

**Inspection report**

**The Forum School**

**Independent special school**

**DfES ref no: 835/6033**

**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**

The Forum School is a co-educational, termly boarding school in Dorset for up to 48 students between the ages of 7 and 16 years diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Classes have no more than 6 pupils, each with a teacher and two teaching assistants. It aims to offer a structured, broad, balanced and relevant waking day curriculum. From the start of this school year provision has been expanded to cover Key Stage 4. Many pupils have quite severe communication difficulties and the school uses a variety of strategies to promote effective communication. The school offers a carefully modified version of the National Curriculum as far as is possible within the individualised curriculum developed for each pupil. Around 170 staff are employed and the school seeks to ensure that education and care are seen as equal partners in the development of its pupils.

### **Summary of main findings**

The Forum School is an outstanding school which provides an outstanding level of care and education. The very effective leadership of the headteacher and her deputy ensures clear and focussed direction, enabling the school fully to achieve its stated aims. The entire staff work together as a very effective team, creating a 24-hour curriculum in which the transition from care to school at the start and end of the day is seamless. The quality of teaching is very good, and some is outstanding. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress and of their autism is also outstanding, and this creates a very clear picture of individual progress that teachers use very well. The assessment of pupils' work is meticulous and is used to provide demanding challenges for the next steps in every individual's learning. The curriculum is individualised and appropriate to need, made more effective because it is organised and managed very well. Within the wider curriculum the provision for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is excellent. Professional development ensures that all staff gain a good knowledge of ASD and they use this expertise to benefit the pupils, who take a full part in their learning. Care is taken to ensure that pupils who do not communicate verbally are still stretched to achieve of their best. All pupils are treated with dignity and respect, and receive an education that equips them well for their next stage in life.

### **What the school does well:**

- it creates a regime where all staff work together as an effective team providing well-coordinated and high quality provision throughout the whole day;

- it provides a challenging curriculum which teachers adapt skilfully to the benefit of each pupil;
- it monitors pupils' progress very well and uses the data to plan further learning;
- it manages pupils' behaviour calmly and consistently, enabling pupils to adapt successfully to changing circumstances;
- it develops effective means of enabling pupils to communicate their wishes successfully; and
- it makes very good provision for the personal development and care of pupils and provides them with many opportunities to use their growing confidence within the local community.

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

The school complies fully with the regulations.

**Next Steps**

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

- continue to develop and refine the 'Progress Reporter' and the 'ASD Profile', which create a very effective analysis of pupils' achievements and progress;
- consider the appointment of a family liaison teacher to further sharpen links with home, developing links with all family members, including siblings;
- continue the development of the new Key Stage 4 curriculum to ensure that the most challenging opportunities are created for pupils seeking external assessment opportunities; and
- broaden the current individual education plan (IEP) so that it becomes an individual education and care plan.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

## **1. The quality of education provided by the school**

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The school succeeds in its aim of offering a broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to the personal and academic needs of its pupils. The full range of National Curriculum subjects is provided, based on the 'Equals' schemes of work. Where necessary, teachers adapt the curriculum skilfully to provide individualised learning opportunities for pupils.

All pupils have statements of special educational needs and the requirements of these are met. When pupils are admitted to the school they undergo a four-month period of assessment and one outcome to this is the completion of an IEP. These plans include up to five objectives for each pupil. Monitoring evidence collated by the school shows that pupils achieve the majority of their objectives successfully. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well within other learning. Where pupils are of higher attainment they follow the requirements of the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy. Pupils of lower attainment have individualised programmes that develop their communication skills. Teaching and learning use both speech and other forms of communication, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), depending on individual need. PECS is used consistently throughout the school to support those pupils with severe communication difficulties.

The provision for PSHCE is outstanding and contributes successfully to pupils' personal development. This programme also develops life skills. Pupils are taught simple domestic tasks and also how to cook simple meals. Community mealtimes form an important element of the curriculum. As part of their personal development, pupils are also encouraged to take part in vigorous exercise and to follow a healthy life style. The school has been presented with a Healthy Schools Award. Where appropriate, and taking into account their physical and emotional maturity, pupils are given effective guidance about their sexual health and emotional responses. The PSHCE curriculum is supplemented and enhanced by the work done by staff within the residences. There is a strong and appropriate emphasis on the development of self-management skills by pupils, as well as helping them in their capability to adapt to change.

At Key Stage 4 the curriculum is varied so as to focus more appropriately on the particular needs of those pupils. This curriculum, which is still under development, is based on the structure provided by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Pupils develop their skills in literacy and numeracy within the ASDAN course. Work-related learning is provided effectively and is used as a theme within the curriculum for this group. For example, the pupils undertake a mini-enterprise scheme in which they produce greetings cards for sale.

The timetable provides sufficient time for coverage of all subjects and this also ensures a good balance to pupils' learning. Little time is lost during the course of each day. The school grounds are used very effectively to support the curriculum. Within the 28 acres the staff have constructed a curriculum trail, which incorporates

locations such as those for story telling, sensory experiences, singing and movement. Additionally the grounds are used to extend pupils' scientific experiences.

The links between the residential and education staff are highly effective and bring a consistency to the learning achieved by each pupil. A particular strength of these is the shared responsibility which all staff take for the identification of learning objectives for each pupil, as well as putting in place the mechanisms by which they will be achieved.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of the teaching is at least good. Much of the teaching observed was very good, some of it outstanding, enabling pupils to acquire new knowledge and to make progress. Teachers record this thoroughly, including the use of video and photographic evidence, which feeds into the six-weekly review of each pupil's IEP, enabling the process of setting challenging new targets to be sustained throughout the year. This process also enables teaching to be individualised successfully to meet the needs of every pupil, and in classrooms teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively in a ratio of two pupils to each adult to sustain this individualised support.

Lesson planning is based on the school's template and is methodical and systematic, so that teachers and teaching assistants have clear objectives and anticipated learning outcomes for every lesson. The quality of teaching is monitored regularly throughout the year, including monitoring the effectiveness of teaching in relation to the ASD needs of the pupils. Effective record keeping means that the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of pupils are taken into account. Pupils' work is assessed thoroughly and this forms part of the data gathering for assessment purposes. Despite the very challenging behaviour exhibited by some pupils, classrooms are positive learning environments. Positive behaviour is supported and encouraged, and the ways in which unacceptable behaviours are dealt with, including those which have the potential for self-harm or harm to others, are effective. The moderation of pupils' work by teachers across the Cambian group of schools is just being introduced to add further rigour to the process of marking and assessment.

The school has an excellent programme for the professional development of staff, starting with a detailed two-week induction, which enables them to develop an expertise in ASD. They are therefore enabled to understand the difficulties faced by the pupils and to tailor their teaching to best meet them. There is a very good level of expertise among staff of the school, both teachers and teaching assistants. They use the information provided by the school's profiles of academic progress and ASD behaviours to promote learning in their pupils, including those with no verbal communication, for whom PECS is proving to be an effective tool, and which is used consistently and effectively for teaching and learning.

The range of resources is very good. It includes computers and interactive whiteboards, and these are used well by teachers to employ a variety of methods and styles in their teaching, which enables them to utilise the knowledge they have

on the preferred learning styles of each pupil in the class. Specialist facilities, such as those for science, design and technology, art, music, drama and information technology support effective teaching, while the excellent facilities for physical education, horse riding and swimming, all of which are used very well indeed, enable a broad and balanced curriculum to be taught. Teachers are also able to utilise the outstanding provision made within the grounds of the school, which includes a curriculum trail, a sensory garden, and other areas aimed at providing interest and stimulation that will be of direct interest and value, including areas for calm and quiet which can be so important to these pupils.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding.

The school works successfully to develop ways in which pupils gain an appreciation of the world around them. They are encouraged to experience a range of adventure activities during the school's annual *Activity Week*. These include camping and personally challenging activities such as rock climbing, designed to develop their self-confidence.

Pupils often have little understanding of the consequences of their actions as well as a limited appreciation of social relationships. Despite this, the school works effectively to develop communication strategies which pupils can use to help them understand basic moral values. Pupils undertake a wide range of visits away from the school and these too provide excellent opportunities for pupils to rehearse social skills within the community setting.

There is very good provision which encourages pupils to contribute to the life of their own community as well as that in the locality. The student council provides a vehicle for pupils to influence decisions that affect them. The school involves the local community in the life of the school by allowing the use of its facilities. Pupils also become involved in community sporting and drama activities. Pupils also undertake various charity fund-raising events, such as taking part in the 'Cheeky Monkey Marathon', which resulted in a substantial donation to a leukaemia charity.

The school provides a very good range of events and opportunities to develop the cultural understanding of pupils. Within the formal curriculum pupils have studied the use and design of prayer mats in the Muslim faith and celebrated the Chinese New Year. The World Cup football tournament has also provided an introduction for pupils to the location of countries throughout the world. Outstanding elements of the provision are the opportunities pupils have to take part in the performing arts. Pupils have visited theatres and also taken part in presentations by visiting theatre and music groups.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The school has clear, published policies for dealing with bullying, based around 'social stories' and positive behaviour modification, which encourage perpetrators to develop an understanding and cessation of their actions. Because of the extremely vulnerable nature of the pupils, the school has rigorous procedures to ensure their safety. This is reflected in the thorough risk assessments that are undertaken, not only of activities themselves, but also of the pupils who would be undertaking these activities. The strategies in place to ensure the well-being of pupils who, as a result of their ASD, have the potential to harm themselves or others by their actions, are effective and take the rights of all people to live in a safe and supportive environment into account. The concurrent inspection undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) showed that all regulations pertaining to health and safety, including fire and First Aid, are met, as are the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools. The school complies fully with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school has a clear procedure for the appointment of new staff, including interview and the taking up of references to confirm details contained in application forms. The CSCI inspection confirms that the school complies with the regulations pertaining to the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools for the employment of staff who care for, train, supervise or are in charge of children. All staff, not just those who are in direct contact with pupils, are subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. The vulnerability of ASD children, particularly those with no verbal communication, is acknowledged in the detailed child protection training and procedures that are in place and which form a central part of the induction programme for all newly appointed staff.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

All classrooms and other learning areas meet the requirements for the provision of effective education. Facilities include specialist teaching rooms for science, information and communication technology and food technology and there are good facilities for art, music (including music therapy) and drama. There are very good recreational facilities for physical education and sport, swimming and horse riding, together with a range of play and recreation areas. The extensive grounds are used

very effectively as a curriculum resource, for both educational and recreational use, and are strong features of the life of the school. A detailed asset management plan has recently been undertaken by the proprietor, Cambian Education Services, and this combines with the rolling development plan to enable the premises to remain in good condition. Accommodation is provided in houses, each of which has a dedicated care team. The CSCI inspection confirmed that all regulations pertaining to premises and accommodation have been met.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school has close partnerships with parents and provides over and above the required range of information. Responses through the pre-inspection questionnaire indicate that, generally, parents are happy with the information they receive about their children. Partnerships with parents are strong, and generally parents are very supportive of the school. Some parents describe the school as '*a very good school*' and '*wish there were more schools like The Forum*'.

Parents are given effective reports about their children's progress. These provide a comprehensive picture of the standard of work achieved by pupils as well as the progress they make. The school collects an outstanding range of evidence to support these reports and also presents some of this as a video, shown to parents at the annual review meetings.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

There is a clearly written and effective policy for responding to complaints. The school has developed a culture of responding to all complaints, whether these be formal or informal. The policy sets out plainly the school's responses and also follows a clearly defined time-scale in response to them. The need for an independent person to chair a formal investigation, the right of the complainant to bring another person along with them to any hearing and the recognised importance of confidentiality are all set out clearly in the published documentation. These procedures are followed meticulously. Parents indicate, through their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire, that they understand the procedures for making a complaint.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.



## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The Forum School				
DfES Number:	835/6033				
Type of school:	Residential Special School				
Status:	Independent				
Age range of pupils:	7 - 16 years				
Gender of pupils:	Mixed				
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys:	36	Girls:	5	Total: 41
Number of boarders:	Boys:	36	Girls:	5	Total: 41
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys:	36	Girls:	5	Total: 41
Annual fees (boarders):	£120,092.70				
Address of school:	The Forum School Shillingstone Dorset DT11 0QS				
Telephone number:	01258 860295				
Fax number:	01258 860552				
Email address:	Forum.admin@cambiangroup.com				
Headteacher:	Mrs G Waters				
Proprietor:	Cambian Education Services				
Reporting Inspector:	Mr M Groucutt				
Date of inspection:	19 - 22 June 2006				

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