

Sybil Elgar School

Independent Special School

DCSF Registration Number	3076064
Unique Reference Number	101953
Social care URN	027798
Inspection number	322005
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Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI
Social Care inspector	Clare Davies

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).

Inspection of social care (welfare) was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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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. The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided and to inform the Secretary of State at the DCSF as to the school's continued suitability for registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focussed 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 judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

Information about the school

Sybil Elgar School is an independent special school and provides a range of services for children and young adults with autistic spectrum disorders. The school was originally established in 1965 and gained approval status in 1984. It moved to the present premises in 1994 and is registered for up to 116 students, with boarding for 25. There are currently 98 students at the school and 21 are boarders. Students are placed at the school by 22 different local authorities, mostly in London, and all students have a statement for their special educational needs. The school is owned and managed by The National Autistic Society and covers three sites. The main school in Southall provides education for students aged 11 to 16 years. The further education unit for 16 to 19-year-olds is in Acton on the site of the Hammersmith and West London College, and the residential unit is located in Ealing. The residential accommodation is in a large extended house and offers boarding facilities from Monday to Friday with occasional respite and holiday provision. The accommodation is divided into four flats with shared dining facilities and a secure rear garden. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2003 and the most recent inspection of the boarding provision was carried out in September 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Sybil Elgar School provides its students with a good quality education and good boarding provision. The school successfully achieves its aim to provide *'an open door with a clear and safe pathway to adult life and celebrates the unique abilities and achievements of the students who break down barriers and offer hope for the future to anyone that meets them.'* All regulations for education are met, including those for handling complaints, which were identified as non-compliant at the last inspection of education. There are very strong links between the three sites, providing consistent

approaches to students' behaviour and learning. This makes a significant contribution to developing students' personal skills, which are outstanding. The school places a high priority on training for staff and this has a particularly good impact on the quality of the curriculum. The curriculum is outstanding and characterised by a high focus on personalising programmes of work. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicate that parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of the school's provision.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding in all areas of the school. It meets the needs and requirements of each student, yet offers broad and balanced access to a full range of subjects. Curriculum plans are well defined ensuring development and progression, whilst also preventing repetition. High priority is given to age-appropriate resources and activities. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught at Key Stages 3 and 4 and there is good use of technology to enhance students' learning. The curriculum at the further education unit focuses on preparing students for adulthood, while also extending essential numeracy and literacy skills. Here students can choose from a range of vocational subjects as well as having the opportunity to attend college and gain work experience locally.

Throughout the school, students' physical, social and communication development is given high priority through well-written and focused planning, individual education plans and targets. Students have a good awareness of their programmes and how these will develop. The close partnerships between the teachers, residential staff, students and their families ensure that the curriculum appeals to the students' interests. This effectively encourages engagement in their work and extends the curriculum beyond the school day. There is a range of educational visits, which enhance students' learning. The local facilities are used very effectively to ensure that students develop their academic and social skills in real-life situations within the community. These include visits to the local shops, which, as one pupil stated, 'are brill because we not only learn to use real money but we do road safety as well!' Other activities include swimming, climbing and a range of vocational activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Aspects of the day-to-day assessment of students' attainment are outstanding. In particular, it is impressive to see how involved the students are in assessing how well they are doing. The use of symbols, together with appropriately phrased targets, helps them to know exactly what it is that they are working towards and what they need to do in order to be successful. Teachers and support staff continually evaluate the progress that students make in lessons and other activities. In addition, the multi-disciplinary team makes a significant contribution to the in-depth assessments and continuous monitoring of students' skills through regular professional dialogue with classroom staff. This effective collaboration ensures that students' needs are met and targets constantly updated. The tracking of students' progress over time shows that they make good progress, although the current system does not easily show staff how

much progress is made. Senior staff are mindful that they are not yet making full use of the wealth of assessment information that they have about their students.

The quality of teaching is good. The skilful use of a range of teaching approaches for students with autistic spectrum disorder enables teachers and support staff to engage students fully within a purposeful learning environment. As a result of systematic, yet appropriately targeted use of approaches such as TEACCH (Treatment and Education for Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children) and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), students communicate more effectively and grow in confidence in their learning. Teachers' questioning is searching and encourages students to apply themselves fully in lessons. Staff all give the students time to consider their answers and to express themselves. There are good opportunities for students to work as a group. Where outstanding teaching was seen students showed a marked improvement in learning and produced high quality work. The school works closely with the students' families regarding homework and opportunities to extend learning outside school. Homework is set when requested, and social, speech, behaviour and physical targets are fully shared and continued with families and residential staff. The school fully supports parents and carers through training and advice.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Visitors to the school cannot fail to be impressed by the students' outstanding personal skills, including their outstanding behaviour and attitudes to school. In particular, students play an active part in their education, not only in their engagement in lessons but also in having a say in what happens in their school. The recent election campaign for the student committee was embraced by students of all abilities and ages. Students respond well to adult interventions to support communication and behaviour without becoming dependent. With this support, they develop outstanding social and moral qualities, including an increasing ability to apply learned strategies to manage their behaviour. They attempt things that are very difficult, such as trying new foods, speaking in public and accepting changes to normal routines. Similarly, encouragement to interact within group activities ensures that they communicate with one another and with adults to the best of their ability. The development of these skills effectively reduces students' anxieties and enables them to access a wide range of subjects and learning experiences. It also helps students to reflect on what they are thinking and feeling. This develops their spiritual and moral development very well. Students move around the school to specialist rooms throughout the day with relative ease and confidence and when they get to the lesson they are well-prepared and motivated to meet the high expectations that staff have of them. The curriculum provides well for students' cultural and multi-cultural awareness, particularly through drama, art and a range of educational and social activities within the local community.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school provides good care for its students in both educational and residential settings. It is clear that the welfare of the students is at the heart of all that the school does. The corporate policies of The National Autistic Society provide a sound approach to all areas of welfare, health and safety. Students are able to identify staff that will help them in times of trouble or anxiety and this, together with effective risk assessments, ensures that students feel safe.

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:

- To make better use of assessment information to evaluate the quality of provision and students' achievements.

Evaluation of boarding provision

The quality of the boarding provision is good. Sybil Elgar School provides a consistently high level of care to its students. The school meets all but one of the National Minimum Standards and exceeds most of them. The organisation provides sound structure for students and staff; the principal provides strong leadership.

The school manages students' health needs well. Sound policies and procedures help support complex medical needs. Parental wishes are established and consent obtained to administer medication and first aid. Medical information ensures students receive appropriate care in an emergency. Parents are promptly informed. Staff promote student's health and well-being with additional support from the school's psychologist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist. This team coordinate to produce individual programmes for the students' development. Observation and monitoring of student's health is thorough, identifying any changes or areas that require additional support. The curriculum delivers personal, social and health education.

The school is involved with the local authority's healthy schools initiative in actively promoting physical exercise, a balanced diet and overall positive student well-being.

Food served is of a good quality with minimal but sufficient choice. Staff respond to individual needs whilst encouraging students to extend their food selection when only eating from a limited range due to their autism. Daily food intake charts are maintained to monitor healthy eating, which students are encouraged to complete themselves or with staff support. This information is shared with parents. Visual aids such as pictures, photographs and symbols inform students of the daily menu. A training kitchen in the residential unit enables some students to prepare and cook a meal with staff support.

Students have privacy and their dignity is respected. Staff promote this effectively, supported by suitable working practices and policies. A student- friendly version of the complaints policy is available. Students regularly use charts and symbols to express how they are feeling. Good systems in place ensure safeguarding is a priority, and enable students and staff to work in a safe environment. The designated member of staff for child protection has good links with the local authority. Staff regularly attend safeguarding training, with termly meetings to refresh knowledge. Policies and procedures are clear and support staff in responding to any concerns.

Each student has a comprehensive behaviour support plan, highlighting any particular behaviours, triggers, and strategies to use. The school psychologist collates incident reports and any physical interventions to identify patterns of behaviour and ensure that staff are responding in the best way to support students. This information informs the senior management team of any changes required relating to staffing, training or individual students. Staff attend training on physical intervention. High staffing levels ensure that they promptly address any negative behaviour, giving priority to the safety of students and staff. Staff address any attempts to bully, making links to individual behaviour support plans.

Robust health and safety policies and procedures support staff with any issues. The school has good fire safety procedures. Risk assessments consider the distress caused to students with autism when confronted with a crisis or an event out of routine. Each student has their own risk assessment identifying particular hazards relating to their level of understanding and behaviour. Generic risk assessments consider the environment, activities and access in the community.

The school has good safer recruitment policies and procedures with a designated member of staff processing applicants. However, records show one omission, which conflicts with this procedure, for example, generic references are accepted.

A strength of this school is the enjoyment and achievement of the students. The boarding provision provides excellent support with educational progress through the curriculum. Very good communication exists between the three sites; policies and procedures are consistently applied. Continuity of staff supports students with periods of transition, for example, educational support workers start early, accompany students to school and remain with them throughout the day. Some school staff accompany students back to the unit after school and provide after

school activities. Staff develop targets for students in association with targets listed in individual education plans, in developing social skills, in particular self-care and independence skills. Support and guidance to residential staff from visits by the speech and language therapist, psychologist and occupational therapist, inspire and introduce staff to new exercises and activities for students. Some students' abilities and skills, such as drawing, have improved through implementation of these new ideas.

Staff respond to each student's particular needs. Each student is encouraged to reach their potential and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other young people. Training is suitable and staff can access expertise in the field of autistic spectrum disorders through the provider organisation. Clear policies and procedures promote equality and diversity. The school promotes inclusion well. Staff and students have access to a designated prayer room.

The school emphasises the importance of listening to and encouraging the voice of students. Student consultation is an integral part of the development of the school. This occurs formally through surveys, student council and tutor groups and informally throughout the day and evening. A DVD showing student's achievements and experiences throughout the year encourages their participation in annual review meetings.

Following assessment, care plans are produced detailing how students should be supported. Care plans include a variety of documents that emphasise how individual needs are met. A senior staff member monitors and reviews the planning. Support for parents/carers is good with an open approach to encouraging partnership working. Students can contact parents when they wish.

The residential accommodation is suitably furnished and in good decorative order with a rolling programme of redecoration and refurbishment. Bedrooms are mainly single with washbasin facilities and a few have ensuite toilets. Refurbishment is in progress to improve bathrooms and toilets. Communal areas include a lounge, dining area, library and a secure rear garden. The school development plan identifies areas for improvement, such as the garden.

The statement of purpose provides suitable information for parents, students and professionals. Staffing levels are good and meet the needs of the students. Staff are highly committed to the school. The existing school staff team or known bank staff cover absence, to ensure continuity. Senior management are accessible for advice and support when needed. Staff training is a high priority. Good support systems, such as planned induction, regular supervision and annual appraisal help staff feel equipped to perform their duties and motivated to develop their professional skills. The head of care follows systems in place to monitor records, boarding development and progress towards personal targets. The principal provides strong leadership supported well by the senior management and the multi-disciplinary team.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that safer recruitment practices are consistently applied. (NMS 27)

School details

Name of school	Sybil Elgar School		
DCSF number	3076064		
Unique reference number (school)	101953		
Unique reference number (social care)	027798		
Type of school	Special, catering for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1965		
Age range of pupils	11-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 74	Girls: 24	Total: 98
Number of boarders	Boys: 18	Girls: 3	Total: 21
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 74	Girls: 24	Total: 98
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 15	Girls: 5	Total: 20
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,801.25		
Annual fees (boarders)	£69,128.10		
Address of school	Havelock Road Southall Middlesex UB2 4NZ		
Telephone number	0208813 9168		
Fax number	0208571 7332		
Email address	chloe.phillips@nas.org.uk; jon.brough@nas.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Chloe Phillips		
Proprietor	The National Autistic Society		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Social care inspector	Clare Davies		
Dates of inspection	8 May 2008		