

The Old School House

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	873/6032
Unique Reference Number	133651
Inspection number	320760
Inspection dates	26-27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Karin Heap

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).

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 Old School House is a residential special school for a maximum of six boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties, ages 11 to 13. There are currently four pupils on roll. The school is located on the outskirts of Wisbech in Cambridgeshire and is part of the Chartwell Group. Pupils are placed here by local authorities from Cambridgeshire, Luton and Essex; all have experienced extremely challenging situations leading to break downs in schooling and often family life.

The school aims *'to provide a small family setting for young people, in a safe, structured and stable environment which affords them positive experiences, freedom, privacy and choice.'*

The school was first registered in February 1998 and it was subject to a children's home inspection in June 2007. This is the first independent school report published by Ofsted.

Evaluation of the school

The Old School House is a happy school where pupils behave well taking into account their backgrounds and individual circumstances. The school provides satisfactory education and care and meets most of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and offers pupils an adequate range of activities including a useful range of enrichment activities. The school follows a modified National Curriculum in line with its ethos and aims, with a particular focus on practical subjects such as design and technology, art and science. Music is not taught in a formal way but some musical education is covered through other subjects and at leisure time. There is a range of after school activities to ensure healthy living and where pupils practise their life and social skills. For example, pupils have access to the local cricket club, attend the village sports day or take part in roller skating and outdoor leisure activities such as walking and cycling.

The school has adequate curriculum plans in place. Medium and short term plans however, do not inform teaching well enough to ensure all learners at different levels

achieve well in their lessons. Careers guidance is not taught formally, however, one pupil has access to individual support by the maintenance manager to experience the life of work in a range of settings. He is gaining practical skills, which are designed to help him in making choices for his future. This is not yet a formalised process to which all pupils at Key Stage 3 have access and progression routes are therefore less well established.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory because pupils, in relation to their starting points make satisfactory progress overall. Attainment on entry is well below national averages and, taking into consideration their personal and social difficulties, pupils make good progress in their personal and social development and behaviour. Their academic progress, considering pupils' emotional difficulties fluctuates but overall is satisfactory. The school has no framework to assess and track pupils' progress over time and lessons therefore are not always clearly focussed and lack individual targets, which pupils can clearly understand and know their next stage of learning. Pupils are keen and generally have a good attitude for learning but lessons are not always structured to help pupils become more independent and sometimes they do not clearly understand what is expected of them. Pupils do not use, for example a visual timetable or task boards to help them sequence their tasks. Planning does not give sufficient detail to ensure that all pupils, especially more able learners make the best progress.

Pupils have very strong and trusting relationships with adults and are taught in an appropriately relaxed atmosphere, however, the pace in lessons is slow with some activities being too long for pupils to maintain their interest. Overall personal guidance to help pupils improve their behaviour is effective and teaching assistants make a positive contribution in helping pupils to manage their behaviour. However, there are missed opportunities as teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively during lessons to help pupils improve their learning.

Parents and the local authorities are informed about pupils' general performance and well-being through termly reports but progress made towards pupils' individual education plans is not made sufficiently clear. The requirements of pupils' statements are therefore not fully met in two cases. The annual review, however, reports on the progress made towards pupils' individual education plan targets and provides opportunities for pupils and parents or carers to contribute.

The use of detailed written behaviour management plans in lessons was not seen, although this is a requirement in pupils' statements of special educational need. In contrast, care staff deploy an effective structured behaviour management system, which includes discussion with pupils in weekly reviews with their link worker, the setting of verbal, personal and social targets, and accurate recording systems.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy their learning and are happy at school. They are keen to talk about their experiences and show their work. Pupils have very good and trusting relationships with all adults, who use effective strategies to help them overcome anxiety and anger so that they can reintegrate into their school routine as quickly as possible. Pupils therefore learn acceptable behaviour and conduct and begin to manage themselves appropriately in a range of familiar and unfamiliar situations. Relative to pupils' personal needs and history, their behaviour is good in and around school. Attendance is very good with only one unauthorised and two authorised absences for medical reasons.

In the '*ideas, beliefs and culture*' lessons pupils have a range of experiences to learn about different religions and cultures and they use their current affairs lessons to reflect on every day life issues and recent local and national events and institutions. This enables pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

Pupils take full part in the life of this residential school, they take on a range of roles and responsibilities, including some cooking at weekends, washing and tidying. To some degree they look after their own rooms and clothing, including ironing. Pupils are less aware of the contribution they could make to the school in terms of sharing ideas and influencing decisions about them. They are not yet involved actively in evaluating their work and in contributing to their targets and annual reviews, other than their behavioural targets.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. School and care staff ensure that pupils feel safe and are well looked after and that they have a good awareness of healthy living and keeping safe. This is developed through opportunities to eat healthily and exercise regularly. Pupils particularly enjoy their sports afternoon, where they access a range of activities such as swimming, badminton or tennis. A good range of healthy foods is offered and pupils understand why this is good for them. They are made aware of their personal care and hygiene needs and practise healthy living every day, for example, they take a shower after sporting activities. Pupils feel safe and behave in a safe manner, for example, they are aware and accept the need for protective clothing during welding sessions.

All staff are trained appropriately to deal with physical intervention and procedures to log incidents of challenging behaviour are firmly in place. A named link worker follows up on incidents and reflects on this with pupils on an individual basis and information is aptly shared between education and care staff. The school meets all regulations with regard to policies and practice for anti bullying, behaviour and health and safety, including risk assessments. Staff are adequately trained to ensure all policies are implemented appropriately. However, the school has not yet

completed its plan to reflect the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002). This is due to be completed by April 2008.

Out of the three local authorities who have placed pupils here, only one authority responded to the pre inspection questionnaire and one parent; both commented favourably on the provision. Pupils respond positively when questioned about the school, two indicated that they would like to be involved in making decisions about the school and receive more helpful advice about their learning.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school fully complies with the regulations relating to checks it makes on prospective employees and volunteers regarding their identity, qualifications, medical fitness and suitability to work with children. All safeguarding procedures, including the single central record are in place.

School's premises and accommodation

This school includes boarding provision for up to six pupils. The bedrooms are nicely and individually furnished and decorated, providing a safe and comfortable place for pupils to spend their personal time. All pupils have access to a TV and are allowed to bring personal items such as a play station and music if appropriate. There is a large school room, which allows for group and individual work and pupils have access to a well equipped specialist room for design and technology. The building provides a family orientated and friendly environment where pupils can learn safely and securely.

The school's outside recreation area is secluded and safe but restricted in size. The school is very aware of this and compensates by offering a range of after school outdoor activities such as cricket, roller skating or walks in the wood and park. Pupils also have independent access to the local village playing field and park.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides opportunities to consult with parents and local authorities three times a year through an appropriate report, which describes pupils' work and conduct of the past term. These reports however, do not clearly identify progress made towards targets as requested in pupils' statements. A formal review meeting, which is held annually brings together all relevant parties to reflect on pupils' work and plan for their future. The school does not yet provide an annual account to local authorities of income received and expenditure incurred with regard to each pupil. Plans are in place to publish accounts by the end of the financial year 2007/8. The school has recently updated its prospectus and it now provides all the required information for parents and carers.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written and fair complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that where pupils have a statement of special educational need, the education provided does fully fulfil the requirements of the statement (paragraph 1(2)(e))
- provide appropriate careers guidance for all secondary age pupils (paragraph 1(2)(g))
- implement a formal framework for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress (paragraph 1(3)(g))
- put in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).

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

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

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

School details

Name of school	The Old School House
DCSF number	873/6032
Unique reference number	133651
Type of school	Residential Special School
Status	Independent
Date school opened	February 1998
Age range of pupils	11-13
Gender of pupils	Male
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4
Number of boarders	Boys: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4
Annual fees (boarders)	£143,000
Address of school	1 March Road Friday Bridge Wisbech Cambridgeshire PE14 0HA
Telephone number	01945 861114
Fax number	01945 861188
Email address	jan@tosh-fridaybridge.wanadoo.co.uk
Manager	Mr Rick Ogle-Welbourn
Lead teacher	Mr Arie Ramp
Proprietors	Mr C E Wright, Mrs D A Wright Mr A E Dillnutt, Mrs E J Dillnut
Reporting inspector	Karin Heap AI
Dates of inspection	26-27 February 2008