

Inspection report

Kisimul School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 925/6034

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 26-27 September 2006

Introduction

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 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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

Kisimul caters for pupils aged 8 to 19 years who have severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. Three quarters of the pupils have autistic spectrum disorder. All have statements of their special educational needs and their attainment on entry to the school is very low. There are 48 pupils on roll, and all but one day pupil lives in the care home on their school site. Pupils transferred from their previous schools because of major behavioural difficulties. Residential pupils are looked after by their local authorities and most board for 50 weeks a year. The school provides a *'24-hour specialised curriculum with continuity and consistency in a highly supported and homely environment'* and pupils receive a number of additional therapies and forms of support. The school is situated on two sites, 20 miles apart. Both school buildings are new and purpose built, and are set in large, attractive grounds. The majority of students aged 16 and over live and go to school at Acacia Hall in Friesthorpe, and the rest of the pupils live and learn at the Old Vicarage in Swinderby.

Overall evaluation of the school

Kisimul provides good quality education and excellent care, and the school meets all of the regulations relating to the education and care of the pupils. The pupils make good progress as a result of this high quality provision. The curriculum is good and meets pupils' needs and interests well. Very good, thorough systems of assessment underpin the good teaching. The support, guidance and care given to pupils are outstanding and their personal development is very good as a result. The school produces a wealth of policies and information, and meets most, but not all, of the relevant regulations. Questionnaire returns from parents and the placing local authorities show their high satisfaction with the provision at Kisimul and the progress made by the pupils and students.

The curriculum for pupils of all ages is thoughtfully planned to be of real relevance and interest to them. There is a very good emphasis on developing communication skills, on healthy eating and living and on working towards independence. The curriculum is well supported out of school time by the residences, for example by reinforcing the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and providing interesting leisure activities in the community.

The curriculum for pupils under 16 is designed to be taught in termly topics, whilst the vital core skills of communication, literacy and personal development are

reinforced and promoted at all times. Careful planning and monitoring ensure that the subjects of the National Curriculum are all addressed in each topic. Over a three year period, the topics themselves have different subject emphases, such as *pattern and shape* (mathematics) or *people at work* (citizenship). Termly and weekly learning targets are set for each individual pupil in every curriculum subject. This ensures that the curriculum is broad, balanced, relevant and interesting.

Acacia Hall makes good provision for post-16 students as a result of the life skills and vocational education on offer. The work and activities are relevant and of interest to students, and provide them with nationally awarded accreditation, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The site's resources, especially for horticulture, gardening and animal husbandry are of high quality. They give very good opportunities for students to experience some of the responsibilities of adulthood. In contrast, however, some of the classroom resources and displays do not sufficiently reinforce the school's hard work in promoting the students' self-image as young adults. Acacia Hall is currently full, and some post-16 students remain at the Old Vicarage. While the school is providing some suitable post-16 courses for these students, they do not have equal opportunities to access the broad range of work and activities provided for their peers at Acacia Hall. Nevertheless, throughout the school the curriculum contributes very effectively to the good progress pupils make.

The teaching in both settings is typically good and pupils make good progress as a result. In lessons, pupils are challenged at exactly the right level, so that they are engaged but not over-pressured. Their behavioural difficulties are expertly managed through well-practised and consistent procedures. Staff use PECS and other devices very effectively to help pupils understand, communicate and learn. Excellent team work in class and support from the other professionals and therapists ensure that pupils are given the help and guidance they need to participate and learn.

Meeting pupils' individual needs is at the heart of all lessons. This is underpinned by very effective planning for learning, based on high quality assessments of pupils' developing skills. Pupils' performance in the National Curriculum subjects is measured against the national *P Level* scales in each subject, and this information is very well used to set individual's subject targets and to track their progress over time. A similar system, *Milestones*, has been introduced at Post-16. In a food technology lesson, for example, pupils had their own objectives which were practised several times throughout the session, and were achieved by the end. The range of assessments completed by the school staff and other professionals is brought together at pupils' annual reviews, when progress is carefully detailed, past targets reviewed and new targets for the forthcoming year are set. These procedures and reports on pupils' achievement are of very high quality.

Pupils come to Kisimul because their behaviour has been too challenging. However, the school has a very positive effect on their personal development. Challenging behaviour is carefully managed and generally decreases over time. In most classes and activities, pupils' behaviour is good. They are calm and able to settle and enjoy what they are doing which helps them to achieve well. Pupils like coming to school,

rarely absent themselves from the classroom and attendance is very high. The support and guidance given to pupils is outstanding. Through this, pupils learn to communicate in a more acceptable manner, and come to have a better understanding of themselves and how to manage their own difficulties. Their confidence increases, and older pupils and students, particularly, are friendly and interested in visitors and new experiences which have the potential to be very frightening for them. This confidence equips them well for leading their adult lives as independently as possible. The pupils are fully accepting of one another, regardless of gender or ethnic origin, and the school works hard to ensure that they appreciate the multi-cultural society in which they live by appropriate curriculum and activity planning.

The pupils respond very well to praise, and staff help them understand the difference between right and wrong, particularly in relation to hurting themselves, adults or one another. Pupils' social development is given a very strong emphasis. Activities during the school day and in the residences help them access the community safely and happily, and learn to contribute back. For example, pupils use community facilities such as museums and the swimming pool, and older students' work experience includes cleaning in the local church and bus shelter.

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils and students is outstanding. The school takes its responsibilities for the safety and well-being of pupils extremely seriously and has implemented a wide range of procedures and practices to ensure them. Child protection procedures are robust. Risk assessments for pupils and for activities are very thorough and any accidents, injuries, and use of physical intervention and sanctions are all meticulously recorded. Pupils and students are exceptionally well cared for by the high number of staff employed to support them in the school day and throughout residential hours. Very good oversight is maintained of pupils' health and many opportunities are given for them to improve their physical skills and fitness. Pupils and students have a wholesome diet, and staff report how, often, pupils' interest and co-operation increases as they lose excess weight and take up more exercise. The school's spacious grounds and facilities contribute very effectively to this positive change in lifestyle. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and has increased accessibility plans for both sites.

Kisimul safeguards the pupils against contact with unsuitable adults very effectively. Robust systems are in place to check that new staff members are suitable, and the school complies with the latest guidance on checking the credentials of staff, past and present. These checks are re-made at appropriate intervals. The accommodation at both sites is of high quality. The new school building at the Old Vicarage has only been open two weeks, and provides excellent, spacious teaching and office accommodation. It has yet to be fully resourced, but this process is in hand. Both school buildings are in extensive, well set out and maintained grounds which are used to support the school-day and residential activities. Acacia Hall has additional facilities for horticulture, animal husbandry, horse riding and gardening, which supports the curriculum on both sites very effectively. The residential accommodation is of similar high quality, and meets requirements. Recent Social

Services inspection reports have indicated that the residential provision is of a very high quality.

The school publishes a comprehensive range of information, which meets most, but not all of the requirements for registration. There is a good information pack for parents and a Statement of Purpose explains most of what the school provides. Some of the required information, however, is missing, and some is spread across more than one document and is not easy to find or digest. The complaints policy, too, has two elements missing and is difficult to follow. The school prospectus is being redesigned and the proposals seen suggest it will provide an efficient and attractive means of communicating requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standard 6) and must:

- include the contact details of the proprietor in the information for parents of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 6(2)(b));
- include particulars of the school's policy on exclusions in the information for parents of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 6(2)(e));
- make clear in the information for parents of pupils and prospective pupils that they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)) and
- provide to each placing local authority an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school for each pupil registered by that local authority (paragraph 6(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the effectiveness of its procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- allow the complaints procedure to provide for a formal complaint to be made in writing if parents are not satisfied with the response to an informal complaint (paragraph 7(e)); and
- allow the complaints procedure to provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations, and for the complainant, proprietors, head of education

and, where relevant, the person complained about, to be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- develop policy and practice to ensure that pupils at Post-16 have equal access to an appropriate curriculum;
- review resources, displays and activities to ensure they are age-appropriate, whilst taking into account the students' severe learning difficulties; and
- review policies and information sent to parents to ensure they are easy to read and understand.

School details

Name of school:	Kisimul School			
DfES Number:	925/6034			
Type of school:	Independent			
Status:	Special			
Date school opened:	February 1977			
Age range of pupils:	8 - 19			
Gender of pupils:	Mixed			
Number on roll :	Boys: 39	Girls: 9	Total: 48	
Number of boarders:	Boys: 38	Girls: 9	Total: 47	
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 39	Girls: 9	Total: 48	
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 38	Girls: 9	Total: 47	
Annual fees (day pupils):	£104,186			
Annual fees (boarders):	£122,946 - £199,217 (50 weeks)			
Address of school:	The Old Vicarage High Street Swinderby Lincolnshire LN6 9LU			
Telephone number:	01522 868279			
Fax number:	01522 866000			
Email address:	info@kisimul.co.uk			
Head of Education:	Jean Gardner			
Proprietor:	Kisimul Group Ltd.			
Reporting Inspector:	Judith Charlesworth			
Dates of inspection:	26-27 September 2006			

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