

# Appletree School

Independent Special School

DCSF Registration Number	3022078
Unique Reference Number	130367
Inspection number	321810
Inspection dates	30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon

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.

The inspection of social care took place at the same time and the findings are in a separate report. Inspectors worked together to share their evidence.

## Information about the school

Appletree is a residential special school which is also registered as a children's home. The home is in a small village on the outskirts of Kendal, with a purpose-built school on site. It is registered for 14 young people aged 6 to 12 years, of either gender, with emotional and behavioural problems. There are currently 12 pupils on roll aged 7 to 12. Most have a statement of educational needs. The pupils have had disrupted schooling and are typically attaining below the expected levels for their age when they arrive at Appletree. The school and home aim to support them to grow emotionally and socially, to learn to cope with school and to return to families and day schools before they are teenagers. The previous inspection of education was in May 2004.

## Evaluation of the school

The quality of education at Appletree School is good. The provision to safeguard the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Young people indicate that they are happy in the home and that they feel safe. They feel well supported by the staff. For most, the school realises its aim of re-integration to a mainstream school.

The school now meets all the regulations for education. It has attended to the few regulations that it did not meet at the time of the previous inspection of education in 2004. It has improved the information to parents and it complies with the Disability Discrimination Act. The school has acted on all the points suggested at that time to help it further improve.

The school and home meet the National Minimum Standards for children's homes and exceed a number of them. The social care inspection judgement is that the school provides good care for the pupils, with close supervision and plenty of support. The welfare of the young people is good overall.

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## Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good, broad and balanced, closely based on the National Curriculum and has an appropriate emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy. In this way, pupils can catch up where they have previously fallen behind in these basic skills in other schools. It also helps them to make progress in their other subjects and means that it is easier to transfer into a mainstream school at a later stage.

The curriculum is sufficiently flexible to allow individualised programmes to be drawn up to meet the pupils' specific needs. The pupils are grouped into 3 classes with work arranged to suit the different ages or stages of maturity and learning in each. In the main this is effective, though recently the age spread in one class has become very wide. The organisation of work in this class is more difficult for the teacher to arrange to ensure everyone can progress at a good rate.

Morning sessions concentrate each day on literacy, including spellings, and numeracy, and offer regular practice in information and communications technology (ICT). The school has improved its provision for ICT since the last inspection, with better resources and regular lessons to teach skills. However, as yet there are no computers in the home, so the pupils do not have the choice of following up school work or particular interests with independent study. The school has identified the continued development of ICT as a priority.

A good programme to improve the pupils' handwriting has also been established since the previous inspection.

Afternoon sessions cover other subjects of the curriculum. An element of choice is built in for the pupils, through choosing activities, or planning trips out of school. Some practical science work is provided, but more is desirable so that pupils can develop skills in investigative science.

There is sufficient opportunity for creative work, such as music, art and craft and design technology and for work to help develop the pupils' personal development, through lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE), or 'circle time'. Regular physical education lessons provide opportunities for the pupils to work and play together in teams, which helps their socialisation, health and well-being. This balance in the curriculum meets their needs and ensures that they have a busy day.

The curriculum is enhanced by good links with the local community, such as with the local Arts centre, for drama and creative arts, and with the local primary school where the pupils get together for sports activities and charity fundraising.

The school benefits from its setting near the coast and the fells. Group activities and trips off-site are organised regularly at weekends and are appreciated by pupils. At times these have to be restricted when problems arise though poor behaviour; for

example when pupils have been 'grounded', or access to local facilities has been restricted. Clubs and activities to suit individual interests are on offer, but waiting list or costs can prevent immediate access to these.

Teaching and assessment are good. Good continuity of teaching staff and assistants provides stability for the pupils. The teachers have a good knowledge of the pupils' abilities. Teachers' planning is thorough, with a good range of interesting activities and tasks, which catch the pupils' interest and get them involved in applying what they have learnt. Teachers make good use of ICT to present or illustrate teaching points, and to suit the pupils' different learning styles.

Teachers generally manage the pupils' behaviour well, but there are a number of instances where classes are disrupted by an individual pupil's poor behaviour and this slows down the progress for all pupils. A mixed-age class has recently been formed, for some good social reasons, but this hampers the rate of progress for the older ones, as the pupils vie for attention.

Assessment systems are thorough, covering both education and behaviour. The school establishes what the pupils know and can do on their entry to the school and tracks their progress carefully thereafter. This is related to the National Curriculum levels, where appropriate. Detailed records show that the pupils make good progress, with noticeable gains in literacy and numeracy.

The very small class size means that the pupils benefit from individual attention, which encourages progress. Each class has a trained and qualified teaching assistant as well as a teacher. Resources are appropriate, leading to hands-on activities, making learning active and enjoyable and suiting the pupils' different learning styles.

The school judges the pupils' progress to be outstanding. Inspectors judge that their progress is good, and recognise that many of the pupils make significant progress in learning to manage their behaviour. As a result, they manage to attend school regularly, to learn and make progress. The pupils are increasingly able to get on one with another. Most pupils make sufficient progress to be able to re-integrate into mainstream schooling and to have foster placements. The pupils make good academic progress overall, given their various starting points.

The care staff help children with any homework set, but further work could be done between school and home, so that the activity programme links up more closely in ways which could reinforce the learning in school.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Care staff and education staff work together, with the advice of health and other professionals. They provide an integrated programme to modify behaviour and shape more positive attitudes to learning and to getting on with other people.

Staff encourage the pupils well and provide a number of interesting activities such as drama, which help to build up their self-esteem and confidence.

The staff have established good relationships with the pupils, which means that they gain their co-operation and learning can take place. The system of rewards and sanctions encourages the pupils to improve their behaviour. The pupils generally enjoy school; this is a considerable improvement on their past attitudes. For most, attendance rates are high.

Behaviour is satisfactory. For most of the pupils this represents a significant step forward. However, some pupils find it difficult to sustain good behaviour over time. During the inspection a few pupils were facing anxieties in connection with their next moves, and there had been two very recent admissions. As a result, a number were more unsettled than usual, with some volatile behaviour, disturbing routine and normal operation. The school support individuals well though this, but has no overall strategy to minimise the disruption to others.

The PSHE programme provides the pupils with factual knowledge and with opportunities for discussion on a range of topics relevant to their personal lives and future needs. The care staff and school nurse reinforce this, with follow-up support for individual pupils.

There are appropriate activities for the pupils' age for learning about their community. A programme of visits introduces them to aspects of community life, such as a visit to the fire station related to personal safety and charity fundraising in tandem with a local primary school. These all help the pupils' socialisation.

Provision for cultural and spiritual education is satisfactory. The school has improved its provision for cultural education since the previous inspection. Pupils learn about their own and other cultures through religious education lessons and through specific events such as St George's Day.

## Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision to safeguard the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school provides good care for them, with close supervision and plenty of support. The pupils say that they are happy at school, they feel safe and the staff help them. Many say that they are happier than at previous schools. They feel that they are making progress and that they are well taught. Several pupils filled in a questionnaire and discussed these with the inspectors. The questionnaires revealed very few concerns and the pupils said that they could discuss these with staff.

The school has improved the boarding accommodation and has gained the Healthy Schools Award. The required policies are in place to help safeguard pupils, and the specified checks on staff have been conducted. Extensive links with outside professionals support the pupils well. In a few instances recommendations, for

example from the school nurse, are not implemented promptly and some records lack detail.

The school has acted to ensure it now meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

## 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:

- establish an overall strategy for managing those times when a number of pupils are unsettled, in order to minimise the negative effect this has on the progress of others
- consider the extension of ICT facilities to the care home, to support pupils in their individual work
- further link the work of care staff and education staff to ensure that activities reinforce school topics.

## School details

Name of school	Appletree School
DCSF number	3022078
Unique reference number	130367
Type of school	Pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties
Status	Independent
Date school opened	13-11-95
Age range of pupils	6-12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10      Girls: 2      Total: 12
Number of boarders	Boys: 10      Girls: 2      Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 8      Girls: 2      Total: 10
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7      Girls: 1      Total: 8
Annual fees (boarders)	£96,810 - £134,850
Address of school	Natland Kendal Cumbria LA9 7QS
Telephone number	01539 560253
Fax number	01539 561301
Email address	admin@appletreeschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Rob Davies
Proprietor	Mrs M Ward
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI
Dates of inspection	30 April 2008