

Inspection report

Horizon School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 860/6024

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Date of inspection: 10 October 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

Horizon School is an independent residential special school for pupils with statements of special educational needs related to autism and associated moderate and severe learning difficulties. The school is in a rural setting outside Rugeley in Staffordshire. It is purpose built and on the site of the residential accommodation. Other residential provision is located six miles away. There are 41 pupils between the ages of four and 19 attending the school, and all except one are boys. Pupils may be admitted at any stage of their school life and their attainment on entry is very low. Ten pupils are 'looked after' by local authorities, although all boarders, of whom there are 33, reside during the academic year in the school's accommodation. On leaving school, pupils' destinations include other schools or colleges of further education.

The school's educational approach is based on *'Daily Life Therapy, a 24-hour curriculum designed to meet the needs of the whole child.'* Since the last inspection the school has had a change of proprietor and is now the Priory Group.

## Overall evaluation of the school

Horizon School successfully achieves its aim to *'develop the independence, dignity and self-esteem of the child.'* It provides a good quality of education and care. The pupils enjoy all activities provided and make good progress in their learning and personal development. The school complies with nearly all the independent schools' regulations. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress and maintained its strengths.

The curriculum is good with many strong features. It is based on 'Daily Life Therapy' and is divided into three key areas: Physical Education; Expressive Arts and Academics. It is superbly supported by the very well planned residential provision. The curriculum has breadth and balance whilst remaining true to the school's ethos. The academic curriculum includes nearly all subjects of the National Curriculum with the exception of a modern foreign language. This requirement, as identified in some pupils' current statement of special educational needs, is not being met.

There is a strong focus on developing communication skills. This enables the pupils to understand their academic studies more effectively. Good account is taken of pupils' attainment when considering class placement. Well planned physical exercise, including sustained jogging, followed by periods of study enables the pupils to make

good progress across the curriculum. Where appropriate, younger pupils have lessons in using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and the curriculum shows good progression as pupils mature. Provision for the oldest pupils enables access to work experience, enterprise activities, local colleges and accredited courses. However, the difference in the curriculum for pupils at Key Stage 4 and for those over the age of 16 is not always sufficiently clear.

The quality of teaching is good and as a result the pupils make good progress. Consistency of approach is a hallmark of the teaching at Horizon and this enables the pupils to feel secure in their learning. The staff's commitment to the school's approach is clearly visible, particularly in physical exercise. In most lessons, the content is pitched at the right level with good attention to pupils' ages and abilities. Lessons have good pace and a range of teaching methods are used so that pupils remain engaged and minimise the amount of times pupils are not on task. On rare occasions, the pace of learning is too slow and pupils have too little challenge and thereby learn less than they should. The pupils' behaviour is managed quietly and effectively and according to the school's adopted practice. Staff use a range of communication systems, including the use of a symbols computer program to assist pupils' understanding. There are some good examples of creative use of information and communication technology (ICT) but its wider use across the curriculum is generally underdeveloped. Feedback to pupils is prompt and well received, although, sometimes the reasons why some pupils receive 'award points' is not communicated sufficiently to them. Relationships with pupils and between all staff are excellent and make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning.

The school makes comprehensive assessments of the pupils' progress. These are well used to help teachers plan work at the correct level for each pupil. Their performance in subjects is assessed using national Performance Levels (*P Levels*) and National Curriculum levels. Older pupils gain accreditation at Entry Level in mathematics and art, as well as in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Whole school analysis of achievement by different groups of pupils in different subjects is underdeveloped and is due, in part, to the lack of specific subject responsibility held by staff. Residential experiences, geared to the achievement of independent living are comprehensively assessed in eight areas including home-management and self-advocacy. The quality of reporting and assessments by all professionals, including speech and language therapists, for the purposes of the Annual Review of each pupil's statement is good.

The school successfully addresses the pupils' prime special educational needs; as a result their behaviour and personal development is very good. Pupils are encouraged to know themselves better over time and how to communicate their needs more effectively in order to learn and become as independent as possible. The consistent modelling by staff enables the pupils to know that the school is a place of learning and this is reinforced by familiar routines to develop confidence and trust in peers and adults. Challenging behaviour is effectively managed and staff remain calm yet firm as they seek to minimise disruption to learning. Absence, including that for day pupils is extremely rare. The pupils behave well and benefit from the security provided within school and the carefully planned social and educational experiences

in the community, including attendance at local colleges and work experience for older pupils. Good attention is also given to providing age-appropriate responsibilities for pupils. The recent election of a school council encourages pupils' participation although other opportunities are missed to find out what they think of school life. The few pupils' questionnaires returned for the inspection indicate that pupils have a positive outlook. They relate to each other as well as they are able with no recorded incidents motivated by race or culture. The pupils' understanding of right and wrong is helped considerably by regular praise from staff and the concept of 'natural consequences' when their behaviour results in others being adversely affected. The extremely well co-ordinated programme of activities in the residences makes a significant contribution to the pupils' personal development and dovetails well with the school curriculum. Letters from parents to the inspector endorse the impact that attendance at Horizon has had on their children's lives.

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good with some outstanding features. The school and care provision place a very high priority on the pupils' safety and well-being. There is successful implementation of an extensive range of policies and practices. Child protection procedures are effective. Risk assessments for all activities are routinely carried out and the recording of any incidents or accidents are meticulously recorded and followed up. The twice-daily 'handover' sessions ensure a seamless provision between care and school staff. The good staffing ratio enables pupils to be closely supervised and supported at all times. However, it is not merely the numbers of staff that ensure pupils' safety and well-being; it is the quality of relationships between adults and pupils and the 'team ethos' between education and care staff. On arrival to school, it is evident on the faces of many pupils that they look forward to the day's programme. The significant attention to physical activity strongly promotes pupils' health as does the provision of a well-balanced diet, although some opportunities are missed to communicate to pupils the benefits of opting for healthier foods. The school has conducted an audit with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) although it has not yet produced a three-year accessibility plan as required.

The proprietor has excellent safeguards to ensure the pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures comply with the latest guidance and are rigorously followed. The school provides excellent accommodation in which to teach its particular curriculum. Classrooms are of good size and the sports hall and swimming pool are excellent facilities that are used most effectively. The substantial grounds offer tremendous scope for outdoor games, fitness and nature studies to support the science curriculum. In keeping with its philosophy of achieving maximum independence for its pupils, the school and residential provision also make very good use of the local community for social experiences. The school provides a good range of information for parents, pupils and carers that complies with all but one of the relevant regulations. Quite properly it is reviewing its information to make it easier to read and access. The complaints policy and procedures are effective and have been appropriately used by parents, notably, to voice concerns related to proposed changes in the school year: these issues are now resolved.

## 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 curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- where pupils have a statement, provide education that fulfils its requirements (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

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

- provide particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)).

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

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

- widen the use of ICT across the school
- improve the use and analysis of academic achievement data, and
- extend ways of seeking pupils' views about school life.

## School details

|  |   |          |          |
|--|---|----------|----------|
| Name of school:  | Horizon School  |          |          |
| DfES Number:   | 860/6024  |          |          |
| Type of school:  | Special residential   |          |          |
| Status:  | Independent   |          |          |
| Date school opened:  | May 2000  |          |          |
| Age range of pupils:   | 4 - 19  |          |          |
| Gender of pupils:  | Mixed   |          |          |
| Number on roll :   | Boys:40   | Girls:1  | Total:41 |
| Number of boarders:  | Boys:32   | Girls:1  | Total:33 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | Boys:40   | Girls:1  | Total:41 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after                          | Boys:10   | Girls: 0 | Total:10 |
| Annual fees (day pupils):                                      | £68,684 - £72,631 (40 weeks)  |          |          |
| Annual fees (boarders):  | £137,088 - £219,946 (42 weeks)                                      |          |          |
| Address of school:   | Blithbury Road<br>Blithbury<br>Rugeley<br>Staffordshire<br>WS15 3JQ |          |          |
| Telephone number:  | 01889 504400  |          |          |
| Fax number:  | 01889 504010  |          |          |
| Email address:   | horizon@priorygroup.com   |          |          |
| Headteacher:   | Mrs Marisa Kelsall  |          |          |
| Proprietor:  | Priory Education Services Limited                                   |          |          |
| Reporting Inspector:   | Greg Sorrell  |          |          |
| Dates of inspection:   | 10 October 2006   |          |          |

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