

Walton Progressive School

Independent Special School

DCSF Registration Number	341/6047
Unique Reference Number	133309
Inspection number	321809
Inspection dates	9 April 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Located in the Walton area of Liverpool, Walton Progressive School opened in 2000 and is owned by the European Care Company. It caters for up to 40 boys and girls, aged 8 to 19, with highly complex needs. There are 20 currently on roll, funded by nine different local authorities. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and while most have severe or profound learning difficulties, some also have sensory or physical disability. In many cases pupils have a diagnosis of autism and severe challenging behaviour. A large number have been excluded from their previous schools or have failed to attend a school. The school is divided into three distinct areas named Acorn, Oak and College and pupils are grouped in these areas according to their learning needs. The school had its first inspection in 2004. No formal responses from parents or from local authorities to our questionnaires were received during the inspection, although the school operates an annual cycle of stakeholder survey.

The school's aims are to help children to a better future by providing the highest quality of education where inclusion, enrichment and progression enable achievement for all children by focusing on their specific and complex needs.

Evaluation of the school

This is a good school which makes an outstanding transformation in pupils' personal development and which meets nearly all of the regulations. Through its climate of high expectations and its expert knowledge about pupils, it is highly successful in improving their readiness for learning. Pupils make good progress academically and outstanding improvement personally, especially in reducing their anxiety and making learning, school and especially their lives, a pleasure. Teaching is good and characterised by the excellent management of pupils, founded upon exceptional relationships between staff and pupils. The organisation and layout of the good quality premises ensures that pupils feel secure and this is an important factor in their willingness to engage in lessons. While the quality of education is good overall,

the curriculum and arrangements for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory.

The school has made good improvement since its last inspection. Pupils' levels of attainment are now recorded in order to track their progress, although the system is not refined enough to show the extremely small, but significant, steps of progress that some pupils make. There is much better development of, and opportunities for, cultural awareness. A good training programme and oversight by teaching staff is helping support staff develop their skills further. Most staff now demonstrate a good understanding about pupils' needs and how to move them on in their learning.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and is best developed for the higher attaining pupils in the College area. A wide range of opportunities provided for these pupils and the school's good focus on accreditation helps staff tailor the curriculum well and ensures pupils gain a great sense of achievement from what they do. Pupils make good progress and achieve a good range of relevant awards.

The school complies with most requirements of pupils' statements, but not all. This is mainly why the curriculum is satisfactory rather than good, as the school views it. Many statements say that the National Curriculum should be provided, and some state religious education is required too. The curriculum includes most subjects of the National Curriculum but a modern foreign language is not specifically taught at Key Stage 3 and religious education is seen more as part of providing cultural and multicultural experiences rather than being planned from the schemes the school has available.

A major success of the curriculum is that it is highly personalised and it meets pupils' individual needs well. Pupils are often taught separately but to ensure they learn to work together there are reasonable opportunities for group work and the application of wider skills in a range of community based settings. The curriculum's emphasis also changes appropriately according to the age of pupils, and is especially well designed to prepare pupils aged 14 to 19 for the next step.

For middle and lower attaining pupils in Acorn or Oak areas respectively, the core curriculum focuses on literacy, numeracy, science, physical education (PE) and personal, social and health education and is also well matched to the pupils' individual needs. Much work is undertaken to develop skills which help pupils make sense of the world around them and especially communication. Other subjects are also taught by specialists such as art, design and technology, information and communication technology, PE, life skills and music, although the opportunities for history and geography are more incidental than planned.

Information and communication technology is a developing area for the 'Oak' and 'Acorn' areas and although taught, the potential of its use to support pupils' communication and also their early writing has yet to be harnessed. This is

something the school is planning towards. There is good support from staff for pupils' speech and language skills and this area is well led by the school's alternative and augmentative communication coordinator. Pupils make good progress overall and many learn to use 'low tech' systems such as the Picture Exchange Communication System effectively. However, there is insufficient use of sophisticated communication aids, which some would benefit from, although the school has commenced work in this direction. Not all the pupils whose statements require it, have support from a speech and language therapist. This means that not all have their needs fully met in this respect.

Teaching and assessment are good, which result in pupils' good academic progress. This judgement agrees with the school's own evaluation. Staff's knowledge of pupils is a significant strength and the routine of activities gives pupils a great sense of security, but also relieves anxiety. Pupils learn to anticipate and in most sessions the regular checking, coupled with the routine, ensure that what they learn becomes firmly embedded. The level of challenge is carefully calculated so that pupils increase their skills well but also consolidate previous learning. Pupils' responses and gains from a session are well recorded by teachers and assistants and show that pupils make better, and in some cases, much greater than expected progress. Pupils' improvements are tracked well but given that some show only small but significant gains over time, the criteria are not always sufficiently refined to show the progress that is detailed in records elsewhere. Occasionally in lessons, what pupils are to learn is not always tailored or targets are too general; arrangements are in hand to provide additional staff training. Multi-disciplinary teamwork is a strength, with a high level of focus and success in meeting the needs of looked after children.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, which is how the school sees it. The exceptional strides that pupils make in their personal development, often from extremely low levels of engagement or awareness, are due to the high level of focus on pupils' individual needs and their successful engagement in learning. As a result, most thoroughly enjoy school, their attendance is excellent and their behaviour is good. They learn to get on with adults and other children and form excellent, trusting relationships. Those with the most complex communication difficulties tolerate others and interact in a way which, for many, opens up their opportunities to learn. All this makes a considerable difference to the life chances of the pupils, especially to their self-esteem and self knowledge, where exceptional improvement takes place.

The school's survey of parents' views reveals these are very positive and one telling comment epitomises the school's effectiveness in this area: 'thank you for giving my son back to me...there were so many dark days before he came to you..'.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Comprehensive induction training which includes child protection, health and safety, pupil management and first aid, together with an ongoing programme ensures that all staff know well the procedures to follow. In addition, designated coordinators for such aspects are well versed in the management of their areas and have appropriate training at a higher level. Systems are clearly defined and procedures rigorously followed. Comprehensive risk assessments ensure that pupils are protected from harm including, in some cases, self-harm. Pupils' medical conditions are well managed and there is a good focus on healthy eating with nutritious meals produced by the school's chef. The school is working hard towards the Healthy Schools Award. The school has a three year plan which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Although the school judges this area as outstanding, this is not the case. This is because two important aspects of safeguarding do not meet the regulations. Staff records do not have all the required information about the checks made when they were appointed. There is no consistent pattern to what is missing, although many do not contain the information on staff's identity checks and some do not have references. The school does not hold a single central record of staff vetting and recruitment checks.

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 and teaching (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that all aspects of the provision outlined in a pupil's statement of special educational needs are complied with, especially with regard to the provision of the National Curriculum and religious education, and of speech and language therapy (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

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 ensure that all the necessary checks, and especially with regard to identity and references, are made and recorded (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- provide a single central register of all the necessary recruitment and vetting checks (paragraph 4C(2 and 3)).

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:

- Make better use of information and communication technology to support pupils' learning and communication and especially their early writing skills.
- Refine the school's system for tracking pupils' progress so that gains made, no matter how small, can be identified.

School details

Name of school	Walton Progressive School		
DCSF number	341/6047		
Unique reference number	133309		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2000		
Age range of pupils	8-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 14	Girls: 6	Total: 20
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 14	Girls: 6	Total: 20
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,600		
Address of school	Progressive Lifestyles Education Services Rice Lane Liverpool Merseyside L9 1NR		
Telephone number	0151 525 4004		
Fax number	0151 521 5804		
Email address	di@europeanwellcare.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Diane Jones		
Proprietor	Mr Anoup Treon		
Reporting inspector	George Derby		
Dates of inspection	9 April 2008		