

Cornerstones

Independent Special School

Inspection report

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| DCSF Registration Number | 877/6001 |
| Unique Reference Number | 134186 |
| Inspection number | 320158 |
| Inspection dates | 21-22 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Greg Sorrell |

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

Cornerstones is a special school housed in a large Victorian building and is located in a residential area of Warrington. The school is attached to one of the three care homes which the proprietor owns. It is registered for up to 10 pupils and students aged 7 to 16. There are currently 11 pupils on roll, of whom four are above 16. Since registration in 2005, additional teaching areas have been added to the premises. The school has recently informed The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) about these changes. All pupils and students have statements of special educational need related to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) alongside associated learning difficulties, notably autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). All pupils and students are 'looked after children' within the care of the proprietor. Prior to attending this school some pupils and students have been out of formal education for significant periods. All have been referred by local authorities nationally. The school's stated aim is to '*provide a positive, calm, structured and nurturing environment in which the pupils and students can fulfil their academic and social potential.*' This is the school's first inspection.

Evaluation of the school

Cornerstones provides a good education and has some outstanding features. The quality of teaching is good, as is the curriculum, which takes account of the National Curriculum and provides personalised programmes that promote good progress. The school is successful in enabling the pupils and students to improve their abilities to communicate effectively and show good behaviour. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and care are outstanding. Parents, carers and placing authorities hold very positive views of what the school provides for their children. The attention given to welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school meets all regulations except one.

Quality of education

The quality of education provided is good and it enables the pupils and students to make good progress. The good curriculum is supported by very clear policies and planning based on the National Curriculum and provision for post-16 education. There is an appropriate focus on the improvement of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and other subjects, including personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). At Key Stage 4 and beyond the students also follow the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). They undertake the ASDAN Transition Challenge, Bronze and Silver schemes that provide vocational

experiences in the world of work and the community. Some students also achieve external accreditation in science. Other awards are also geared towards the pupils working towards independence on leaving formal schooling. Suitable careers education and guidance is provided in Key Stage 4 and above. The curriculum is highly personalised and relevant, although in Key Stage 3 there are no lessons in a modern foreign language as required by some statements of special educational need.

The overall quality of teaching and assessment is good. A significant strength evident in the best lessons is the wide range of teaching styles adopted. For example, in an outstanding PSHCE lesson, the teachers and assistants used role-play, discussion and astute questioning to elicit excellent responses from the students. They use a range of strategies, including signing and picture exchange when appropriate, to encourage effective communication. All teachers have good subject knowledge and when this is combined with recent assessment information, lessons are highly relevant to the learners' needs. On occasions, knowledge of abilities is less secure and the content of lessons is not always fully appropriate. In all lessons, however, teaching assistants ensure that learning is always at least satisfactory. All lessons offer good opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy. For example, in information and communication technology (ICT), students used a spreadsheet to work out the quantities required for baking in food technology. Wherever possible, practical experiences are offered to make learning enjoyable and are related to developing pupils' independence. Teachers work well with resources, which are good for most subjects offered although there are some minor omissions in ICT. Regular use is made of computer assisted learning to develop skills in art.

The teachers' assessment of individuals is good and this information assists in the development of personalised learning programmes. Objectives in individual education and behaviour plans are focused on progress in learning and behaviour. There is increasing involvement of learners in assessment of their academic progress.

Monitoring of classroom practice by the headteacher is undertaken regularly and the school is reviewing its data analysis procedures so as to make even better use of the information it holds about academic progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their economic and personal well-being is effectively promoted through the education they receive and by the well-focused support to improve their relationships with peers and adults. They gain confidence and increase their enjoyment of school as they respond to regular opportunities to reflect on their achievements and behaviour. Pupils complete a sheet recording how well everything has gone weekly, sometimes with adult support. Responsibilities are offered within the school and these promote independence well although options of study, where they can express choice, are limited.

There is no formal school council but pupils' views are regularly expressed in daily meetings including 'circle time', where discussions of feelings are promoted. Within the curriculum, they study other faiths, relationships and aspects of how the country works. Within the school racial harmony is evident. Pupils and students respond very well to the good role modelling provided by staff in lessons and at meal times where they enjoy good quality lunches.

The pupils' and students' behaviour is good. Sometimes, they find it very hard to settle down to work, and changes to known routines can lead to anxiety. However, once issues have been resolved, attitudes to learning and behaviour improve. They are constantly encouraged to consider how best to communicate effectively and the impact of actions. For example, in a PSHCE lesson, students engaged in role-play about why it is wrong to steal. Although, such behaviour is not commonplace within school, they were able to reflect upon the moral issues involved.

Pupils and students respond positively to the school's systems that recognise and reward good behaviour and achievement. These include the weekly assembly, which is a celebration of achievement where healthy snacks or small toys are earned as rewards. Their attendance is good and for some is markedly improved from previous settings.

A wide range of visits is enjoyed as part of the curriculum, for example, trips to centres of culture and adventurous activities in addition to places of worship. These experiences not only promote the pupils' and students' cultural development but also their personal development and confidence in unfamiliar settings.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision of welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school works very closely with the proprietor's residential care staff, social services and all relevant agencies to provide well-integrated provision. They use all available information and their own initial assessments to establish appropriate education, behaviour and care plans. The small group and individual attention provided also has a positive impact upon the pupils' and students' well-being. The home-school notebooks are monitored closely and daily meetings keep both parties informed about events. The school makes every effort to secure regular attendance and liaises with all agencies to maximise opportunities.

The school's policies are effectively implemented. The supervision of pupils and risk assessments are appropriate within school and during off-site visits. The staff encourage pupils and students to follow healthy eating habits and take regular exercise. Arrangements for child protection are good. The importance of consistent relationships is recognised and the deployment of key workers is good. Pupils and students know they can talk to trusted adults and this helps them to stay safe. The school's policies for the promotion of good behaviour and for administering first aid are implemented well. All accidents, incidents and interventions by staff are recorded in detail.

Systematic checks are made on portable electrical equipment, and monitoring in relation to fire safety is good. Registers of attendance are maintained as required. The school's recent attention to its admission register has ensured that it now contains all the required information. The school has planned well to increase accessibility to the premises and curriculum and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access over a three year period.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Staffing and recruitment procedures are appropriately informed by the most recent guidance, and include the maintenance of a single central register of the checks made.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation enable safe and effective learning for the current number on roll. The main school area is located on the lower floor where there are sufficient classrooms and teaching areas of appropriate size. Since its initial registration, further rooms have been made available for teaching, including an additional teaching room on the upper floor to accommodate individual tuition. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of all available space. Highly attractive displays of achievements, particularly artwork, adorn all teaching areas and many other areas of the school.

The school has appropriate facilities for pupils and students who become ill during the day and there are adequate washrooms for all. During the inspection, a small number of minor health and safety matters were brought to the attention of the proprietor. The compact outdoor play area enables safe play on either grass or hard areas. In support of the curriculum, excellent use is made of the local community and further afield for sports activities, cultural visits, places of worship and historical interest.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is good and meets all but one requirement. The school maintains excellent contact with parents, carers, local authorities and all other agencies by regular telephone calls, face-to-face contact, reports and progress meetings. Written progress reports are of good quality and although they do not contain assessment test data, which is provided in other ways, they do give a clear picture of how effective the provision has been in addressing academic needs. The same quality of reporting is evident when reviewing statements of special educational need and care arrangements in 'looked after children' reviews.

The school has recently reviewed its prospectus to ensure that all the relevant information is available. Parents and carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that they are very satisfied with the information they receive from the school. The school routinely seeks their views about its effectiveness to

gain feedback as to how it may improve its work further. The school was unaware of its responsibility to send referring authorities an annual account of how funding for pupils is allocated.

Feedback received from local authorities who place pupils and students at the school was universally positive. Comments included, '*Cornerstones has provided an excellent level of care for the young person that we have placed there, we have no areas of concern at all*'.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints are satisfactory.

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 the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- submit to the local authority and, on request to the Secretary of State, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each pupil who is registered at the school and is wholly or partly funded by that local authority (paragraph 6(7)).

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:

- ensure all lesson planning is as precise as the best examples in the school
- consider the provision of curriculum options for older pupils
- provide a modern foreign language at Key Stage 3 where necessary to meet pupils' statements of special educational need
- extend the range of ICT resources.

School details

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| Name of school | Cornerstones | | |
| DCSF number | 877/6001 | | |
| Unique reference number | 134186 | | |
| Type of school | Special, for students with SEBD and ASD | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | June 2000 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 7-16 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Boys | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 11 | Girls: 0 | Total: 11 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs | Boys: 11 | Girls: 0 | Total: 11 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 11 | Girls: | Total: 11 |
| Annual fees (boarders) | £175,936 | | |
| Address of school | 2 Victoria Road Grappenhall Warrington Cheshire WA4 2EN | | |
| Telephone number | 01925 211056 | | |
| Fax number | 01925 211092 | | |
| Email address | chris@cstones.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Ms Caron Bethell | | |
| Proprietor | Mr Chris Ardern | | |
| Reporting inspector | Greg Sorrell AI | | |
| Dates of inspection | 21-22 February 2008 | | |