

The Yellow House School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	881/6048
Unique Reference Number	134398
Inspection number	319762
Inspection dates	2-3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI

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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

The Yellow House is an independent special school which opened on a site in Sible Hedingham, Essex in 2002. A second site in Clare, Suffolk opened in 2006. In both cases, these centres are in former shops in villages. There is provision for up to 15 full time students aged between 13 and 17 across the two centres. There are currently four full time and 10 part time students attending. All the students have a statement of special educational needs to address their complex needs, which include autistic spectrum disorders and associated behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. All students have had a disrupted education and have had poor attendance at other schools. The school aims to provide an alternative curriculum and a therapeutic learning environment which is designed to meet students' individual needs. It aims to promote the personal growth of the students, to enable them to take increased responsibility for themselves and to improve their academic attainment.

Evaluation of the school

The Yellow House School provides a good quality of education and takes good care of its students. The headteacher leads a staff team who share her passion for enabling young people, who have previously had difficult experiences of school, to enjoy success in their learning and to gain in self confidence. The school is successful in meeting its aims and is particularly successful in promoting young people's personal development and helping them to improve their behaviour and communication skills. It also enables them to achieve academic success. Students are pleased to be at the school and their parents and local authorities are pleased with the provision. It meets most of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The school provides a good curriculum to meet the specific needs of the individual young people. The progress made in lessons and academic achievement demonstrated over time is good and some young people make outstanding gains in developing their social skills. This is as a result of a therapeutic approach to meeting their needs rather than the strength of individual components of the provision. One of the placing authorities described the school as being 'energetic and creative' in its approach. Staff work hard, and successfully, to provide a curriculum and learning environment which enables students to succeed.

The curriculum demonstrates breadth over time and is good for a number of reasons. There is close attention to matching the requirements set out in students' statements of special educational need with a flexible approach to meeting their interests and changing circumstances. Good attention is given to basic skills and there is thorough preparation for students' future economic wellbeing. A good range of carefully selected trips enriches the curriculum. There is a brief curriculum statement and the school follows published schemes of work. However, there is insufficient detail about an overall approach to each subject, particularly for students at Key Stage 3. The strong emphasis on developing good social skills and awareness through personal social and health education (PSHE) is a significant strength.

The school works hard to ensure that students who have gaps in their education are able to attain at age-appropriate levels when they leave school. It carries out transition reviews and arranges work experience locally. The amount of time most students spend at the school represents a significant achievement. However, some students have not built up the number of hours they attend sufficiently and many are not receiving a full-time education.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall because they result in consistently good progress. Young people are almost always interested and focused on their work and relationships are good or better. The headteacher has appointed staff who, although in most cases not qualified teachers, are qualified in specialist fields of therapeutic work with adolescents and are skilful in engaging young people and promoting their learning. Work programmes are highly individualised, clearly derived from the targets in students' individual education plans (IEPs) and discussed at regular meetings. However, this is rarely formalised into individual lesson plans. In the best teaching there are good opportunities for speaking and listening and computers are used effectively to support students' learning. Work is linked well to real life situations to help students apply their learning. Where teaching is less effective this is because there are insufficient plans setting out clear objectives for the lesson and there are not enough opportunities for students to take responsibility. In some cases work is undemanding, relying too much on copying and the use of work sheets. There is a satisfactory range of classroom resources available and a small library on each site with newspapers and magazines available.

The school assesses students carefully on entry, using standardised tests to establish their academic levels, and provides a programme suited to their needs which enables them to fill in gaps in their education and achieve in line with their peers by the end of Key Stage 4. Staff have had training on formative assessment but this is not always evident in lessons. They do, however, share information regularly face-to-face. The school is good at formally recording learning outcomes from lessons, but there are only emergent written systems for setting objectives that form the basis for lesson plans for the weekly programme.

Evidence of good progress is seen by the external accreditation obtained by students, including GCSE and ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation

Network) and by how they steadily achieve higher levels in adult literacy and numeracy qualifications. It is also seen in students' improved attendance, their good behaviour and in the gains they make in their social communication and confidence. Progress against IEP targets is monitored thoroughly and there are daily sheets, collated termly, which show students' success in their work and behaviour. The school does not have a formal system for tracking progress which clearly demonstrates overall gains.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good. The social and moral aspects of their development are particularly effective and enable them to make very good gains in their personal development. Students are expected to treat others with respect, and they meet this expectation both in classrooms and in the good opportunities to socialise on site with staff and their peers. These opportunities to practise social skills are extended by visits to local shops, on other trips and when on work experience. As a result of the concerted and consistent work of staff the students' behaviour is good, and outstanding in individual cases. This is particularly notable given the students' previous difficulties. Their spiritual development is satisfactory. As part of the work of the school to improve the students' self awareness, they are encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and situation and receive good support from staff to do this. They have opportunities to consider the beliefs of other faith groups and make visits to local churches and to a Hindu temple. The school promotes increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, a multicultural society. Students study issues of race and discrimination as part of the PSHE curriculum. Cultural development is promoted well through the study of the lives of different groups, such as when studying the culture of those living in the rain forests. Students also benefit from trips to art galleries, museums, and the cinema. Students' attendance has improved from a previous low base. Although many students only attend part time, they attend regularly and clearly enjoy being at the school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare health and safety of the students is good. The school takes good care of students and they are supervised well throughout the school day. It carries out careful risk assessments for individuals and for trips, and ensures it obtains parental permission for a range of activities, including taking photographs and for trips. There are clear protocols for staff when making home visits. Staff are fully aware of child protection procedures and the school's policy meets the requirements. However, this policy is not implemented fully as currently no member of staff has had recent designated teacher training and other staff require updated training. The school benefits from having members of staff who are trained nurses. Most staff have had recent first aid training and there are clear policies and procedures for first aid and for administering medicines. Health and safety and sex and relationships education are clear elements of the school's curriculum. As part of this provision the school

promotes healthy eating, and raises awareness about the dangers of substance abuse. Discussion with students shows that they understand these dangers. There are regular opportunities for students to take exercise, and these currently include swimming and golf. Careful records are kept on students' files of any significant incidents. The school keeps attendance registers thoroughly but some of the required details are missing from the admissions register. The school does not fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as it has not written a 3 year plan to improve accessibility.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has clear processes for checking the suitability of staff although in one recent case it has not carried out all the necessary checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is on two sites, both of which are former antique shops in listed seventeenth century buildings in villages. The school chose these buildings to provide calm and safe sites. While the sites are attractively decorated and do provide a good environment to promote learning and social development, they also present challenges in meeting the regulations in a number of areas. There is no sick room on either site. Neither kitchen has a sink for washing hands which is separate from that used for food preparation. The floor covering at the Clare site is not good enough on some uneven floors. There is no outside grassed or paved recreational area on either site and no space to develop such an area and the school makes regular use of local recreational areas to address this. There is a specialist art room on both sites.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information and sets out its philosophy and approach very clearly in a helpful information pack. There is a strong focus on family liaison and each family has a named member of staff as a primary contact point. This contact includes fortnightly home visits and regular phone calls between parents and staff. Parents receive informative termly reports about their child's progress and attainment and are fully involved in review processes. Both parents and placing authorities are very pleased with the support given to the students and to the whole family with one parent noting that the school goes 'way beyond their remit' to do this.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints policy which fully meets the regulations.

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:

- develop its written curriculum policy to include appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement it effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- provide full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (paragraph 1(2)(a)(i))
- ensure lessons are well planned and that effective teaching methods and suitable activities are used (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:

- implement its written policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) by ensuring staff attend the required child protection training (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references and take such information into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4 (2)(a)).

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

- provide (on both sites) appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l))
- provide (on both sites) a separate sink in the kitchen to ensure adequate facilities for the hygienic preparation, serving and consumption of food (paragraph 5 (m))
- ensure that there is appropriate flooring which is in good condition (paragraph 5(s)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

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:

- provide training for unqualified teachers to help them develop their teaching skills further.

School details

Name of school	The Yellow House School		
DCSF number	881/6048		
Unique reference number	134398		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2002		
Age range of pupils	13-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 11	Girls: 3	Total: 14
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,826 Full Time		
Address of school	1 Alderford Street Sible Hedingham Halstead Essex CO9 3HX		
Telephone number	01787 462504		
Email address	debbie@pester6731.fsbusiness.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Debbie Pester		
Proprietor	Ms Debbie Pester		
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI		
Dates of inspection	2-3 October 2007		