

Inspection report
Manor House School
Independent special school
DfES ref no: 860/6026

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

Manor House School provides education for boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and for whom mainstream education is not possible. It is part of Educare Adolescent Services who provide care for young people from all areas of the country. The school also provides education for pupils who may be 'looked after' children in other care companies, as well as providing places for pupils from surrounding local authorities. The majority of the 13 pupils who currently attend the school have been there for less than half a term and all are in care. Their previous education has been severely disrupted, and as a consequence, when they enter the school, they are attaining levels below those expected for pupils of the same age. All enter with poor attitudes to learning and low self-esteem. Nine of the pupils have statements of special educational need. The school has been without a permanent headteacher for two terms. It is currently being led by an experienced acting headteacher. A new permanent headteacher will take up post later this term.

Overall evaluation of the school

The school is providing a satisfactory quality of education, but this has fluctuated during the unsettled staffing period of the last year. Since its registration in 2004 some of the good practice had been lost, and some of the areas identified for improvement had not been accomplished. The acting headteacher has ensured that the quality of education, including planning and teaching, has improved. There are increased expectations for curriculum and lesson planning, consistent quality of teaching and new systems and routines for both staff and pupils. However, she has not been at the school long enough to ensure that accurate assessment and recording procedures are being used. These two weaknesses make it difficult for the school to demonstrate that pupils who attended last year made sufficient progress. Pupils are making good progress in lessons but currently there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that this is the case over a period of time. High regard is given to pupils' safety, behaviour and welfare but opportunities for them to develop personal skills for adulthood are too limited. The school is very aware of all its deficiencies and the development/improvement plan shows how it will remedy them.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It covers most subjects of the National Curriculum and the content of the subjects is appropriate for the ages, abilities and needs of the pupils. Improvements have been made at the beginning of this term so that the content is based on national guidance for each subject and these are now being used well by teachers to plan their individual lessons. There is good quality work around the school in art, information and communication technology (ICT) and in English. For all pupils there is a strong emphasis on developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. These have recently been extended to include problem solving, working with others, and improving learning and performance. Another adjustment to the curriculum has been to increase the amount of physical education in order to promote healthy lifestyles, as well as to introduce short courses in childcare and independent living skills. There are too few opportunities for visits, for visitors to come to the school and out-of-school activities. This view is endorsed by the pupils and the carers

The curriculum for older pupils is based on a good range of externally accredited courses. These include General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Entry Level Certificate (ELC), and European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). The school has recently also introduced Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) to support vocational skills and learning. The school provides pupils with a satisfactory personal, social and health education programme, but citizenship has only recently been introduced. Pupils have opportunities to look at their future options through careers education. All pupils have a Connexions worker who gets to know pupils through regular meetings and provides advice on these. The school arranges college link or taster courses but many pupils find the expectations of college too great to tolerate and do not remain on the course. Likewise there are too few pupils who acquire work related skills through work experience.

The teaching seen on the inspection was good with pupils making good progress in lessons. However, it is only satisfactory because of the weakness in the assessment of pupils' learning and the recording of their progress. Pupils come into the school with very few records of previous achievement. The initial assessment in relation to academic attainment is not rigorous enough to provide teachers with a starting point for planning work at the right level or for setting and sharing targets with pupils. The school has recruited well-qualified and experienced teachers who have a good knowledge of their subject. They use a wide range of different teaching methods to make sure that pupils remain engaged and interested. They all manage very well the sometimes disruptive behaviour through a non-confrontational approach. Pupils respect teachers for this and because teachers show that they value their efforts and praise them. Higher expectations for lesson planning have been introduced this term. Teachers are now planning lessons with objectives, with differing activities for different abilities and showing what pupils are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. A system to record this achievement against individual pupil's curriculum targets or National Curriculum levels has not yet been introduced. However, the work for pupils is planned and taught at a level appropriate to age and to ability because teachers are experienced in informally assessing pupils. This means that lessons proceed well and pupils make progress.

The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate.

There is a good ethos for learning and behaviour in the school, but there are too few opportunities for pupils to contribute to the community and virtually no multicultural or cultural experiences. Pupils are encouraged to value education and develop self-confidence and self-esteem through taking pride in their achievements. This is effective as there is little evidence of work being destroyed. Unacceptable behaviour is tackled by all staff. There is a consistent and positive approach to managing this and to rewarding pupils' efforts. Despite incidents of noisy outbursts the behaviour is good. Attendance during this term has improved and there are no exclusions.

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. All staff undertake their responsibilities thoroughly in relation to this. There is a good range of supporting policies which are consistently implemented. There is a very good ratio of staff to pupils and pupils are supervised at all times. On occasions, for the most disruptive pupils, this is helped by the presence in the school of the pupil's care worker. However, most pupils do not need this support and at times their presence in the building causes pupils to become unco-operative. Healthy snacks at lunchtime are now being prepared on the premises and are providing an opportunity for social interaction. It is also resulting in fewer incidents of pupils leaving the premises during this time. Communication between the school and the care homes is too informal and results in the school having sometimes to enquire about pupils rather than the home firstly ringing the school. A more structured and integrated approach is needed so that the school is immediately aware of any changes to the pupils' moods, their non-attendance, and to support the review of academic and personal progress.

There are very thorough checks made on all staff so that the company is aware of all qualifications and experience before appointing them. All Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are up-to-date. The accommodation is appropriate for the number and age of pupils but it has a limited range of rooms for teaching specialist subjects. It is the intention of the company to relocate to larger premises next term. The surrounding area is small but there is a well-fenced grassed and hard play area. These are sufficient for recreation at break and lunchtimes, but are too small for physical activity. The school compensates for this by making use of local community facilities. There is an informative prospectus which contains a clear statement of the school's ethos and its aims. The school collects and records information about pupils' behaviour, attitudes, areas of study, as well as attendance, and concerns and incidents. It is available to pupils, parents, carers of each pupil. However, this information is not arranged in a way so that achievement and progress can be readily monitored. Reports on academic progress are produced and although they show the National Curriculum levels at which the pupils are working, this information has not been based on accurate assessment information. The quality of the supporting comments is inadequate as they rarely describe the academic progress which pupils have made. The school has a clearly expressed policy for handling complaints which is available for pupils, parents, carers, and placing authorities.

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 quality of education provided (standard 1) and must:

- prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 1(2)(j));
- put in place a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use this information to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)); and
- put in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1.(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (standard 2) and must:

- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)); and
- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of information provided for parents and other interested parties (standard 6) and must:

- provide an annual written report of the progress and attainment each pupil makes in the main subject areas and against targets set in Individual Education Plans (paragraph 6.(5)).

School details

Name of school:	Manor House School
DfES Number:	860/6026
Type of school:	Independent day Special (BESD)
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	2002
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 6 Girls: 7 Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 6 Girls: 3 Total: 9
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6 Girls: 7 Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils):	£31,122
Address of school:	High Street Knutton Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire ST5 6BX
Telephone number:	01782 623153
Fax number:	01782 618206
Email address:	email@easmanorhouse2.fsnet.co.uk
Acting Headteacher:	Mrs D Yates
Proprietor:	Mr B Scanlon
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs F Gander
Dates of inspection:	26 -27 September 2006

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