

Inspection report

Cornerstones School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 845/6043

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 6 - 8 November 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

Cornerstones is a small independent special school in Hove. Founded in 1997, it provides education for boys and girls who have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school is part of the wider Seafield Children's Services and Lioncare Group, and although most pupils come from their residential homes, the school also accepts pupils living elsewhere in the Hove area.

There are currently eight pupils attending the school, with ages ranging from ten to fifteen years. Most pupils are in public care; all have a statement of special educational need and local authorities fund their placements. Pupils display a wide range of ability and many exhibit extreme negative behaviours. Most of the pupils have previously experienced extended periods of disrupted schooling and poor attendance. As a result, many start at the school with low levels of academic and personal skills.

Cornerstones aims to provide each pupil with the skills to achieve a high degree of independence and self-determination in adult life. Pupils study all subjects of the National Curriculum and education is delivered in a therapeutic way to complement approaches used within the residential homes. The school occupies a converted house in a quiet residential street in the town.

Since the last inspection in 2001, there have been three changes in headteacher and a change of location within the town. The current headteacher took up her post at the school two months before this inspection.

Summary of main findings

Cornerstones is providing a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils, enabling them to continue their education in a formal setting and preparing them for future schooling by raising their self-esteem and developing co-operative skills. The school is successfully emerging from a period of instability and appropriate plans are in place to develop its provision further. This is being achieved by building upon high levels of care, establishing an increasing focus on learning and developing closer links with parents and carers.

An initial period of integration helps new pupils to settle quickly to school routines and expectations. There are good levels of supervision and care by skilled staff so that pupils develop close, trusting relationships. Behaviour is satisfactory, representing good progress from low, often very low, starting points. Incidents of inappropriate, sometimes violent and aggressive, behaviour are well managed

according to appropriate procedures. Pupils are keen to come to school and generally enjoy their learning. Their attendance increases, although there is still room for improvement. Teaching, assessment and the curriculum are satisfactory. The school is mindful of the need to assess, record and track pupil progress more carefully and to improve the use of targets in the planning and teaching of lessons. Opportunities for older pupils to access vocational and work-based learning are limited. In addition, the curriculum lacks sufficient opportunities for pupils to study towards nationally accredited qualifications.

What the school does well:

- it provides good levels of supervision and care;
- it makes good use of the accommodation and uses local amenities to provide good opportunities for physical education;
- it enhances the curriculum through a range of educational visits and trips and this contributes to pupils' enjoyment of learning;
- it encourages pupils to develop effective personal skills through the daily community meetings; and
- it promotes literacy skills within other subjects.

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

- improve the quality of the Key Stage 4 curriculum as identified in section 1 of this report;
- ensure that pupils are given a knowledge of public institutions and services in England;
- produce a written policy on First Aid;
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils for when they are ill; and
- provide the placing authorities with an annual report of income received and expenditure incurred by the school for each pupil.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

Next Steps

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

- use monitoring information more effectively to evaluate how well pupils make progress over time; and

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 with some good features. Social and academic needs are met through the planning of the full range of National Curriculum subjects for pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3. There is a strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects for all pupils, for example through extended writing about world religions, and through applying measuring skills in food technology. ICT is not used sufficiently to promote teaching and learning across the curriculum and staff have already highlighted this as an area for improvement.

The curriculum for pupils at Key Stage 4 is not fully satisfactory because restricted opportunities for work experience and preparation for life beyond school limit the development of economic well-being for older pupils. Opportunities to gain wider accreditation, particularly in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and vocational subjects are insufficient, although the school is already working hard to remedy this with new courses to be available soon.

The school's programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship is satisfactory. Citizenship is taught as a separate subject and, together with international studies, helps pupils to learn about and accept differences in others. However, there is insufficient emphasis on drugs awareness, the promotion of sexual health and development of positive relationships within the taught PSHE curriculum.

The curriculum is considerably enhanced through a good range of educational visits and physical activities. These include swimming, mountain biking, sea canoeing, visits to castles and visits to the theatre to see Shakespeare's plays. These are much appreciated by parents and carers and are clearly enjoyed by the pupils who say that this is one of the best things about the school. These opportunities effectively promote learning, self-confidence and self-esteem through the achievement of badges and certificates.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Classrooms provide pupils with a purposeful learning environment. As a result of good working relationships with adults, pupils are keen to come to lessons, behaviour within the classroom is generally satisfactory and motivation to complete work at an acceptable level is high. This allows all pupils to engage positively in learning and to make satisfactory progress in lessons, as well as in national tests and examinations. Younger pupils are often able to work collaboratively with one another.

Teachers plan their lessons carefully, taking account of pupils' interests and previous learning experiences. Increasingly, teachers plan activities that match the ways in which individual pupils learn best. Support staff make a good contribution to the

learning environment by keeping pupils focused on their work and rewarding effort. Pupils make most progress when teachers and support staff are clear about what is to be learned and how best to challenge them to take responsibility for applying skills independently. Not all pupils do as well as they should because some are too dependent on adult support, reluctant to complete tasks by themselves. Others will negotiate what they will or will not do in the lesson and this reduces the level of challenge and achievement.

The homework policy is not applied consistently across the school. This is a concern to parents and carers. It also means that opportunities are missed for extending thinking, self-study and independent research linked to what is learned in lessons.

Assessment is satisfactory and plans are in place to develop it further. Pupils have targets that form the basis of their individual education plans. These targets support the strong emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy and on improving behaviour. Teachers assess how well pupils are achieving these targets in lessons. However, this is not done consistently and the pupils themselves are not always involved enough in assessing their achievements. Although adults often focus on rewarding pupils' efforts in class, less attention is given to using targets and marking to reward academic achievement.

Monitoring of pupils' progress over time is in place but not fully developed. Information on pupils' attainments is collected systematically but it is not yet collated in a way that supports evaluation of what they have achieved. As a result, it is not easy for the school to judge whether or not pupils are making as much progress as they should in their academic and personal skills.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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

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

- *develop accreditation and the vocational curriculum, including work related learning, to ensure that pupils at Key Stage 4 are offered opportunities appropriate to their age and are adequately prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraphs 1(2)(b) and 1(2)(j)).*

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

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school is run in a predictable and orderly fashion with staff providing good role models for pupils. Systematic use of rewards, consistent approaches and good levels of supervision effectively improve pupils' behaviour, social relationships and attendance. These skills are further promoted during educational visits, use of local facilities and daily meetings where the whole school community meets together. Some pupils who have been in school longer are polite and are confident in speaking to visitors about the school. Newer pupils have yet to settle fully into their routines.

Behaviour and attendance are satisfactory and this represents good progress from low starting points. Improvements can also be seen in the way in which pupils gradually learn to cope with small changes to their routines and in their responses to disappointment or distress. The morning community meetings and round-up sessions at the end of the day effectively enhance social development and respect for the community as pupils gradually learn to co-operate with each other. Their relationship with one another and with adults improves considerably over time. This supports the parents' belief that the school enables their children to become more mature and responsible.

Staff act quickly and effectively to intervene and ensure the safety of pupils when occasionally a pupil loses control. Through a system of meetings involving the pupil, their parents or carers and key members of staff, pupils are encouraged to make reparation for any damage caused.

Pupils' spiritual development is promoted through religious education (RE), and through composing their prayers for themselves and others. There are good opportunities to experience a sense of wonder through educational visits and lively lessons, such as when the teacher produced a large squash for them to observe in science. However, spiritual development remains only satisfactory because there are missed opportunities for reflection in assemblies. Pupils' cultural awareness is promoted through the RE curriculum in studies of world religions. There is insufficient emphasis on teaching pupils about public institutions and services in Britain.

Pupils' moral and social development is promoted satisfactorily as they are encouraged to appreciate right from wrong and to be aware of the consequences of their actions for themselves and others around them. Adults provide good examples of how to behave and their consistency in the application of the rewards system helps pupils to develop an awareness of what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. However, the use of sweets as rewards for appropriate behaviour does not sufficiently promote healthy lifestyles. The community police officer visits the school to talk about crime and community responsibilities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

- *provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)).*

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Staff at Cornerstones provide a caring, safe environment for the pupils. High priority is given to their health, safety, welfare and well-being particularly in relation to emotional and behavioural needs. Pupils are encouraged to stay safe. Policies relating to aspects of behaviour management, safeguarding pupils, First Aid and health and safety are in place but do not always reflect current practice at the school.

The policy for First Aid in particular is not comprehensive enough to inform staff of key procedures and processes. Senior staff are aware of this and are beginning to review policies to bring more consistency with those across the broader organisation. For example, new systems are in place to report and record incidents, accidents, sanctions and complaints effectively and are consistent with those kept by the residential homes. Appropriate records are kept of admissions and attendance.

Levels of supervision are good. Staff are confident in their relationships with the pupils and this often helps them to regain control of their behaviour during times of tension or anxiety. Risk assessments for taking pupils off-site are good. This enables pupils to have safe regular access to local amenities, particularly for sport, and to benefit from the educational visits that enrich the curriculum. The caretaker makes a significant contribution to health and safety by diligently keeping the building free from hazards. All staff receive annual training for First Aid, safeguarding, restraint and food handling.

The school has not yet drawn up an accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the DDA.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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

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

- *produce a written policy on First Aid which provides guidelines on the full range of emergency procedures (paragraph 3(6)).*

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *produce a three-year plan showing how the building and curriculum will be made more accessible for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are comprehensive checks for each member of staff relating to health, training, proof of identity and suitability for working with children and young people. The school is bringing together these records to into a single, central record as recommended in DfES guidance.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a large end-of-terrace house which provides two classrooms, a computer suite, a library, kitchen, dining room, staffroom and offices for the headteacher and administrative staff. The school makes good use of its well-maintained accommodation, which is in good decorative order. Pupils make full use of the small hard-surface play area behind the school and recreational facilities are considerably enhanced by the use of the local park, swimming pool and outdoor activity centres. The accommodation supports the academic and social curriculum. The school has no medical facilities for pupils who are ill.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *provide appropriate medical facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school prospectus provides parents, carers and other interested parties with useful details about the nature of the provision and the range of educational opportunities offered at the school. It also tells them how they can request further information. A lively pupils' booklet gives practical information to prepare new pupils for what they can expect when they start the school, as well as what is expected of them in relation to good behaviour. The parent company also has its own comprehensive prospectus, which complements information supplied separately by the school.

Arrangements for annual reviews of the pupils' statements of special educational need are effectively carried out. In addition, meetings are held regularly with pupils, their parents and carers to discuss progress, individual education plans and other issues that might be of concern from time to time. Parents and carers are contacted prior to the start of each day so that any relevant information or concerns can be shared with staff at the morning hand-over meeting. Similarly, at the end of the day information is exchanged with those who collect the pupils. A formal report on pupils' progress is sent to parents and carers each term. These regular opportunities for sharing information and planning together support pupils' school placements by keeping all interested parties informed of how well the placement is progressing and what needs to be done to maintain it.

The company does not currently provide placing authorities with a financial account of how school fees are spent.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *provide the placing authorities with an annual report of income received and expenditure incurred by the school for each pupil (paragraph 6(7)).*

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

The school has an appropriate policy for the handling of complaints, setting out clear procedures and time-scales. This meets all requirements for registration.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Cornerstones
DfES Number:	845/6043
Type of school:	Special day school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	10 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 5 Girls: 3 Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 5 Girls: 3 Total: 8
Annual fees:	£40,924
Address of school:	87 Payne Avenue Hove BN3 5HD
Telephone number:	01273 734134
Fax number:	01273 716171
Email address:	headteacher@lioncare.co.uk
Headteacher:	Julia Dance
Proprietor:	Seafeld Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Heather Yaxley HMI
Date of inspection:	6 – 8 November 2006

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