

ISP Sittingbourne

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	886/6065
Unique Reference Number	119015
Inspection number	301539
Inspection dates	6-7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker AI

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

ISP Sittingbourne is one of two small independent special schools owned and run by their parent company *Integrated Services Programme (ISP)*, which cares for and educates young people looked after by nine local authorities in South East England. The great majority of students live in ISP foster homes. They are aged between 11 and 16 and have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as their primary need, although many have additional specific learning and/or psychiatric difficulties. Most have been excluded from their previous mainstream schools and many have had irregular attendance and become disaffected by education by the time they arrive. All but one have statements of special educational need. Students' attainment on entry is generally below that expected for their age and the great majority have particular difficulties with social communication and basic skills.

Evaluation of the school

ISP Sittingbourne is a good school that successfully achieves its aim to *meet the educational needs of each young person within the educational environment that is most appropriate to their abilities, aptitudes and needs*. Its sensitive, highly flexible approach helps students to regain their lost confidence and self esteem, ensuring that all leave with qualifications that they had never expected they were capable of gaining. Placing authorities and other agencies value the high quality care and academic guidance it provides and the effective work it does in improving the life chances of the young people it serves. The school complies with all the independent schools' regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. Its breadth and relevance enable students to study the full range of National Curriculum subjects and have their attainments accredited through GCSE examinations and the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Students' progress is good throughout their time at school, so that their achievements in these courses are impressive, certainly well above the expectations for looked after children across the United Kingdom, and reflect the high ambitions and commitment of all staff. An ex-student's comment that reflects a consensus

throughout the school was: *'Without their belief in me and their enormous influence on my life I wouldn't have been so successful and got where I have'.*

There is a strong focus on developing students' speaking and listening skills, so that they can understand and apply the vocabulary of each subject and become confident communicators and self-advocates. The exceptional collaborative work of speech and language therapists makes a significant contribution in this. Appropriate importance is placed on the key skills of literacy and numeracy across all subjects and many students make impressive progress in improving these capabilities. Development of the other key skill of information and communication technology (ICT) is less effective because the current quality of both equipment and software constrains planning and provision, particular of an entitlement to study for an accredited qualification. Students are prepared well for the experiences and responsibilities of adult life through a highly effective programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), focused careers guidance and sensitively planned work experience placements. The school has clear plans to develop further the extensive outdoor facilities available at its sister school in Teynham for horticulture, animal husbandry and other practical studies, in order to offer more structured vocational courses. All students move on from school to college or employment incorporating an educational or further training element.

The quality of teaching is good. The very effective working partnerships between teachers, their able assistants, a team of therapists and other professionals provide students with the support necessary to help them to learn successfully. Detailed planning, informed by thorough and effective assessment practice, ensures that students' programmes of education and care are well integrated and adapted to meet their individual needs. All staff are flexible and constructively responsive to the often unpredictable nature of some students' behaviour. The positive ethos nurtured by the headteacher and her deputy across the school encourages good behaviour and mutual respect. Students are involved in negotiating their own challenging targets and evaluating progress towards them. A structured points system provides short and longer term motivation for students to do their best. Lessons are lively and engaging, reflecting teachers' good subject knowledge, high quality relationships and personalised attention. Those students who find the demands of classroom lessons difficult to cope with are provided with an education otherwise programme on the Teynham site. They appreciate the sensitive one-to-one, practical nature of this provision, which enables them to develop a more constructive attitude to learning and is successful in gradually integrating them back into normal studies.

Good use is made of wider community facilities and students benefit from a range of enrichment activities that include clubs, sporting and residential opportunities and contribute effectively to students developing a healthy lifestyle.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students express clear appreciation of the pastoral support provided, and recognise the value of the second chance they have been given to make up for their troubled backgrounds. Many feel that they have been 'rescued' through the school's commitment to help them develop the skills necessary to function effectively in society. When combined with their academic success, those that can are then well equipped to return to mainstream education.

The strong PSHCE programme reinforces students' moral and social development well. It successfully addresses their prime needs, so that they become more effective members of their communities and wider society and have a much better chance to be productive and self supporting citizens beyond school. Students' views are sought on how the school is run and they are encouraged to express their opinions whenever appropriate. Plans for a school council are well advanced and representatives have already been elected. This valuing of their contribution to the school results in students developing very positive attitudes, a sense of justice and fairness and a clear enjoyment of all that is on offer. By the same token, although attendance is slightly below the national average overall, often due to difficulties for students around their foster care placements, there are impressive improvements for the majority of students, many of whom had previously rarely attended school prior to attending ISP.

Behaviour is good because there is a consistent, supportive approach to managing challenge. The range of supportive therapies readily available are a key factor in helping students to work through their anger and other difficulties, so that they can develop effective coping strategies.

Regular assemblies and the wider curriculum, including the time students spend at Teynham, help them to develop their spiritual and cultural sensitivities well. They are properly prepared for life in a multicultural society

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. A very high priority is given to safeguarding their security and a wide range of support is provided to meet any particular needs in relation to their emotional wellbeing. A comprehensive range of policies covers all possible eventualities and staff have a strong commitment to evaluating and securing all risks both in school and out in the community. There are rigorous arrangements to identify and deal with any bullying or racist behaviour and careful recording of all incidents and any sanctions applied.

Good arrangements are made to promote students' healthy lifestyles. Good eating habits and regular physical activity are encouraged as part of a daily routine. Staff do their best to help students develop an understanding of the importance of avoiding

the potential damage of smoking, drug use and alcohol abuse.

The school fulfils all its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has thorough arrangements in place to ensure that staffing and recruitment procedures comply fully with and follow the most recent safeguarding guidance in relation to Criminal Records Bureau checks and the upkeep of a centralised record. Child protection and other necessary arrangements are secure and effective.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are of good quality, are well maintained and enable students to learn effectively and safely. Recent high quality refurbishment has ensured that there are sufficient, adequately sized and well presented classrooms and other spaces for a range of tutorials and therapies, practical subjects, including art and design, design technology, science, and a large hall for whole school activities. An omission, commented on by some students, is a lack of facilities for food technology. The high quality facilities at the Teynham site provide well for environmental science, outdoor and sporting activities. The school uses other community facilities well to extend curriculum opportunities as necessary.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is good. Brochures and other documentation give a clear, accurate and up to date picture of the school. Carers are kept properly informed about students' day-to-day and longer term progress and there are suitable arrangements in place to share other important knowledge. Placing authorities and other agencies comment favourably on the quality and flow of necessary information.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets all requirements. Any complaints received are properly handled and suitably documented.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

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:

- improve the resources for ICT to ensure that:
 - this basic skill can be properly incorporated across all subjects
 - students can study for and gain recognition for an accredited course
- consolidate plans to develop vocational training opportunities.

School details

Name of school	Integrated Services Programme		
DfES number	886/6065		
Unique reference number	119015		
Type of school	Special day		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1993		
Age range of pupils	11 - 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 14	Girls: 1	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 13	Girls: 1	Total: 14
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19,760		
Address of school	Church Street Sittingbourne Kent ME10 3EG		
Telephone number	01795422044		
Fax number	01795477088		
Email address	senior.school@ispchildcare.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Sharon McDermott		
Proprietor	Integrated Services Programme		
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker AI		
Dates of inspection	6-7 June 2007		