

Ashmeads School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	928/6069
Unique Reference Number	133515
Inspection number	301493
Inspection dates	01-02 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison 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).

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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

Ashmeads School is an independent special school owned by Sedgemoor College Limited and was opened in 2001. It moved to its current site, a former farm house in rural Northamptonshire, in 2003. It has provision for up to eight students aged between 11 and 16 who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are currently six students attending aged between 13 and 16. All the students are looked after by their local authorities and two have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). The students live in residential homes owned by the Sedgemoor group. Many students have had a disrupted education and, on entry to the school, their attainment is low. The school aims to provide a secure and friendly environment and to motivate, support and challenge them in their learning and raise their attainment levels. It also aims to promote the students' self-esteem and self-confidence. The school was inspected on its previous site in Bedford in 2002.

Evaluation of the school

Ashmeads School provides a satisfactory quality of education for its students and takes good care of them. The school works hard to improve the life chances of very vulnerable young people who have had a disrupted education and poor experiences of maintaining relationships. It is successful in meeting its aims of motivating them, re-engaging them with learning and helping to encourage the development of their self-esteem. It offers a broad and responsive curriculum which is planned carefully to meet individual needs. The current placement of students who are being assessed, with those whose placements are longer term, presents considerable challenges for management. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education at the school is satisfactory. The school provides a satisfactory, broad curriculum and has a range of policies, underpinned by long and medium term plans and suitable schemes of work. Some policies have recently been rewritten to reflect the changing nature of students' placements at the school and this appears to be a positive development. The school has a good focus on teaching basic skills to address the gaps in students' education. There are also good opportunities for engaging in practical activities, for example in art when pupils use a

variety of materials to make masks. The school has a good range of resources to support learning and students make satisfactory use of information and communication technology to support their work. Evidence of their effective use of a digital camera was seen in a very good display of photographs of the school grounds. Working with the care staff, the school makes good efforts to prepare the young people for the world of work. It arranges work experience for them where possible, in line with their individual risk assessments. The school is making efforts to involve the Connexions service in Northamptonshire, having previously had good support from the service elsewhere.

The school is successful in providing a highly individual programme for each student and fully meets the needs identified in students' statements of SEN. However, there are few opportunities for those on short term placements to complete accredited courses. The current mix of assessment and long term placements makes it harder for staff to deliver the curriculum. The Sedgemoor group proposes to address this by opening a separate provision for girls on assessment placements. Recent difficulties in ensuring students reach school on time sometimes affect the delivery of the curriculum.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. There are some good features. The school makes good use of the skills and talents of teaching assistants to deliver the curriculum. Much of the teaching is good and all staff work hard and plan carefully, making clear links to the targets on the students' individual education plans and using a range of well chosen resources to motivate them. Staff respond flexibly to the needs of new students who arrive with little information about their attainment, and to the frequent changes in the students' ability to apply themselves to work because of situations which arise outside of school. There are good relationships between staff and students. Staff remain good humoured while ensuring that students remain on task. They encourage students to work hard and the young people appreciate the individual attention they receive, as well as the way their teachers make learning fun. Work is marked with encouraging comments and appropriate attention to presentation.

The school makes good efforts to obtain details of National Curriculum assessments from students' previous schools and has adequate systems in place to assess their attainment. Although students make at least satisfactory progress in lessons, the school is not able to demonstrate better than satisfactory progress over time. This is partly because it does not yet make full use of the systems available, and partly because of the short period of time which many students spend at the school when on an assessment placement. A few young people are able to take external examinations. When they are unable to complete accredited work, the school makes arrangements for the work to continue in their next placement wherever possible. Students also have the opportunity to return to Ashmeads to sit external examinations after they have moved on to other placements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is satisfactory. The school and care home placements actively encourage the young people to observe their religious beliefs if they so wish. Students learn about the beliefs of various faith groups through religious education and in the annual multicultural event held for all Sedgemoor schools. The school rules are simple, clear, and displayed in classrooms. The rewards and sanctions programme, which includes financial bonuses, motivates students to comply with these rules. Students get on well together with each other at break times and occasionally work together in lessons. These opportunities are extended when they use outside facilities for sports, such as when swimming. The school makes every effort to arrange visits and activities to reflect the young people's interests where risk assessments indicate this is possible. Students have some links to the local community through visiting shops and the library. The well planned multicultural event enables them to consider the life, culture and beliefs of others. Most recently this focused on Africa and the Caribbean, and included opportunities to consider Rastafarianism, and the slave trade.

Students attending the school have previously had very poor experiences of maintaining relationships, and have very low self-esteem. Their behaviour is good when set against the difficulties they continue to face in managing the social and emotional issues in their lives. They are polite to visitors and demonstrate good relationships with staff. Their attitudes towards adults improve during their time at the school and most students make good progress in improving their attendance from a very low base.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students is good. The students trust staff. One student described staff as being '*very protective*' of her. There are good policies and procedures in place to safeguard students. A clear handover of information from care staff to school staff takes place at the beginning of each day and good links are maintained between them. The school keeps clear central records of sanctions and incidents. It maintains very good records on individual students, including very thorough individual risk assessments. As a result of this, staff are able to plan carefully to address the needs of individual students and to promote their physical and emotional health and well-being effectively. The school's curriculum promotes personal safety, and effectively encourages the young people to understand, and be prepared for, potential dangers. Staff make good use of opportunities within lessons to promote safety, for example, when reading a Roald Dahl short story in an English lesson, the risks associated with hitchhiking. There is regular training on child protection, physical intervention and first aid for staff. However, the designated teacher for child protection has not yet had the specific training needed to fulfil this role. The school supports young people in addressing their attitudes and behaviour towards sex and relationships and encourages them to adopt a healthy life style.

Staff work very hard to fulfil all the necessary administrative tasks associated with school life. However, all have teaching commitments and need to be available to provide close supervision of students, so the time they have available to complete these tasks is limited. The school has regard to the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and has drawn up a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Sedgemoor College Limited carefully checks the suitability of all employees who work in the school.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides good accommodation for students. The main building is well maintained and decorated, and this good standard is enhanced by attractive displays of students' work. There are seven classrooms, including a kitchen which is used for food technology, a science room, an art room and a small music room. There is also a quiet room which can be used when young people need time to reflect or to be apart from their peers. The school has attractive and well maintained grounds which provide good opportunities for the students to relax at break times, and which help to enrich the curriculum. It makes good use of off-site provision for them to enjoy regular sports.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has a well presented prospectus which includes all the information required by the regulations. Reports are produced each term which show the attainment levels for each student in core subjects and information about their achievement in all other subjects studied. The school involves parents and carers in any reviews as appropriate. It works closely with care staff to support planned links with parents, including those which may precede a young person's return home.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints procedure which fully meets the requirements.

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 that listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- provide further training in child-protection for the designated person in order to comply fully with DfES guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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:

- consider further developing the curriculum to include some short, accredited units which will allow students to achieve academic success during short-term placements
- improve strategies to ensure that students arrive on time for the start of the school day
- consider providing further administrative support to reduce the burden on teaching staff in managing the school office.

School details

Name of school	Ashmeads School		
DfES number	928/6069		
Unique reference number	133515		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 4	Total: 6
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 4	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,800		
Address of school	Buccleuch Farm Haigham Hill Burton Latimer Kettering Northamptonshire NN15 5PH		
Telephone number	01536 725998		
Email address	buccleuchfarmschool@sedgemoor.net		
Teacher in charge	Mr Adam Snook		
Proprietor	Mr Richard Hamlin		
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI		
Dates of inspection	01-02 May 2007		