

New Horizon Centre School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	9336203
Unique Reference Number	133527
Inspection number	322014
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

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

New Horizon Centre School is a small day special school which provides education for boys and girls aged between 11 and 16 years who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Currently there are 21 pupils attending, 15 have a statement of special educational need and seven are girls. Approximately two thirds of pupils are in the care of their local authorities and live in care homes or with foster parents.

The school was established in 2001 and was last inspected in January 2004. At that time it had only 12 pupils on roll and was under different ownership. Pupils who now attend have a wider range of needs, and some have complex literacy, numeracy, language and communication difficulties. The school moved to its present site in December 2004, an extended farmhouse with adjoining buildings set in four acres of land near Taunton in Somerset. The school came under the ownership of 'European Wellcare' in December 2006. The company owns care homes throughout the UK and Europe and has two other special schools. Young people come from homes in the south of England and have their places funded by their local authorities.

The school seeks to provide *'a stable, consistent and stimulating environment that enables all students to develop academically whilst learning to respect themselves, others and their environment'*.

Evaluation of the school

New Horizon Centre School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are at the heart of the school's work. Many pupils have failed in their previous educational settings and the caring environment helps them to re-engage with education and make satisfactory progress. The school has a good awareness of areas for further improvement and meets most of the regulations. Since the last inspection it has improved aspects of its accommodation.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. A broad range of subjects is provided which takes close account of the National Curriculum. The school has a strong focus on pupils learning from the outdoor environment and many pupils take part in the 'Forest School' outdoor learning programme. Physical education (PE) is provided at a local sports hall. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme

contains an appropriate range of topics. A small group of girls receive their full-time education at a nearby youth centre. Whilst this arrangement generally works well, it does not enable the pupils to receive the full range of learning experiences, particularly the practical aspects of design and technology (DT) and science.

Each pupil is usually taught individually or in a small group to help them concentrate on their work. Larger group activities occur when pupils gather together for daily assembly, take part in sport, or engage in 'Forest School' activities. Most pupils receive sufficient taught time during the week. However, a few attend part time and are on a programme of gradual return to full-time education. Programmes neither set a clear time scale for increasing pupils' attendance nor include planned activities for the time they are absent.

Planning for subjects is satisfactory and is often based on AQA units of work. The school recognises that longer-term planning is needed in some subjects. Students in Key Stage 4 this year entered GCSE and Entry level examinations in English, mathematics, PE and art. The school rightly has plans to broaden the range of examination subjects entered by individual pupils. Most pupils also study the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme which has a focus on developing independence. Students benefit from appropriate careers advice and those with a statement of special educational need have their requirements met fully.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Teachers and support assistants form positive relationships with students and consistently encourage them to try their best. This approach contributes well to pupils' security and increasing self-esteem. Where teaching is at its best, a range of strategies are used to promote learning. These include questioning to ensure pupils' understanding and the use of short activities which maintain concentration. In less successful lessons, the topic does not capture pupils' interest and planning focuses on the activity to be completed rather than on what pupils will learn. This results in pupils not being sufficiently engaged and occasionally leaving the class.

Teachers regularly discuss pupils' work and behaviour with them, although marking is too brief and lacks suggestions on how work might be improved. In lessons where pupils work individually with a member of staff, opportunities for independent working are sometimes limited. Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory and several pupils are able to use information and communication technology to word process their work and research topics.

Assessment information is not used consistently to inform lesson planning. This is particularly noticeable in lessons for pupils with learning difficulties where targets are not sufficiently precise for pupils to make small gains in their learning. Progress is satisfactory overall. Higher attaining pupils gain a few GCSE and Entry level examination passes each year. All pupils gain the ASDAN qualification and several AQA units.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory. Pupils generally speak positively about the school and most feel that they make progress. They develop their self-confidence when they take part in such activities as the 'Forest School', horse riding and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Several pupils raise their self-esteem when they pursue their interests through art or music.

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. This is encouraged by the awarding of 'points' for appropriate behaviour and the respectful way in which staff relate to pupils. The PSHE curriculum contains a strong emphasis on moral issues and developing positive relationships. Also, the school promotes social development through daily assemblies and by encouraging pupils to eat together at lunch time. Some pupils are able to talk thoughtfully with visitors about their work and life at the school. In response to the questionnaires sent out prior to the inspection, a minority of parents and pupils expressed concerns about behaviour at the school. Some pupils do occasionally display quite challenging behaviour, although they generally follow established routines and evidence suggests incidents of misbehaviour are managed appropriately. Pupils develop skills for independent living and for their future economic well-being when they budget and cook meals in food technology and in 'Forest School' lessons. A few are able to complete work experience placements, for example in a hairdressing salon or an animal rescue centre.

Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community when they look after animals on the school site or participate in the school council. Few opportunities exist for pupils to make a contribution to the wider community. The role of public institutions and services is taught through the ASDAN programme. Pupils develop some awareness of other cultures in geography, ASDAN, art and food technology lessons. However, the school does not provide a planned programme to ensure all pupils have a sufficient understanding of the diverse range of religious and cultural traditions in modern Britain.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Staff work closely as a team to ensure students receive a high standard of care. They have received training to help them manage behaviour in a calm and non-confrontational manner. Policies are in place to promote appropriate behaviour and records are kept of incidents of misbehaviour and sanctions imposed. Programmes to help manage the behaviour of individual pupils lack detail and do not consistently implement the agreed consequences of misbehaviour. A good level of staffing, which includes individual counselling, ensures students receive sufficient care and support.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are satisfactory and a clear child protection policy is in place which is followed by staff. Students learn about keeping safe and leading a healthy lifestyle through the PSHE curriculum. They also take regular exercise at the local sports centre.

Relevant health and safety policies and risk assessments are in place. Fire drills are held regularly and equipment checked. The member of staff responsible for health and safety has received appropriate training. However, he does not undertake regular recorded inspections to identify potential risks and ensure the safety of the site. At the time of the inspection some minor repairs were outstanding, for example there were missing covers to some light fittings, an extractor fan in a toilet was not working, and a window was broken. The school keeps an admission register and an attendance register but these do not contain all the required information. The school has a three-year plan to increase accessibility as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has thorough procedures in place for the recruitment and appointment of staff. All staff have been subject to clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. References are followed up prior to appointment and the school has established a single register to record this information as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The main building is arranged over two floors and contains offices and six classrooms. Other classrooms are provided in adjoining buildings and two wooden cabins. Specialist rooms are provided for teaching science, ICT, art, DT, food technology and music. The school also benefits from a small assembly hall. Classrooms are of a good size for the small number of pupils using them. The designated room for pupils who might be ill does not have a washbasin. Although the school has sufficient washrooms for the number of pupils on site, these are not clearly signed and sometimes staff and pupils use the same toilets. Outside recreation is provided by grassed areas and picnic benches.

Three off-site centres, which are not registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), are used for educating small groups of pupils, sometimes on a full-time basis. Two are based in local youth centres and meet the regulations. The third is a room on a trading estate which is not appropriate for education. The school is reviewing its use of this provision and is in communication with the DCSF.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a prospectus which has recently been updated to contain all the required information for parents and carers. Weekly reports are sent to parents and carers on request. More detailed reports are provided to coincide with pupils' six monthly reviews which give satisfactory information about students' progress. The school does not provide some financial information for local authorities.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed complaints policy which meets all the regulations.

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 (standard 1) and must:

- provide full-time supervised education for pupils of school age (paragraph 1(2)(a)(i))
- give all pupils experience in the following areas of learning: scientific and technological (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- use assessment information to plan teaching so that all pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- assist students in acquiring an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- have regard to the DCSF guidance Health and Safety: responsibilities and powers (DfES 0803/2001) (paragraph 3(4))
- maintain its admission and attendance register in accordance with the Education (Student Registration)(England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure washrooms are used in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

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 local authorities (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 they fund (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:

- Use more detailed targets to help pupils with learning difficulties make better progress.

School details

Name of school	New Horizon Centre School		
DCSF number	9336203		
Unique reference number	133527		
Type of school	Day special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	November 2001		
Age range of pupils	11 - 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 14	Girls: 7	Total: 21
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 11	Girls: 4	Total: 15
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 10	Girls: 4	Total: 14
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,000		
Address of school	Bath House Farm West Hatch Taunton Somerset TA3 5RH		
Telephone number	01823 481902		
Fax number	01823 481901		
Email address	school@newhorizoncentre.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms J Meadows		
Proprietor	European Wellcare		
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	24–25 June 2008		