



Little Acorns School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

DfES Registration Number 886/6085
Unique Reference Number 131810
Inspection number 296838
Inspection dates 27-28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Heather Yaxley HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group 7-12	Published 22 March 2007	Reference no. 296838
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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

Little Acorns School opened in Tenterden, in Kent, in 1999 and is part of a small therapeutic community that specialises in working with children who have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school works within the principles of the Charterhouse Group. There are six pupils attending the school and all are resident at the children's home adjacent to the school. All pupils are in the care of a local authority, which funds the placements. Most pupils have regular supervised contact with their families and respite carers. All pupils have statements to support their special educational needs. The residential provision was inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) in August and November 2006. On these occasions the provision was judged to be good.

Evaluation of the school

Little Acorns School provides its pupils with a good quality of education and care, successfully achieving its vision to *'work in partnership with care staff to provide all pupils with an all embracing curriculum within a nurturing environment'*. This partnership with the residential care staff is a strength of the school, making a significant difference to the positive way that the pupils value their education. Members of the senior management team, lead by example giving staff good support and strategic direction. The pupils, parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school. The school meets all except four of the requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and, under the leadership of the headteacher is improving, already showing areas of strength. The pupils are taught the full range of National Curriculum subjects, although some are planned better than others. For example, the curriculum for physical education (PE) and that for music lack careful planning to cover the full range of skills, and the new computers are only just beginning to help the pupils develop their information and communication technology skills. Similarly, opportunities to improve personal skills within the planned personal, social and health education programmes are not developed well. In order to address these concerns the

staff are systematically upgrading subject policies and schemes, and increasing the use of visits and visitors to enliven the curriculum. In response to limitations on-site for PE the school makes good use of local community facilities. All pupils visit the local library every two weeks and this gives them good opportunities to research using the internet and to choose books relating to class work.

The quality of teaching and assessment are good overall. As a result of good, and sometimes outstanding teaching, pupils' interests are captivated and they make good progress in their learning and personal skills. Pupils say that they like their teachers because they give them individual help and they make learning fun. The best lessons are dynamic, lively and move along at a brisk pace. For example, in a geography lesson about Brazil the teacher used a puppet named 'Polly Filler' to interact with the pupils as she showed them interesting, colourful pictures and talked enthusiastically about the main exports of coffee and chocolate. Pupils ate Brazilian food, listened to Brazilian music and learned some simple phrases in Portuguese. At the beginning of lessons teachers always make it clear what they expect pupils to learn. The pupils make most progress when they are given different tasks to support learning at their own pace and aptitude, whilst all focusing on 'what we will learn'.

In all lessons the teaching assistants work extremely well together as a team with teachers. Excellent relationships and good management of behaviour ensure that the pupils receive very good support for their learning and emotional needs. This helps to build their self-esteem so that they become more confident learners. Each pupil has targets for their behaviour in class but the use of targets for learning is not always given sufficiently high profile in lessons. Homework, in the form of daily reading and weekly spellings, is effective in linking learning between home and school. Opportunities to encourage the pupils to use self-study and to bring their own contribution to lessons from home are limited.

Assessment is satisfactory. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the pupils and use this to set individual targets for numeracy, literacy and personal development. Consistently good marking ensures that pupils know how well they are doing. Assessment of the pupils' skills on entry to the school are currently being developed and are not yet comprehensive enough to set precise and challenging targets. Consequently, the school does not have a clear view about how much progress pupils make in their learning over time.

The pupils make good progress from their low starting points because teachers expect them to try their best to manage their behaviour and to complete work to a good standard. They benefit from effective guidance provided by external professionals.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school, in close collaboration with residential staff, addresses the pupils' prime learning difficulties successfully, and as a result their behaviour and personal development are good. In general, the school presents as a calm environment where the pupils come to learn. The pupils respond well to the high expectations that all staff have of them to move around school and between home and school appropriately and as independently as possible. In relation to past school experiences they develop good attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school very much. They are punctual to lessons and their attendance is very good. Achievements are celebrated with one another in school and at home. Good care is taken of the classroom, work is completed carefully and the pupils like to take their work home to show and discuss with the staff.

High priority is given to completing work and pupils respond very well to this. However, there are obviously some occasions when pupils find it very difficult to manage their behaviour in school. But, as result of the support that they receive from staff, such occasions are short-lived and the pupils are able to return to the work as soon as possible. In addition, this support ensures that when one pupil has a problem, others generally carry on with what they are doing.

The pupils contribute to their own community through weekly meetings and celebrations of success, as well as when they use local facilities for after-school clubs and other activities. They are keen to express their opinions, concerns and suggestions. With adult support, they are able to do this constructively and with clarity of thought. Involvement in local community activities and the curriculum are helping pupils to have a good appreciation of the lives of people from different cultures. Past pupils often let the school know how they are doing and current pupils are encouraged to stay in touch with friends that have left.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Good quality care is evident throughout the school and extends equally to the staff and the pupils. The school benefits from policies and procedures required of the residential provision by the CSCI and a strength of the school is in the strong, coordinated approach to the health, safety and well-being of the pupils between the school and residential care staff, and with other professionals. However, these policies are not always tailored to the specific requirements of the school.

Assessments of potential risks are thorough and include detailed information for each pupil as well as for each activity and visit. As a result, the pupils access an increasing range of experiences to enrich the curriculum within the local community and further afield. Procedures and reward systems are very effective in promoting and improving behaviour. Levels of supervision are appropriately high but do not restrict the pupils' independence around the school or between home and the classrooms.

Particular attention is given to developing awareness of the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating and the pupils respond very well to this. They enjoy having fresh fruit at break times and a hot main meal each lunchtime. In the eco garden the pupils grow vegetables which they then cook at home. Attention to the pupils' emotional health is continuous, planned well and discussed regularly by all staff and other professionals. The pupils' long-term emotional well-being is supported by weekly sessions with the psychotherapist.

The school does not have an accessibility plan relating to the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and therefore does not meet this requirement. However, it is evident that when alterations are made to the building, reasonable steps are taken to make suitable changes.

The school was unable to locate the admission register during the inspection. However, attendance registers are in good order.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has thorough and rigorous selection and recruitment procedures. The required checks are made on all staff to ensure the safeguarding of pupils' welfare.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises are of a satisfactory standard. Although school accommodation is adjacent to the house, it provides the pupils with a distinctive character of its own which establishes a purposeful learning environment for the pupils. When they leave home in the morning, they are 'going to school'. There are currently no toilet facilities for staff or pupils within the school buildings. However, this is already being addressed and will be resolved by the end of this year. Plans are also well advanced to replace the temporary reception area with a permanent building.

There is a small hard play area and grassed area. These are suitable for play times when the weather is good but not large enough for the full range of physical activities and games. A lack of indoor facilities restricts opportunities

for physical activities during the school day in poor weather. However, the school makes good use of the local facilities for sports clubs after school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

A range of documentation available to parents, carers and local authorities gives detailed information about the school in the context of the residential provision as a whole. This includes a useful brochure which summarises the main information about the curriculum and teaching facilities. Additional details regarding the school's therapeutic approach can be found on the web-site for the Charterhouse Group.

Reports and regular review meetings ensure that parents, carers and local authorities are kept well informed about each pupil's progress throughout the year. In addition, a newsletter is produced each month which not only keeps families and others supporting the pupil informed about recent school events, but is also personalised to celebrate the particular achievements of each pupil. The school does not send financial reports to local authorities as required.

Procedures for handling complaints

Procedures for handling complaints are clearly set out in the school's policy. There have been no formal complaints for some time but the policy provides suitable and fair procedures that will be followed in the event of such a complaint.

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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- locate and update the admission register (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils (paragraph 5(k)).

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

- provide an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each pupil to their local authority (paragraph 6(7)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- further develop the curriculum so that National Curriculum requirements are clearly shown in planning for all subjects
- improve baseline assessments and the tracking of achievement so that systems are effective in measuring how much progress the pupils make
- ensure that learning is rewarded as much as behaviour in the classrooms.

School details

Name of school	Little Acorns School		
DfES number	886/6085		
Unique reference number	131810		
Type of school	Special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	4 May 1999		
Age range of pupils	7-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Number of boarders	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,709-£74,783		
Annual fees (boarders)	£109,893-£208,526		
Address of school	London Beach Farm Ashford Road St Michaels Tenterden Kent TN30 6SR		
Telephone number	01233 850422		
Fax number	01233 850422		
Email address	carterjpc1@aol.uk		
Headteacher	Miss Angela Flynn		
Proprietor	Mrs Sue Carter		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Dates of inspection	27-28 February 2007		