

Coln House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115812
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312065
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Julia Coop

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Wilkinson
Headteacher	C Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2001
School address	Horcott Road Fairford GL7 4DB
Telephone number	01285 712308
Fax number	01285 713011

Age group	9–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. An inspection of the boarding provision was carried out by an Ofsted Social Care Inspector.

Description of the school

Coln House is a residential school. Virtually all of the pupils are boarders. It admits pupils from throughout the county and from some neighbouring local authorities. Most pupils come from low socio-economic backgrounds. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs because of their severe and complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and a few have additional learning needs associated with especially low literacy skills. Increasing numbers start school with mental health issues. The majority of pupils are boys, but the school also admits a small number of girls. A small proportion of pupils are looked after by various local authorities. Many pupils arrive throughout the school year having missed substantial periods of schooling or following a permanent exclusion. The school has gained Arts Mark Gold, Sports Mark and International School awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Coln House is an effective school with some outstanding features. Its major strength lies in the way that it very successfully turns around pupils' lives. Parents are fulsome in their praise. The comment made by one parent that 'Coln House has given my son the education and guidance to have the chance of leading a normal life' is echoed by many others. Within a happy, extremely supportive environment, pupils who arrive troubled and with negative attitudes to learning leave as mature and very sensible young adults who not only enjoy learning more, but also have a keen sense of right and wrong. This is due, in part, to excellent relationships and the outstanding care, support and guidance that the pupils' receive, successfully instilling a sense of pride in themselves and their achievements. The pupils recognise what the school has done for them stating, 'Our behaviour is much better now 'cos of all the support and help we get.' Consequently, pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and are in a much better position to access learning.

Pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils, make good progress in their learning and achieve well. All leave school with at least one externally validated academic accreditation, including GCSE. This success is down to good teaching, an effective curriculum and a highly successful and consistent approach to managing behaviour across the school and residential provision. However, despite receiving additional support, a small minority of pupils still struggle with reading. This is because staff do not accurately pinpoint the pupils' underlying difficulties in order to make the teaching of basic reading skills even more relevant. A wide range of creative and sporting activities, as well as many business enterprise schemes and opportunities to develop independent living skills, are part of school life. Together with many excellent opportunities to help in the local community these enable pupils to achieve success in a variety of ways so they are very well prepared for life beyond Coln House. The Young Citizen's Award from Fairford Town Council is a testament to the high regard the pupils are held within the community, and well deserved recognition of all the hard work they put into contributing to town life.

At the centre of the school's success are determined and effective leadership and management. The headteacher provides an outstanding pastoral lead, championing the cause of the pupils and their families. Together with his senior leaders, they form an effective team who have an accurate view about how well the school is doing. All staff are fully committed to the school and work extremely hard, but the monitoring role of the subject coordinators is not yet fully developed. Governors are very supportive. Some are knowledgeable and work very closely with the school and residential provision but, although plans are in hand to develop their skills further, the school knows that most are better at support than checking on how well the school is doing. In addition, although the school tracks and analyses pupils' behaviour exceptionally well using a very effective computer program, the system for tracking pupils' academic progress is unwieldy and time consuming. Therefore, although it has a wealth of data about learning, it is not as easy to analyse how well groups of pupils are doing to help raise achievement further. Nevertheless, there is a culture of high expectations, a track record of good improvements and many good links with outside agencies that ensure the school is well placed to continue to move forward.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Provision for boarding complements the work of the school extremely well. The Ofsted social care inspection found that the provision meets the National Minimum Standards and exceeds them in some areas. Staff provide a very caring, welcoming and homely environment and there is a seamless link between school and boarding provision. Consequently, there is a consistent approach to managing behaviour, which, coupled with highly positive relationships, helps change pupils' attitudes. The 24-hour curriculum provides an exceptional range of exciting activities for pupils in the evenings that make a very significant contribution to other features of pupils' personal development. The pupils make excellent progress in developing community skills by taking on more responsibilities within their 'houses' and are very much members of the town community. They talk proudly about their Riverside Project where they are renovating the riverbank in the school grounds for the benefit of the local community. Residential life also makes a strong contribution to preparing them for independent living when they leave school. Older pupils take turns to stay in the cottage where they learn to be self-sufficient and live on a small budget. Provision in the residence supports the overall achievements of the pupils well through providing extra support for their school work in the evenings.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of those pupils who struggle with reading by more accurately diagnosing their difficulties and using a wider variety of teaching approaches.
- Develop the monitoring role of subject coordinators and streamline the procedures for collecting and collating data on pupils' academic achievements so that the information can be more efficiently used to raise achievement.
- Develop the skills of governors so that they can check on the school's work more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Many pupils have missed a lot of school in the past and face considerable barriers to learning. From this disadvantaged starting point, pupils, including the small number of girls, make good progress and achieve well overall because most teachers are adept at making learning more relevant. Consequently, pupils successfully re-engage in the learning process and begin to make up the lost ground. Vulnerable pupils also make good progress because they and their carers or families receive personalised and invaluable support. Achievement against individual targets is good for the vast majority of pupils. By the end of Year 11, all pupils attain nationally recognised academic accreditations and they do particularly well in information and communication technology and in practical subjects such as art or physical education. In 2007, all leavers went on to start a college course or gained employment. However, by the time they leave, standards are still low compared to the national average. Pupils and parents are proud of the progress they are making, which they say is 'much better than at their other schools'. Despite this achievement, there are a few pupils who only make satisfactory progress in reading and struggle to gain basic levels of competency. Although these pupils say that 'extra reading lessons help us' they also say that they find reading difficult because 'it's tricky'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The strength of the school is the outstanding progress pupils make in improving their behaviour and in becoming increasingly mature and responsible. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and seen routinely in the trust and respect pupils show to staff, the concern they show for each other, the friendships that quickly develop and the spontaneous celebrations of good work. The relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding and help pupils feel very secure and comfortable. One new pupil typically said, 'I love it here, the staff are brilliant and I don't get angry anymore.' Pupils know that they can go to their key worker when they are troubled and talk to them about any matter. This means that most pupils quickly learn to make safer choices such as regarding substance misuse although one or two still succumb to this temptation when they are at home. They are extremely proud of the produce they grow and healthier menus they devise so that they very successfully develop healthier eating habits. They attend regularly, which for many is a dramatic improvement, enjoy most of their lessons and take a full part in the wide range of interesting activities and visits. They develop an excellent understanding about living within the community. Without exception, all pupils participate willingly and enthusiastically in school and community life, taking responsibility for the chickens and selling their eggs, helping to cut logs to sell and saving the tokens they earn to buy personal items or gifts. They also do extremely well in their work experience. The pupils are extremely well prepared for adulthood because in all of these activities, they learn the value of money as well as hard work and commitment. Consequently, many are offered jobs when they leave.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are an oasis of calm because teachers and assistants work very well together and pupils really respect and value the individual support they receive. Most teachers are confident in the subjects they teach and are skilful at explaining what is expected of pupils. Effort is always recognised and praised, and in most lessons, no time is lost to develop learning because lessons begin as soon as pupils arrive and do not stop until the end, although occasionally the pace slows and lesson ends are rushed. In most lessons, activities are pitched at just the right level of challenge, with interesting activities that capture the pupils' attention so the pupils quickly improve their skills and knowledge. Occasionally, some pupils still struggle when reading and find letter sounds a difficult concept. On these occasions, staff do not have the specialist knowledge to accurately diagnose these pupils' underlying difficulties and they are not therefore able to tailor their teaching approaches to help plug the gaps in interesting but more relevant ways.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum successfully helps pupils to renew their enthusiasm for learning. Pupils demonstrate the extent of their academic progress through gaining success in GCSE and Entry Level courses. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 take part in the very well planned work experience programme. However, although plans are in hand, there are currently few opportunities for the pupils to gain nationally recognised accreditations in vocational subjects. In addition, aspects

of the English curriculum, such as the additional reading programme, require further development. Nevertheless, there are several strong features of the curriculum. These include the wide range of interesting activities planned by the care and school staff that provides a powerful and varied set of cohesive learning experiences, which enhance pupil confidence and self-esteem enormously. In addition, numerous residential experiences, business enterprise schemes, drama, a wealth of sports and adventure activities and participation in the Garden for life, and Eden project help in balancing academic study with work-related and other learning. One pupil stated, 'There are so many good things to do at this school, that we have no time to get into trouble.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The main reason that pupils improve their attitudes so dramatically is because of the excellent, consistently applied procedures for improving behaviour that include individual guidance from key workers and staff and the awarding of points and tokens for positive behaviour, achievement and effort. In addition, the detailed computerised records provide an extremely powerful vehicle to help staff adapt strategies so they can nip any potential negative patterns of behaviour in the bud. Parents overwhelmingly agree that the school is a 'wonderfully caring place'. As the parent of one girl commented, 'She is so much nicer to be around because she now knows the effect of her behaviour on others.' The provision for securing the safety and security of pupils is also effective. The school works very closely with parents and families, particularly of the more vulnerable pupils; home liaison is a vital part of the care and support that pupils and their families receive. A dedicated multi-agency group, including a wide range of outside agencies, meets regularly with the school to provide wrap-around support for any pupils causing particular concern. However, despite its best efforts, the school has had great difficulty in gaining specialised therapeutic support for the very small but growing number of pupils with complex mental health issues, although these pupils receive sensitive support and care from school staff. Well thought out individual targets for learning, helpful marking and regular slots to discuss their next steps in learning with a teacher, coupled with very effective careers guidance, provide specific help and support for individual pupils and successfully underpin the good progress most pupils make in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has worked tirelessly in his efforts to improve the life chances of all the pupils and ensure that all leave with the skills and attitudes to become productive members of society. This is achieved because he has created an environment where care and compassion are at the heart of everything the school does. All staff hold true to this aim and the school and its pupils have gone from strength to strength due to their combined efforts. The senior staff provide a good level of support and there is a strong team spirit that permeates right from the kitchen staff to senior leaders. However, on occasions the headteacher takes too much on his own shoulders. Subject leaders are keen to move forward on developing their areas of responsibility, but do not always have sufficient time to monitor their subjects. The school sets challenging targets both for improved behaviour and for learning because it has a wealth of data. However, the system for collecting and analysing the data on learning is burdensome. Although staff work hard and get there in the end the process is time consuming. This makes it more difficult

for subject leaders and other managers to ensure that any underperformance is picked up and quickly rectified.

The headteacher is adept at sourcing and directing resources to produce better outcomes for pupils. He has ensured that there have been continued improvements to the accommodation. It is a testament to the hard work of staff that the older classroom huts, being well past their sell by date, do not hinder learning. Governors play their part but not always as extensively as they might because some do not visit often enough.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Coln House School, Fairford, GL7 4DB

Thank you very much for the warm welcome we received when we visited your school. I would like to thank you for being so friendly to us when we spoke to you. I am very pleased to tell you that you go to a good school that has some outstanding features, including an excellent boarding unit.

- These are the most important things I found out about your school.
- You make good progress because the teaching you get is good.
- You enjoy coming to the school and attend school more often.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- You are very polite, thoughtful and very caring young people.
- The residential and school staff do a fantastic job in looking after you.
- You have a good curriculum and a fantastic range of extra things to do.
- You make a superb contribution to the town of Fairford.
- The school does an excellent job in getting you ready to leave school.
- You should be very proud of your excellent work on the Riverside and other special projects.
- Those who lead and manage your school work hard to make sure you receive a good education.
- To make your school even better, I have asked your headteacher to:
 - help some of you get even better at reading
 - develop an easier way to check on how well all of you learn, and make time for subject leaders to check on how things are going
 - make sure that the governors visit the school more often.

You can help by continuing to behave very well, continuing to try hard in lessons and making sure that you attend as often as you can. We wish you all the best of luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Julia Coop Lead inspector



29 November 2007

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