

Farleigh College

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	933/6195
Unique Reference Number	131016
Inspection number	316930
Inspection dates	6-7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Farleigh College is approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to provide education for young people with Asperger's syndrome aged between 11 and 17 years. Several have additional complex learning and behavioural needs and most have experienced failure in their previous schools. Currently there are 38 students on roll. Approximately three quarters are boys and all have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). Students come from homes across England and Wales and have their places funded by their local authorities. A small number attend as day students. The school occupies a former Georgian manor house and grounds approximately five miles from Frome in Somerset. It is in the ownership of The Priory Group which owns several other schools providing education for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school seeks to provide *'a safe, secure and predictable environment in which young people come to understand their own areas of difficulty and learn skills and techniques in order to overcome them'*. It was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2002 and by Ofsted's Children's Directorate in December 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Farleigh College provides a satisfactory quality of education with some good features. The quality of care is good. The respectful and understanding approach of staff underpins students' good behaviour and good personal development. The quality of the curriculum and teaching are satisfactory, which leads to students making satisfactory progress. Whilst providing well for higher achieving students, lessons do not always engage sufficiently a small number of students with complex needs. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. Strong leadership has ensured that good progress has been made since the last inspection. The school meets almost all the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and in some respects it is good. It takes close account of the National Curriculum and is particularly successful in providing a wide range of subjects for study by higher achieving students. As well as mathematics, English, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and design and technology (DT), additional subjects include astronomy, photography,

psychology and sociology. Many of these subjects are studied during 'extension' sessions which afford older students a good opportunity to follow their particular interests. The curriculum is less successful in meeting the needs of a small but significant number of students who have complex communication and behavioural difficulties. As a result, some of these students are not engaged fully or do not always attend lessons. The school is not able to offer food technology due to the lack of appropriate facilities. Physical education takes place in the school field and at local sports and leisure centres.

The curriculum is planned well to ensure students in mixed-age classes study different topics as they move up the school. Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and individual counselling are provided to meet fully the requirements of students' statements of SEN. Additionally, a large number benefit from individual support provided by a specialist literacy teacher. Students receive good preparation for leaving school through well-planned work experience placements, careers advice and introductory visits to local colleges. The school has recently established its post-16 provision, which is satisfactory. The school is appropriately seeking to extend vocational aspects of the programme through strengthening links with a local college. Older students develop their independent living skills well in the residential areas, for example when they live in semi-independent flats and cook their own meals. The full potential of this work is not realised since it is not linked closely to the day curriculum.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features. Lessons are planned thoroughly and include different activities for students with various levels of ability. ICT is used well to support learning and each pupil has regular access to a computer. Teachers, teaching assistants and therapists establish positive relationships with students. Praise and encouragement are used effectively and help most students to concentrate and to work hard. Expectations are generally high and teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. A few staff who are new to the school are developing their knowledge of how young people with Asperger's syndrome learn most effectively. Staff benefit from the school's good professional development arrangements which have been recognised through the Investors in People Award.

Teachers use assessment data linked to National Curriculum levels to monitor students' progress and to set targets for future examination grades. Overall, students make satisfactory progress with their learning. The school is successful in ensuring most students achieve several passes in GCSE examinations each year. For many, this represents significant progress in relation to their previous school history. As one parent commented, 'I could not wish for a better school. Without it my child would not have received any education'. The progress of students with more complex needs is less secure. Teachers keep daily notes on their progress in lessons and employ a range of strategies to manage their behaviour. However, behaviour and communication programmes are not sufficiently detailed to monitor closely the

progress of these students and to check whether current strategies are working effectively.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good. The personal development of students is given a high priority by the school and residential staff and is seen as an essential element in the school's provision. Relationships between staff and students are good. The staff encourage and support the students, who generally respond by trying hard at their work.

The school recognises that many young people will arrive with low self-esteem and works hard to develop and foster their belief in themselves and their capacity to achieve. Students have a growing sense of right and wrong behaviour and value the merit system which rewards their efforts to improve. Behaviour is good. Daily assemblies and the weekly 'positive' assemblies give public recognition to individual achievement. Students are successful in improving their social skills in targeted groups run by the speech and language therapist. The counselling offered to individuals ensures direct and flexible support for personal development which is accessible throughout the term and, where appropriate, during vacation periods.

Students are encouraged to contribute to the life of the school through the recently re-established school council. Those seeking to be members were able to articulate why they wanted such additional responsibility and how they might use it for the benefit of others. Students have been involved in raising money for various charities. The curriculum in religious education contributes to their understanding and appreciation of diversity by studying other people's beliefs and values. Work in citizenship and social studies supports students' knowledge of life in the world around them and is enriched through regular visits out of school; for example to the theatre, concerts and places of historical interest. Students speak proudly of their success in completing work experience placements which effectively helps to develop their skills for future employment.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. Staff across the school display an understanding and caring approach in their relationships with students. The residential provision makes an effective contribution to the high quality of care of students, a view supported by the latest Children's Directorate report. Students appreciate the relaxed and homely atmosphere which prevails in the residential areas. Residential and education staff share information well each day and meet regularly to discuss any students causing concern. Good procedures are in place to manage any challenging behaviour and to ensure students are treated with dignity and respect. Students develop an understanding of healthy lifestyles through the healthy food provided in the dining room and by studying food topics in the curriculum. Students take part in a wide variety of physical exercise, ranging from

walking to more challenging pursuits such as climbing. Appropriate personal, social and health education topics promote students' safety and positive relationships. Girls are given additional individual support to discuss any specific issues relating to their care and guidance.

The school has good arrangements for safeguarding students. Staff receive appropriate training in child protection and understand the procedures. Risk assessments are conducted on individual pupils and appropriate levels of staffing allocated to take account of their needs. Good health and safety policies and procedures are in place which include regular fire drills and the testing of electrical equipment. The school keeps admissions and attendance registers although the admissions register does not comply fully with the most recent regulations. The school has improved access for disabled users and has drawn up plans for further improvement.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has thorough arrangements in place for the recruitment and appointment of staff. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

The standard of the premises and accommodation are satisfactory. Most students reside in the main school building with a small number of older students living in a house approximately four miles away. Many students share rooms which occasionally creates tension between some, given their learning difficulties. Classrooms are generally small but of adequate size for the number of students using them. There are specialist rooms for teaching science and art. The school uses facilities in the community to provide PE and a well-equipped workshop approximately two miles away to teach aspects of design and technology. The school does not have a specialist room for teaching food technology, although some students cook in the residential units. There is no designated room for attending to pupils who are ill, and although there are a sufficient number of toilets for students, there are too few for the number of staff on site. The school is currently embarking on a building programme to extend the accommodation and increase toilet facilities. Good space for outside recreation is provided by a large lawned area with picnic tables and by access to adjoining playing fields.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a weekly progress report to parents. A further report at the end of each term gives detailed information on students' academic progress, measured against National Curriculum levels. On entry, students receive a handbook which provides helpful information about life at the school. Through its prospectus and other documents, the school provides all of the required information for parents,

carers and others. In response to the questionnaires sent out prior to the inspection, the majority of parents expressed positive views about the work of the school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy which has recently been updated to meet the regulations. Parents, carers and others are informed in the school prospectus that they can receive a copy of the policy on request.

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:

- provide the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i))
- ensure that there are effective teaching strategies for pupils with complex behavioural and communication difficulties (paragraph 1(3)(c)).

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

- maintain its admissions register in accordance with the Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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

- ensure there are sufficient washrooms for staff in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- use more detailed programmes in lessons to monitor the progress of students who have complex behavioural and communication needs.

School details

Name of school	Farleigh College		
DCSF number	933/6195		
Unique reference number	131016		
Type of school	Residential special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1996		
Age range of pupils	11-17		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 28	Girls: 10	Total: 38
Number of boarders	Boys: 23	Girls: 8	Total: 31
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 28	Girls: 10	Total: 38
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,297 - £76,452		
Annual fees (boarders)	£59,920 - £95,151		
Address of school	Newbury Manor Newbury Nr Mells Frome Somerset BA11 3RG		
Telephone number	01373814980		
Fax number	01373814984		
Email address	anthonymulcahy@priorygroup.com		
Headteacher	Mr A R Mulcahy		
Proprietor	The Priory Group		
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	6-7 November 2007		