

National Institute of Conductive Education

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF registration number	330/6080
Unique reference number	103588
Inspection number	318152
Inspection dates	12-13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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

The inspection of the school 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

The National Institute of Conductive Education (NICE) includes a co-educational independent day special school providing for children with physical difficulties and wide-ranging learning difficulties, aged from infancy to eleven years old. NICE is part of the Foundation for Conductive Education, which works with children and adults with a range of problems affecting their mobility such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and strokes. The methodology of Conductive Education was developed in Hungary in the 1940s. It aims to help children and adults learn how to overcome problems with movement so they can lead more active and independent lives. The practice relies on specialised professionals called Conductors who have degrees in Conductive Education obtained in Hungary or at Wolverhampton University. Their training incorporates aspects of teacher training. Some NICE Conductors have dual Conductor/qualified teacher status.

Children under three can attend a parent-child group at the school for one or two sessions per week. Children aged three to 11 can attend full time; for a fixed block of time (often repeated annually); or part time. Some of the part-time children attend mainstream school for the rest of their education. The Foundation is also funding a two year project at Great Barr primary school, situated a few miles from NICE, where Conductive Education is provided to children with physical difficulties on their school roll.

Evaluation of the school

NICE provides a good quality education, with outstanding care and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, they make good academic progress, and outstanding progress in personal development and the development of physical skills. The aspects identified for improvement in the previous inspection have been addressed well, and the school now meets all but one of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. All aspects are effectively supported by the headteacher, by well established practices such as induction and by an external

education consultant who attends the school weekly to provide advice and monitor the school's work. The headteacher and lead Conductors provide extensive support for those training and for new Conductors, some of whom arrive from Hungary with limited English language and knowledge of the English education system. Parents are very happy with the quality of education provided and the positive effect it has on their children.

The curriculum is good. A main aim of the school is to equip its pupils with the necessary skills to move on from NICE, and to be included in mainstream education wherever possible. Consequently, the curriculum is taken from, and runs in parallel to, the Foundation Stage and National Curricula to give pupils the best chance of inclusion. Planning and classroom practice, however, indicate that the most recent initiatives such as the new primary strategy for literacy and mathematics have not yet been incorporated into the curriculum. Personal, social and health education is not provided as a discrete subject, but is an integrated cornerstone of Conductive Education and threaded throughout the school's work. A range of interesting activities, such as a visit to the local Sea Life Centre, enhance the curriculum and support learning effectively.

Curriculum planning is clear and logical. Long term plans outline the areas and topics to be covered in each subject over a year, and these are supported by comprehensive medium term plans giving more detail. Short term plans are written for every lesson and include learning objectives for each child. Learning is evaluated after every lesson and the information is used to plan the objectives for the next lesson and to inform the detailed reports written on children's progress in curriculum subjects. Assessment is good and all methods show that children make good academic progress. Progress in their physical skills and personal development is outstanding. Each child has a very detailed individual Conductive Education plan in which targets are set and regularly reviewed. The school also uses a commercial scheme to assess children's developing skills, knowledge and understanding in areas of learning and subjects of the curriculum. However, information from this is not used to the full, for example, to underpin academic target-setting, monitor progress or set whole school targets for improvement.

The quality of teaching is good, and some is excellent. Practice is extremely diverse, as Conductors work with very differing groups. Conductors work with one- and two-year-olds with their parents, showing them how to encourage and motivate their children to learn some of the skills that most children achieve naturally, such as reaching out, sitting up from lying, and walking. In class, teaching ensures that the children maintain and develop their physical skills throughout sessions that also promote academic learning. At times though, the pace of learning slows as children wait for others to complete their tasks before further work is given. Common to all sessions in NICE is group work, so children learn from and encourage one another, together with repetitive song to establish understanding and state intention such as 'I am standing, I am standing' to the tune of *Frère Jacques*. The children enjoy song

and their music lessons. However, art work tends to lack vibrancy and muted displays are sometimes difficult for children with visual difficulties to interpret.

At the local primary school, children are withdrawn from class for one hour a week for an intensive session on managing and minimising their physical disabilities. The Conductor also advises class teachers and assistants, and by watching the children in their classes, suggests ways of helping them to achieve further. This is extremely successful and the children make rapid and sometimes astounding progress, for example in developing the use of their hands and moving freely and independently around school and in the playground.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

This aspect of the school's provision is outstanding. The children very much enjoy school and parents' questionnaires indicate that this is their view too. The children's confidence and self-esteem grow rapidly because they feel included and valued and achieve success. Their attendance is excellent in all settings, although understandably affected by the frailty of some and their need to attend numerous medical appointments. Behaviour is good and individual behavioural difficulties are very well addressed by the staff. The children's attitudes to learning are outstanding. Determination to succeed is shown clearly on their faces, and their pride in what they do is equally evident. Spiritual, moral and social development are excellent although greater emphasis could be placed on raising the children's multicultural awareness, for example, through art. In NICE, the children are motivated by each other in the group activities and share each others' success. This is part of the Conductive Education philosophy. At Great Barr, pupils' developing skills enable them to be fully included and accepted by their peers. Children in all groups are well prepared for the next step in their education and for taking their place in, and contributing to, the local and wider community. For example, some wrote a letter to the local government about ways to make the environment safer. The children learn to communicate, solve problems and be as independent as possible. They are taught to value and appreciate one another because they are respected and valued themselves, and they learn to be part of small and large groups, and society as a whole, often from a position of previous isolation.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the children is outstanding. Children are exceptionally well cared for physically and emotionally, which has a very positive effect on their personal development. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of this aspect of the school's work. Careful risk assessments are made of all activities and venues to be visited, and health and safety and arrangements for first aid are suitably addressed. The school has good procedures to minimise fire risk and weaknesses in this area, identified at the

previous inspection, have been rectified. There is a strong focus on thorough induction of new staff and continuous professional development. Consequently, staff are well trained and up to date in matters such as child protection and safe handling of children. Good policies and procedures address any challenging behaviour and the school seeks and welcomes advice from other professionals. Bullying is not tolerated, and there have been no incidents in recent years.

The school works hard to improve children's health and keep them safe. The Conductive Education philosophy encourages as much independent physical activity as possible and there is an appropriate emphasis on safety. Parents are taught how to support their children to help themselves. Children are taught to dress, wash their hands and brush their teeth at appropriate times, and toilet training is given high priority. The curriculum includes topics on healthy eating, and food and snacks served throughout the day are all healthy and include items such as yoghurt and soft fruit. Pupils of all ages are caring and considerate of one another. A delightful example of this was seen in an encounter between two toddlers in the parent-child group. Each worked harder to knock down their tower of bricks when they could stand next to one another and enjoy each other's success.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have had an enhanced check with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. A range of other checks are carried out before any staff appointment, although up to this point, a check on medical fitness had not been included. This omission has now been rectified.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are of good quality. The school was purpose-built twelve years ago, and was designed for the effective delivery of Conductive Education. It still meets this specification. Classrooms are exceptionally spacious to accommodate the extensive range of equipment required. Some rooms can be reduced in size by partition doors, for example, for small group work, which helps the children learn and concentrate. Toilet arrangements ensure privacy and dignity, and the school has plans to improve them further. The grounds are attractive and recently enhanced by a sensory area provided by a corporate sponsor. The grounds provide a good mix of hard surface, grass and play equipment set on a safety surface. All areas of the school and grounds are very well maintained and in excellent decorative order.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, local authorities and other interested people meets all requirements. The school has an attractive, informative prospectus with some loose-leaf additions which keeps it up to date. It includes an extensive list of additional information and policies that are available on request. The prospectus and further information about the school are also accessible via the Foundation for Conductive Education's website, which covers all aspects of its work. Returns of both the inspection and the school's own questionnaires indicate that parents are very pleased with the quality of information they receive. They are kept informed about school events by frequent contact with staff, newsletters and photographic displays, and are extremely positive about the quality and frequency of written reports on their children's progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, fair complaints procedure. Inspection questionnaires indicate that parents and local authorities understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints, but there have been none in recent years.

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 suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- Before the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, ensure that a check to ensure their medical fitness for the job has been carried out (paragraph 4(2) (a)).

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:

- Raise staff awareness of the latest teaching methodologies and curriculum initiatives in special and mainstream schools so that relevant aspects can be incorporated into the school's work.

- Use the data collected on pupils' attainment in curriculum subjects more effectively to monitor their progress and plan for their academic achievement, and to underpin the setting of challenging whole-school targets.

School details

Name of school	National Institute of Conductive Education		
DCSF number	330/6080		
Unique reference number	103588		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1987		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 2	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 13	Girls: 4	Total: 17
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12834 - £41856		
Address of school	Cannon Hill House Russell Road Moseley Birmingham West Midlands B13 8RD		
Telephone number	01214491569		
Fax number	01214491611		
Email address	wendy@conductive-education.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Baker		
Proprietor	Mr Roger David Wood		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth AI		
Dates of inspection	12-13 September 2007		