

Inspection report

Potterspurry Lodge School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 928/6039

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 22 – 25 May 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

Potterspurty Lodge School, situated on the outskirts of Towcester, is an independent day and residential special school for 53 pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and difficulties associated with autism, Tourette's and Asperger's Syndromes. It is located in spacious and attractive grounds which provide a peaceful setting. The accommodation includes both education and residential provision. The school was originally founded according to the principles of Rudolf Steiner. Potterspurty Lodge admits boys between the ages of 8 and 16 years, all of whom have statements of special educational need. There are currently 53 pupils aged 11 to 16 on roll, and the school draws its pupils from a wide area. Twenty seven pupils travel into school each day from as far away as Luton. All pupils are placed in the school by local authorities.

Pupils come from diverse backgrounds, but all enter the school with missed opportunities for learning, and histories of educational failure. Attainment on entry covers a wide range, but all pupils are underachieving on admission. The school seeks to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which follows the principles of the National Curriculum within a setting making 24-hour provision. The principles of Rudolf Steiner still guide the philosophy of the school, with an emphasis on creativity, seasonal festivals, and morning song. The provision for pupils is designed to enable each to reach their academic potential as well as to enrich their spiritual and cultural experiences. There are no pupils with English as an additional language and nearly all are of white British heritage.

Summary of main findings

Potterspurty Lodge School is a good school with some outstanding features. It fully achieves its stated aims. The school meets nearly all the requirements for registration. The school has a calm welcoming and positive ethos, in which highly committed staff work skilfully to promote the interests and welfare of pupils. The provision for safeguarding pupils is outstanding. Teaching is good and sometimes excellent. It effectively promotes pupils' learning and achievements, developing their capacity to communicate socially and manage change in their lives. The provision for personal and social development is outstanding, enabling pupils to be very well prepared for their future after school. The well-thought-out curriculum is effectively adapted to meet individual needs with excellent opportunities to enrich learning. The assessment of learning and personal development is good, although individual targets set for pupils are not always specific enough. Pupils are enthusiastic about what they do and this impacts well on their achievements and understanding. The

school provides very good standards of care and welfare to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met.

What the school does well:

- It provides high quality teaching so that pupils are challenged in their learning and achieve well;
- it has very good procedures to ensure health and safety which are exceptionally well implemented;
- it makes outstanding provision for pupils' personal development;
- it provides a challenging, rich and varied curriculum which effectively promotes enjoyment and achievement;
- it maintains regular contact with parents, providing good information so that they are well informed of their children's progress; and
- it provides very good training, support and induction for staff so that they meet the needs of all pupils.

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

- implement the plans to provide appropriate changing facilities for physical education.

Next Steps

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

- improve the quality of individual education and care plans to ensure all targets set are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a good curriculum with outstanding features. The curriculum effectively encompasses the academic and social needs of boarders because it involves 24-hour learning with a range of structured evening activities, which are popular with pupils. The very good links between the academic and social curriculum impact well on learners' personal development. The curriculum is considerably enriched through an excellent range of visits and residential experiences, such as trips to World War 1 battle field sites, skiing trips and outdoor adventurous activities. These considerably enhance pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem as well as academic skills.

At Key Stage 3, pupils follow the National Curriculum taking national tests at the end of Year 9. Results over recent years show that pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science with very good progress in reading. At Key Stage 4 pupils follow a variety of accredited course at Entry Level and/or General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), achieving well in public examinations. The school works very effectively to match the curriculum to the individual needs of pupils. For example, a higher attaining Year 9 pupil took mathematics GCSE, gaining a Grade A. He has just completed AS level mathematics at a local mainstream secondary school.

The planning of the curriculum is good and is strengthened further by appropriate schemes of work for each subject or area of learning, adapted well to the needs of all pupils. Planning in humanities is a strength of the school. Planned 'options' activities such as gardening, fishing and cookery make a very good contribution to pupils' enjoyment and their economic awareness.

Individual education and care plans (IECPs) are provided for each pupil, with a strong emphasis on developing literacy, social communication skills and improving behaviour. Although these are developed from appropriate assessments, the targets set are not always specific enough and it is therefore sometimes difficult for pupils to understand them or for staff to measure progress against them. Pupils receive very good support from teachers and learning support assistants who take account of IECP targets in moving learning forward. As a result pupils achieve well. Pupils with particular learning difficulties benefit from skilfully adapted tasks or resources to ensure they have equal access to learning alongside their peers. Staff ensure that extra provision specified on statements, such as speech therapy, is made.

There is a strong focus on developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology which are not only effectively taught as separate subjects but also developed well in other subjects across the curriculum.

The provision for personal, social and health education and citizenship is outstanding. There is an excellent life-skills programme for older pupils to promote independence skills. As a result, pupils leave the school as well-rounded young

people ready for further education. All pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and to stay safe. There is a strong emphasis on drugs awareness, the promotion of sexual health and development of positive relationships. The religious education curriculum considerably enhances pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, as pupils learn from different world religions appreciating the richness and diversity of different faiths. Music, art and food technology introduce pupils to different cultures and pupils are fully aware of the advantages of healthy eating and the need to protect the environment. Work-related learning is very well developed with strong links through the Connexions service and carefully planned work experiences. Pupils do very well, as seen in the very positive feedback from local employers.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons it is outstanding. Where teaching is outstanding the lessons are planned in very great detail, learning objectives are challenging and methods are carefully matched to support the needs of different pupils. All lessons provide good opportunities for success and learners are fully engaged in what they do. The best of these include small steps for each learner as well as effective means to ensure that learning is consolidated. All teachers focus effectively on developing the skills of communication by, for example, simplifying verbal instructions and providing very good opportunities for speaking and listening. This has a positive impact on pupils' understanding and considerably enhances self-confidence. Communication skills are further enhanced through the expertise provided by the educational psychologist and speech and language therapist.

All teachers set high expectations for pupils' learning. Pupils receive very good support from teachers and support staff who work effectively as a team. For example, in a Year 11 lesson the teacher worked with two pupils to develop their pottery skills, while the learning support assistant worked with other pupils, helping them to revise work for physical education and to improve their examination course work in history. Staff benefit from effective training, which provides them with the skills and expertise to improve pupils' behaviour and to promote their learning and enjoyment. As a result, staff manage behaviour well and when there are sudden outbursts these situations are quickly defused as pupils re-focus on their learning.

There are good systems for assessment and recording of learning, which enable teachers to track the good progress made by pupils. Baseline assessments are in place. These include the use of standardised tests for literacy. This information is used to formulate IECPs. Milestones in learning are recorded against National Curriculum levels, and, where appropriate, pupils are provided with an indication of their anticipated GCSE or Entry Level grade, so that they know how to improve their work. Pupils' progress within individual sessions is evaluated and recorded so that teachers can use this information in planning the next stage of learning.

Pupils make good academic progress, taking into account their starting points. They make excellent progress in personal development and social skills, so that by the time they leave the school pupils are well prepared to face their next phase of life.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school was founded on the principles of Rudolf Steiner and this philosophy remains central to its ethos. Set within tranquil, landscaped grounds, the school is very successful in promoting its aims and is particularly effective in developing pupils' social awareness. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now good.

Around forty percent of parents returned their pre-inspection questionnaires and they are all pleased with the way the school helps their children to mature and accept responsibility. All the pupils have significant social and emotional needs and they find reassurance in the school's very strong systems and routines. Supported by highly skilled teachers and support staff, most of the pupils quickly learn to relate to, and co-operate with, each other during lessons and at other times. Relationships between day and boarding pupils and with adults are very good. Dining arrangements make a significant contribution to the school's social structure. Accompanied by the staff who live and work within their residential unit, boarding pupils eat their meals in small family-sized groups. Day pupils have similar arrangements and this stability and consistency helps everyone to get to know each other very well. The close relationships are reflected in the gentle conversation and the ease with which all pupils and adults join hands to bless, and give thanks for, each meal. As they get older, pupils become increasingly independent and, by the time they leave school, all pupils have developed the ability to listen to others and make friends. Behaviour is good and pupils manage to cope with small changes to their usual routine. Many are able to converse with relative strangers, making visitors feel welcome; this represents outstanding achievement.

Pupils' spiritual development is promoted exceptionally well through the day-to-day life of the school, routines such as Morning Song and the half termly festivals. During the inspection, the Whitsun festival was held and pupils were inspired by the musical, poetic and multi-lingual contributions of several members of staff. Pupils listened attentively for an extended period, participated on cue and left the chapel smiling, clearly uplifted by what they had seen and heard. In addition, the many sporting and extra-curricular activities help pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem. For example, the outdoor pursuit programme includes potholing, gorge walking and ski-ing. Pupils' cultural awareness is boosted by trips abroad and by getting to know staff from overseas. Adults provide outstanding examples of how to behave and their consistency and skill helps pupils to develop an awareness of moral issues. Within the life-skills curriculum, for example, pupils learn about adult relationships and understand the importance of taking responsibility for their actions and behaviour. Pupils' ability to interact with other people and sound basic skills develop markedly while they are at the school and this puts them in a good position to cope once they leave.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and well-being of its pupils. Pupils are very well supervised and cared for at all times. Procedures for child protection, risk assessment and for safeguarding pupils' health and safety are rigorous and very effective. Regular training keeps everyone up-to-date and all members of staff clearly understand their individual responsibilities.

There is a clear, consistent and very effective approach to managing behaviour. Although pupils say that bullying does occur, they trust the adults around them and know that they will take firm action. This encourages pupils to share concerns with staff and this helps staff to nip any emerging problems in the bud. Physical restraint is used rarely and all such instances are recorded. Adults know the pupils very well indeed and their skilful management of pupils' behaviour helps to defuse situations of potential conflict. Pupils who become agitated or upset may be accompanied from the classroom and given 'time out' with a senior member of staff so that they can calm down.

Medical advice and treatment are readily available and arrangements for the safe storage of medicines are being upgraded. Arrangements for the registration of admission and attendance are efficient and meet requirements. The school, also fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are thorough and rigorous selection and recruitment procedures for all staff including foreign workers. Required checks are made on all staff. These include enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and checks through the local police stations of foreign nationals.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school occupies a single site within attractive and spacious grounds. The main house is a large Grade 2 listed building and accommodates a number of classrooms, two boarding areas, an office and a medical room. Further boarding accommodation is provided in small hostels and there is a separate teaching block. There are excellent outdoor facilities, well-maintained and spacious classrooms and living

accommodation. The good accommodation supports the academic and social curriculum. However the school has no changing facilities for day pupils who participate in physical education. Plans are in place to provide the facilities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets nearly all requirements for registration.

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:

- *implement the plans for constructing changing facilities for day pupils who engage in physical education (paragraph 5(j)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides a good range of information for parents and other partners. Photographs in the attractive brochure depict many aspects of school life and provide a good overview of the school and its provision. The school's aims are clearly laid out and the curriculum is detailed.

Parents feel the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress. Home-school books are used as and when the need arises. Parents also receive regular phone calls and written bulletins that keep them up-to-date with school life. Parents are fully involved in their children's annual reviews and are encouraged to contact their child's tutor or houseparent if they want to speak to someone directly. Every parent or carer who expressed a view indicated that they would feel comfortable about doing so.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has good procedures for handling both formal and informal complaints. Nearly all parents indicated, through the pre-inspection questionnaire, that they understood these.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Potterspurty Lodge
DfES Number:	928/6039
Type of school:	Special school for learners with Asperger's syndrome and emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Boys
Number on roll:	53
Number of boarders:	26
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	53
Annual fees (day pupils):	£21,084
Annual fees (boarders):	£35,211
Address of school:	Towcester Northamptonshire NN12 7LL
Telephone number:	01908 542 912
Fax number:	01908 543 399
Email address:	mail@potterspurtylodge.co.uk
Principal:	Mr John Brown
Proprietor:	Board of Trustees, Potterspurty Lodge School
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Declan McCarthy
Date of inspection:	22 – 25 May 2006

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