

Inspection report

Wilsic Hall School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 371/6005

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 19 - 22 June 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

Wilsic Hall School is an independent, residential school for 33 pupils aged 11 - 19 years. The school is one of several establishments around the country which together comprise the Hesley Group. Residential placements are provided on a 52-week basis. The pupils have special educational needs (SEN) resulting from challenging behaviours associated with autism, and a significant number have additional related learning, medical and emotional difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational need (SEN) and are referred from local authorities across the country. At the time of the inspection there were 32 full-time pupils on roll: 7 girls and 25 boys. Some of the post-16 pupils have weekly sessions at the vocational college attached to Hesley village. The school occupies a very pleasant site in the village of Wadworth near Doncaster. The provision is subject to annual inspections by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI), the most recent of which took place in February 2006. Wilsic Hall School aims to ensure that all pupils reach their full potential. Social interaction between pupils and staff underpin all the work carried out by the school. Its philosophy and approaches are based on positive interventions for challenging behaviour without the use of sanctions.

Summary of main findings

Wilsic Hall School is a very good school with many outstanding features. The school meets its stated aims. Its managers are highly innovative and have a clear vision for its future development. This results in excellent care for its pupils and very good provision for their health, safety and welfare. At the heart of the work of the school are the promotion of pupils' personal and social development, their communication skills and their self-esteem and well-being. The excellent curriculum provided by the school is broad, enriched and carefully matched to pupils' individual needs. Detailed and regular assessments monitor individuals' progress very effectively. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes excellent and, as a result, the vast majority of pupils make good progress, particularly in the areas of communication and in their personal social development. Particularly good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to enhance pupils' learning. The school has a well-qualified and experienced multi-disciplinary staff team who work cooperatively, know their pupils well and prepare them successfully for leaving school. There are strong links with the community; however, pupils have few opportunities to mix with their mainstream peers. There is very good communication with parents and carers, who strongly support the school.

What the school does well:

- it has developed an excellent curriculum and its ethos promotes and celebrates pupils' progress and achievement;
- it provides very effective teaching and support and has comprehensive systems in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress as well as effective record-keeping procedures;
- it provides very successfully for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepares them well for leaving school;
- it makes excellent provision for pupils' care and very good provision for their welfare, health and safety;
- its management provides a very good quality and range of training opportunities for staff which ensures that the teamwork between all the adults involved in teaching and supporting pupils, including visiting professionals, is very good and, as a result, pupils gain confidence and improve their self-esteem; and
- it makes very good use of the accommodation and local resources and has strong links with parents and carers.

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

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

Next Steps

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

- provide pupils with the opportunity to gain nationally recognised awards in swimming;
- pursue opportunities for pupils to interact with their mainstream peers; and
- ensure that plans to remove the mobile teaching rooms from the accommodation are carried out.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provision is outstanding. All National Curriculum subjects are taught at a level matched closely to pupils' aptitudes and abilities, with an emphasis on choosing activities which make learning fun. Each pupil has an individual education plan (IEP), which takes full account of information from their statement of SEN. Throughout the curriculum, there is a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and the development of social interaction and communication skills. These elements form the basis of targets in PUPILS' IEPs and individual communication plans which directly inform subject planning.

There is also a strong emphasis on vocational learning for pupils in Key Stage 4 and post-16. In Key Stage 4 pupils follow the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Transition Challenge and Accreditation for Life and Living (ALL) units of accreditation, which are matched closely to individuals' needs. Social interaction and communication skills are strongly promoted through the PSHE programme which includes a module on citizenship and work-related learning. Pupils also benefit from a very good range of work experience programmes in the school and community. However, they have few opportunities to mix with their mainstream peers.

Post-16 there is also a very good range of accreditation through the ASDAN programme, including Towards Independence and OCN courses, which build on pupils' prior learning in Key Stage 4. Older pupils also participate in a range of vocational course at Hesley Village College. Some are involved in mini-enterprises such as running a tuck shop and delivering internal post around the campus. There are effective links with the Connexions careers service through transition reviews. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is very good. Pupils become aware of how to recycle waste materials by recycling waste around the campus.

The contribution of the 24-hour curriculum to pupils' learning and personal development is very good. Care staff support teachers in lessons and, as a result, they are fully aware of the educational needs of each pupil. The speech and language therapist and psychologist work closely with both teachers and care staff. Their cooperation ensures consistency of both behaviour management and the use of strategies and resources, such as PECS and objects of reference to support communication. This has a very positive impact on pupils' progress in social interaction and communication. A youth club enriches pupils' learning and there is a very good range of after-school clubs and activities, such as ICT and gymnastics. Teachers and care staff work closely together in planning a range of very well conceived activities within the 24-hour curriculum, taking care to ensure that there is no duplication of activities offered by the residential units and the school. Activities such as shopping, bowling and swimming increase pupils' confidence in social settings very effectively.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and there are examples of excellent teaching. The knowledge that all staff have of each pupil's abilities, needs and potential, underpins the good teaching and learning that take place. Teachers, carers and therapists have a clear understanding of the physical and emotional needs of their pupils as well as their individual special learning needs. They modify the curriculum skilfully and plan tasks well to reflect pupils' individual needs. They use a wide range of teaching strategies to make learning enjoyable and help pupils work towards their individual targets. Those with additional needs are supported effectively. Daily lessons promote pupils' basic skills and staff use alternative modes of communication such as PECS and signing to help individuals engage in learning effectively. For example in a music lesson, staff used symbol cards effectively to move pupils on from one activity to another and they used their PECS books successfully to communicate what they wanted to do. As a result of this personalised approach, pupils gain in confidence and acquire a good range of basic skills including speaking, listening, writing and the use of number. Their reading skills also improve as they move through the school. ICT is also used effectively to promote pupils' learning; for example post-16 pupils used the photocopier to enlarge logos they had designed for their T shirts.

Pupils have access to specialist teaching in a number of areas including art, religious education (RE), physical education, ICT, and gymnastics and those who attend the vocational college are taught woodwork, pottery and craft by specialist staff. Although pupils have regular opportunities to go swimming, they do not have access to professional coaching. Pupils benefit well from the individualised language and communication programmes drawn up by the speech therapist. Throughout the school pupils' behaviour is managed skilfully, this is as a result of the effective planning between the care and education staff in consultation with the visiting psychologist.

The teamwork of all adults who work in the classroom is very good. Learning assistants and care staff work very closely with teachers and make a valuable contribution to both the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. They have very good relationships with the pupils; they know the pupils so well that they are able to assist with teaching individualised programmes. They are also extremely effective in dealing with incidents of challenging behaviour and provide appropriate activities for a number of pupils when they are withdrawn from class to the multi-sensory room. Care staff also contribute significantly to the close links that have been established between the education and care settings and between the school and Hesley College.

The procedures for monitoring how well pupils are doing are excellent. The school carries out a comprehensive assessment of pupils' attainment on admission. This, combined with the information received prior to their placement, provides the school with a clear baseline from which to set targets for improvement. Teachers and carers regularly and systematically assess how well pupils respond to their daily targets and tasks. Evaluations are recorded carefully and are used to inform multi-disciplinary staff discussion and future planning. Regular assessments are made of pupils' progress in curriculum areas and in their personal and social development.

Outcomes are used to inform internal reports, half-yearly reports, newsletters, records of achievement and annual reviews. Records are well organised, and the annual review reports provide parents with a complete overview of pupils' achievements and progress in all areas of learning and development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes very good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The provision is enhanced by an excellent system of pastoral care and strong links with parents and the local community.

Pupils' social development is promoted very successfully within the school day and through the variety of after-school clubs and off-site activities. Many of the classroom activities encourage pupils to work cooperatively in groups. For example, in a mathematics lesson all pupils participated in a game of skittles in which they had to record their score and identify a winner. Older pupils attend a range of work experience placements in the community, such as working at a day care centre for the elderly, helping out at a riding school for the disabled and delivering a monthly newsletter for the local church to local residents. A number of the post-16 pupils attend a local vocational college on a weekly basis.

Pupils' spiritual awareness is promoted effectively. Pupils have many opportunities in lessons for reflection on ideas, experiences and moral issues. Lessons are conducted in a happy and purposeful atmosphere. The reflective time at the end of lessons and during assemblies enables pupils to share and celebrate their achievements and experiences and to consider the needs of others. Photographic evidence in life books and records of achievement offer pupils the opportunities to reflect on their development and achievements as well as to consider their place in their family and the wider community.

The provision for pupils' moral development is supported effectively by the school's system of incentives, which helps them to make appropriate choices and distinguish between right and wrong. Staff provide very good role models, both by example and by encouraging pupils to respect others and take care of themselves and the environment. As a consequence, pupils increase in self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence while they are at the school. A number of pupils are involved in collecting waste for recycling and some deliver gifts they have made to a geriatric hospital at Christmas and Easter time.

Opportunities for pupils' cultural development are very well integrated within the subjects of the curriculum. Lessons in art, French, humanities and RE, for example, provide opportunities for pupils to learn about the customs, beliefs and festivals of other cultures as well as their own. Other activities which enhance cultural awareness include whole-school assemblies where pupils learn about prayers of other faiths, an annual French week where pupils and staff look at the customs, language, food and music of France. Topic work also gives pupils opportunities to

learn about other countries, faiths and traditions, for example, pupils have been looking at animals in Africa and learning about India through the study of Hinduism. Pupils are encouraged to attend a faith service of their choice and the school has arranged for two of its Afro-Caribbean pupils to attend a weekly social event in the community with people from a similar ethnic background.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school ensures that the interests and welfare of learners are safeguarded and supported extremely well. The very good policies that are in place are carefully implemented and monitored rigorously. Supervision of pupils is excellent. Staff ensure that all pupils throughout the 24-hour curriculum are supervised closely yet discreetly on a one-to-one basis. Consequently, pupils experience a sense of freedom whilst at the same time any potential incidents of challenging behaviour are dealt with very quickly and effectively. Staff are very well trained and all contribute greatly to the development of pupils' communication and social interaction skills and to the management of challenging behaviour. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure in school. All incidents of restraint are properly recorded and there is a clear Helsey Group policy against bullying. Staff benefit from excellent child protection training which ensures that the interests of pupils are safeguarded and protected within the 24-hour curriculum. Given the severe nature of pupils' difficulties, inappropriate or challenging behaviour is seen as a function of the environment. As such positive strategies are used to manage behaviour and, when it is necessary to use restraint, it is used sensitively and effectively.

There is a very good First Aid policy with four designated First Aiders on site during the day and one at night. The procedures for administering medication are also very good. Procedures for ensuring fire safety are excellent. There are detailed records of fire risk assessments and fire drills. All pupils have their own individual fire evacuation procedures which are well known by staff and implemented effectively. Admission and attendance registers are kept according to requirements and the school has produced a well conceived plan to further improve access to the building for disabled people.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The Helsey Group of Schools owns the school. There is a rigorous staff appointment process in place whereby staff have their professional expertise checked through evidence from previous employers, character references and professional qualifications. All staff are checked to ensure that they are medically suitable to work with children. Clearance is obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau for all staff prior to the confirmation of their appointment. There are very

good arrangements for the induction and professional development of staff and the very good staffing levels ensure that the pupils are supervised appropriately at all times.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable for their purpose. The school occupies a single site within spacious grounds. The main house, which provides residential accommodation for 12 pupils, with office facilities and meeting rooms, is a large, Grade 2 listed building. It is currently undergoing refurbishment as part of the building development for Wilsic Hall School. There are also modern separate house units providing more homely accommodation for smaller numbers of pupils. Plans are in place to provide more homely residential accommodation within smaller house unit accommodation for those pupils who are currently resident in the main building. The school is housed in a separate block. Classroom accommodation is generally well maintained and enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work. There is also a range of specialist areas, such as an art/DT room, multi sensory suite currently housed in a mobile classroom, a soft playroom, and a newly equipped ICT suite within the main teaching block. Although classroom accommodation is mostly good, the school plans to remove the two mobile classrooms when additional classrooms are built. There are very good outdoor facilities, with a mixture of hard play surfaces, grassy areas, wild flower and wooded areas, all of which enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment. For example, there are a number of leisure walks that follow nature trails.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides a very good range of information for parents and local authorities through very detailed annual review reports and an informative prospectus. Regular newsletters are sent home and parents also have very good opportunities to attend regular reviews of their children's progress, such as the annual review of their statement. A computer slide show is used to enliven and enrich illustrations of an individual's progress so that all who attend the reviews, especially parents and carers, understand very clearly how much progress a pupil has made. Copies of these are then given to parents. Parents also attend a range of social functions, such as the end-of-year presentation ceremony for leavers and the annual Christmas concert.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a complaints policy, which sets out appropriate procedures, responsibilities and time-scales for dealing with complaints. Its procedures fully meet the requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

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| Name of school: | Wilsic Hall School | | |
| DfES Number: | 371/6005 | | |
| Type of school: | Residential special school | | |
| Status: | Independent | | |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 - 19 years | | |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils): | Boys: 25 | Girls: 7 | Total: 32 |
| Number of boarders: | Boys: 25 | Girls: 7 | Total: 32 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | Boys: 25 | Girls: 7 | Total: 32 |
| Annual fees (boarders): | £242,463 | | |
| Address of school: | Wadworth Doncaster DN11 9AG | | |
| Telephone number: | 01302 856 382 | | |
| Fax number: | 01302 853608 | | |
| Email address: | Martin.henderson@hesleygroup.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher: | Martin Henderson | | |
| Proprietor: | Stephen Lloyd | | |
| Reporting Inspector: | Sheila Boyle | | |
| Date of inspection: | 19 – 22 June 2006 | | |

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