state who this person is, nor is this clearly understood by staff. There are clear sanctions for misbehaviour and there is a strong and appropriate emphasis on promoting good behaviour through positive means. The outcomes are rigorously recorded. There is a good level of supervision of pupils, reflecting the serious nature of their offences. Admission and attendance registers are kept in accordance with the regulations.

The school has a very good accessibility plan to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. It covers improving the curriculum, the physical environment and the provision of information.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The company undertakes rigorous checks to ensure that staff at the school are suitable to work with this group of vulnerable pupils. These checks include reference to the Criminal Records Bureau as well as confirmation of the professional references claimed by each member of staff. Appropriate medical and identity checks are also carried out.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is located in a historic former forge in the village of Coalbrookdale. It is also used as training base for other company personnel but these activities do not conflict with the education of the pupils.

The single classroom is of adequate size and it provides sufficient opportunities for variation in teaching methods. The space is supplemented by a small anteroom which is used as a computer facility as well as for storage of resources. There are

no facilities for pupils to undertake specialist activities, such as science or craft and design. Provision for pupils to play outside is satisfactory, though there is no area of hard-standing which pupils could use in inclement weather. During winter months the pupils have access to the largest room which is used for training of company personnel. This allows them to take part in games such as badminton.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides a suitable range of information for parents, carers and other partners. The brochure gives a useful overview of the school, including its aims and philosophy and details of the curriculum which it provides. Twice-yearly reports of pupils' progress are provided and they give a clear picture of the progress pupils make. Parents and carers who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire reported good communication and positive links with the school. Pupils' responses also indicate that they are pleased to be in the school; they feel that they have made good progress and that they are treated fairly and with respect.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a written complaints procedure which clearly states the responses it will make in the event a complaint is received. There is a defined timescale by which each stage of a complaint will be completed. Through their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents and others indicate that they understand these procedures. The school has not received any formal complaints within the last academic year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Upper Forge School
DfES Number:	894/6005
Type of school:	Special school for pupils with specific emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	12 – 17 years
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	5
Annual fees:	£24,700
Address of school:	Upper Forge School Dale Road Coalbrookdale Telford TF8 7DT
Telephone number:	01952 432660
Fax number:	01952 432873
Email address:	spitt@castlehomes.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Geoffrey Southall
Proprietor:	Castle Care Ltd.
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Tom Smith
Date of inspection:	17 – 20 July 2006

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