

Inspection report

Philpots Manor School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 938/6219

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 4 - 7 December 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

Set in large grounds in West Sussex, Philpots Manor School is an independent residential special school. It is also registered with, and inspected by, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) as a children's home because in the past a small number of students were placed here for 52 weeks a year. Of the 51 students on roll, 11 are looked after. Seventeen students attend daily, the remainder are residential during the week for 36 weeks. All students have statements of special education need and their placement is funded by their local authorities. Many come here following difficulties at previous schools that have prevented them from achieving their potential. All have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and many also have moderate or specific learning difficulties. Half the students have had, or are currently receiving, support for mental health problems.

The school's philosophy is firmly rooted in the ideals of Rudolf Steiner and its curriculum follows the Steiner Waldorf approach. The school aims that *'each student develops physically, emotionally, academically, spiritually, and socially to the highest degree of which they are able'*.

Summary of main findings

Philpots Manor provides a good quality education for its students. The wide curriculum meets the social and educational needs of its students effectively. Generally good teaching is underpinned by strong relationships between staff and students. Strong provision for students' personal development helps them to mature as they get older and to learn to take responsibility for their actions. Policies and practice in aspects of provision for welfare, health and safety have not kept pace with regulations. In part, problems arise because lines of accountability are unclear.

What the school does well:

- it enables the students to achieve well in a wide range of accredited courses;
- it provides good teaching and conditions for learning supported by relevant therapy;
- it provides a good curriculum with some very strong features, including its extra-curricular activities, the creative curriculum and vocational courses;

- it is very effective in raising students' self-esteem, encouraging positive attitudes to learning, and improving their abilities to manage their behaviour; and
- it liaises very closely with external services to ensure that students receive an appropriate level of support.

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

- have regard to the health, safety and welfare issues raised in sections 3 and 5 of this report.

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:

- develop further the systems for assessing the small steps in progress made by students and use this information consistently in lesson planning;
- develop the roles of classroom assistants in modelling good learning habits;
- widen opportunities for students to tell staff what they think about school; and
- develop systems for evaluating what the school does well and what needs improving, including ensuring that there are clear roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability for staff.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good and has improved since the last inspection. It meets the school's aims to enable the students to achieve well and establish positive relationships with others and the wider world. The strong emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills promotes both their educational and personal development. The students achieve success in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) courses in addition to OCN (Open College Network) and OCR (Oxford Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts). These courses offer a wide range of opportunities for accreditation though the school is researching other avenues that may allow greater opportunities for students to make choices about how they study.

The curriculum, based on Steiner principles, is taught through the 'main lesson' which incorporates English, mathematics, science, humanities, religion and modern foreign languages. Other content includes eurythmy, therapies and a very strong vocational curriculum. Provision for aesthetic and creative development is strong. The school has a good appreciation of the way some activities not only allow the students to gain accreditation but are also therapeutic. An example is the excellent provision for horse-riding where students gain much confidence in addition to increasing their knowledge and understanding of stable management.

The curriculum policy gives a good overview of provision and is supported by suitable schemes of work adapted from the Steiner curriculum, the National Curriculum and requirements from accredited academic and vocational courses. Most teachers use this to plan lessons effectively, taking suitable account of students' individual special educational needs as detailed in their statements and records. Some highly personalised programmes of learning have a good impact on the progress students make. In addition, sessions of therapy and individual learning support have a positive effect upon the students' social, emotional and behavioural needs alongside their academic development. Regular monitoring is required to ensure that students do not always miss the same elements of their main curriculum while taking time to attend these sessions. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is integrated into main lessons and includes appropriate drugs awareness teaching and sex education. From Year 9 onwards, students receive suitable careers education and guidance supported by effective links with the local Connexions adviser.

The curriculum also provides good preparation for life after school and, where appropriate, students shop in the nearby village, attend local colleges of further education and undertake work experience. Students, especially boarders, have good opportunities to access an extensive range of extra-curricular activities that also make good use of the school's facilities and the local community.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Overall the quality of teaching is good although there is some variation in practice across the school. Relationships are a real strength. Many students lack confidence and self-motivation and so need plenty of support and cajoling to take part. Teachers give good encouragement and positive praise to students to boost their confidence and self-esteem. Students are generally responsive, want to do well and are keen to learn. Teachers who have been with their classes for some time know the students' individual needs and understand how best to manage them. Staff new to the school or new to their classes, are still establishing expectations. Students new to the school are finding their feet and in some cases testing their teachers to see how far they can go. Learning is affected by the poor behaviour of individuals in a small number of lessons. Calm approaches work well. Routines are well established and followed. The repetitive nature of daily activities is very effective in giving structure to learning and in modelling good organisation, something many students lack. Students' own views of teaching are positive. The oldest recognise how teachers have helped them to learn and to grow in confidence during their time at the school.

Teachers' subject knowledge is good with some real expertise in practical activities. Lesson planning is satisfactory overall, but variable. The best planning is meticulous, with activities carefully tailored for students because teachers are highly aware of their individual needs. The long main lesson contains a variety of short activities with interesting content to keep students motivated. At times, though, teachers devise worksheets that are presented to all students despite the wide range of ability. Some lower ability students need a greater level of support for written work and at times, some abler students could have greater challenge. The ratio of adults to students is high so that they receive plenty of individual support to complete tasks. The quality of support from classroom assistants varies. Where assistants take an active part in the lesson, they are positive role models for good attitudes to learning. Staff work together effectively as a team, alert to students' changes in mood and anticipating potential difficulties. Resources for some activities are very good but more limited for other subjects, such as information and communication technology (ICT). In general, teachers make only limited use of ICT in teaching and for learning.

A computerised system of assessing students' progress has been introduced and staff are gradually being trained to use it. This system identifies the small steps that students make in English and mathematics. Where it is well established it is used effectively. There is scope for this to become embedded in the practice of all class teachers and for information to be used to vary the activities given to students. Many teachers, especially those teaching practical creative subjects have their own systems for recording students' skills, experiences and attitudes and use these well in planning and supporting lessons.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

Provision for the students' spiritual, moral and social education is good. The education of the 'whole child' is central to the Steiner philosophy. The school provides many opportunities for students to develop self-awareness and self-confidence. Both care and education staff work hard to ensure success is attainable and thus raise students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Students talk openly about how they have developed since being at the school. The positive impact of the provision was evident as one remarked: *'This school has enabled me to get back my confidence'*. Another commented: *'I could never have used the train by myself without the support of the school'*. The students' spiritual development is also fostered through the daily verse and religion lessons. These provide the opportunity for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other major world religions as well as of wider moral and social issues.

Staff provide good role models for students and have appropriate expectations of behaviour so that students are aware of what is right and wrong. A helpful guide for students states very clearly: *'Being unfair is not allowed'*. One group of students has won an award for their consideration of 'green issues' such as the impact of humans upon the environment and the moral responsibility to protect future generations. Speaking of responsibility to others and how the school helps students manage their own behaviour one said: *'I'm much more able to handle things now and I don't lose my temper so much; staff here understand my problems'*. Some students occasionally display challenging behaviour which results in an appropriate response from staff. Overall, the students' behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. Expectations of clearing away after the very sociable meal-times are well understood. Incidents are dealt with calmly and effectively and in a manner that encourages students to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

The development of students' cultural awareness is good and fostered through, for example, art, music and religion. There are several opportunities for them to become involved with the community, for instance, performing in the local church and fund-raising for a school in Sierra Leone. Older students take part successfully in work experience placements within the community and some gain much from attending local colleges of further education. The views of boarders are sought by care staff but there is scope to give students greater opportunities to express their opinions about the school. The PSHE curriculum provides students with a good understanding of public institutions and of the rights and responsibilities of living in the wider community.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the students

Some aspects of the provision for welfare, health and safety are good while others are inadequate. Recent changes to policies and practice have improved the provision but the school acknowledges that further updating of policies and tightening of practice is required.

The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach with the promotion of good behaviour and makes very clear what is not acceptable as a sanction. The focus of the policy is on behaviour in the homes rather than in lessons. In practice, this leads to some variation in the methods used to motivate students and in teachers' expectations in classes. Staff record serious disciplinary breaches and the sanctions imposed in such cases. Thorough procedures for safeguarding students meet all requirements. Staff, including the designated officers, have had appropriate training. Advice to students is clear and all are confident that they have a named person to whom they can turn if they have a problem. The school takes a positive approach to tackling bullying and its policy is clear about the support offered to both the bullied and the bully.

The detailed health and safety policy, which all staff are required to read, identifies the need for thorough risk assessments on lessons, activities, events, and students. Despite this, several breaches of the policy noted during inspection stem from issues over the speed with which maintenance work is carried out. The report from CSCI in June of this year also noted some maintenance issues that compromised students' health and safety. The section in the health and safety policy on out-of-school activities does not state clearly that teachers must carry out risk assessments before a visit, or that visits must be agreed by both the education co-ordinator and the health and safety officer. It does not refer specifically to the recommended guidance although it has regard to elements of it. In practice, the written risk assessments completed by staff lack some important details.

Following several visits by the local fire authority during the year and some improvement work to the buildings and equipment, the level of fire safety is improving. Some deficiencies remain and the fire officer intends to visit again. The school does not carry out its own fire risk assessments and does not have a record of practice evacuations from the school building. The school has considered the requirements of the DDA and produced a brief statement of intent. This falls short of the requirement to devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

First Aid cover is good. Accident forms, medical records and records of medication administered to students are kept carefully. The admission register is kept on computer and meets requirements but attendance registers do not comply fully with regulations. They are not always completed promptly at the start of the day and, in one case, not completed at all for afternoon sessions.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

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:

- *prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside the school which has full regard to Department*

for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance: 'Health and Safety of Students on Educational Visits' (paragraph 3(2)(c));

- *fulfil the requirements of DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' by carrying out appropriate maintenance work (paragraph 3(4));*
- *undertake a risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, and ensure that appropriate records are kept (paragraph 3(5)); and*
- *maintain attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)).*

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:

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

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has thorough procedures for checking staff through the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with and care for children. If checks are delayed, staff do not work alone with the students. Appropriate checks are carried out on staff from other countries. Staff are required to confirm their medical fitness as part of the application process and references are taken up from previous employers. Their identity, employment history and qualifications are checked before confirming their appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are suitable for the education provided. From its beginnings in the original manor house, the school now operates on a site of over 20 acres that has been developed over time to provide a good range of classrooms and specialist facilities to meet the demands of the broad curriculum it provides. Most teaching areas, including specialist rooms, are small but appropriate for the number of students in each group.

There are sufficient washrooms for students with plans to improve facilities further. Should boarding students become ill during the school day there are appropriate arrangements to attend to their needs, and a newly designated area has been set aside for the same purpose for day students. Delays to essential maintenance work occur as a result of the nature of the expansive site and unclear priorities from the management group. The vast majority of the school is kept clean, tidy and hygienic.

However, arrangements for cleaning the food technology room are inadequate, as is the provision for hand-drying in several washrooms used by students.

The accommodation to support the curriculum for practical subjects is very good. Students have regular access to specialist facilities for science, ICT, woodwork, weaving, art, pottery, cooking, music and physical education. Discrete rooms are also set aside for therapies, counselling and 1:1 support for specific learning difficulties. The outdoor provision includes access to gardens for landcraft studies and excellent facilities for horse-riding and stable management. The school also makes very good use of its extensive grounds for walks and cycling while off-site facilities including a swimming pool and sailing centre.

Does the school meet 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:

- *ensure all classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 5(n)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school gives parents and prospective parents a wide range of information about its philosophy and curriculum in the prospectus. Additional information is provided when students join the school, both for parents and students themselves. The school updated its policy on providing information to parents during the inspection to ensure that parents know that they may request various policies and information. Although the required information was readily available to parents, they were not told that they could request it. This updated policy will be incorporated into the admission information for new parents and will be sent to existing parents in the end-of-term newsletter. The school's website is designed to give parents easy access to information and enables the school to update them readily on any changes.

The annual reports to parents give a good overview of the work covered and the gains made in each subject over the year. Parents have many opportunities for informal discussions with staff and are involved in their children's annual reviews. The quality of the education reports prepared for the annual reviews is variable, though satisfactory overall. While some are detailed, others focus on behaviour with less regard for the students' gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Assessment information is not always incorporated into the report. The school liaises closely with representatives from a range of local authority services, including social services and health services, to ensure that each student has an appropriate level of support.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The complaints procedures have been updated recently to comply fully with regulations. The updated version has been posted on the school's website and the school intends to send a copy to all existing parents. The procedures are issued to parents as part of the admission documentation. No complaints from parents have ever reached the formal stages. The procedures include appropriate methods for students to make complaints and records show that these are taken seriously and followed through.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Philpots Manor		
DfES Number:	938/6219		
Type of school:	Steiner Waldorf residential special school		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of students:	7 – 19 years		
Gender of students:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students):	Boys: 42	Girls: 9	Total: 51
Number of boarders:	Boys: 26	Girls: 8	Total: 34
Number of students with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 42	Girls: 9	Total: 51
Annual fees (day students):	£46,644		
Annual fees (boarders):	£46,644		
Address of school:	West Hoathly West Sussex RH19 4PR		
Telephone number:	01342 810268		
Fax number:	01342 811363		
Email address:	linda.churnside@philpotsmanorschool.co.uk		
Education Co-ordinator:	Linda Churnside		
Proprietor:	Philpots Manor School Ltd		
Reporting Inspector:	Jane Wotherspoon HMI		
Date of inspection:	4 – 7 December 2006		

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