

# The Education Centre

## Independent Special School

### Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	938/6249
Unique Reference Number	126149
Inspection number	322024
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy 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

The Education Centre is an independent day school for students aged 12 to 16 who have significant behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. All students have statements of special educational need and generally come to the Education Centre after other school placements have broken down, some having been out of school for a lengthy period. There are currently 33 students on roll. The Education Centre opened in Haywards Heath in 1999 with the aim of providing education for young people who might otherwise be out of school. A busy railway line runs close to the school and there have been plans to move to new premises. As a result, repairs and improvement to the existing site have been on hold. However, the planned re-location is not going ahead for the foreseeable future. The school was last inspected in 2004.

## Evaluation of the school

The Education Centre provides students with a satisfactory education. Curricular provision is satisfactory and meets the needs of students whose motivation and behaviour improve during their time at the school, thus enabling them to make satisfactory progress overall. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, in the context of their significant behavioural and social needs, is good. The caring ethos of the school is reflected in the relaxed atmosphere and good relationships between staff and students. It is supported by appropriate procedures for the welfare, health and general safety of its students, although these are currently compromised by some shortfalls in premises and accommodation. The school has a number of matters to address in order to meet the regulatory requirements fully.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Since the last inspection the school has taken steps to provide sport and physical education by making regular use of the nearby leisure centre. Recognising that it could be more responsive to the needs of its students and building upon its success in art and design, it is currently developing a broader range of more practical and vocational opportunities. The emphasis upon promoting better behaviour and developing social skills permeates the curriculum

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but this is sometimes at the expense of ensuring that all aspects of a subject are covered. There are limited facilities for practical science work and cross-curricular links, especially for the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology are underdeveloped.

The centre builds strong links with parents and carers and makes good use of support agencies, colleges and work experience providers. As a result good arrangements are in place for students to receive the guidance and experiences they need to prepare them for moving to the next stage in their education or working life.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Strengths in teaching include the long term planning, which takes into account the demands of examination courses, and the personal understanding that each member of staff has of each student. Teaching methods, although rather reliant upon worksheets, are generally successful in encouraging improved behaviour. In the best lessons students stay on task and are engaged in their learning, often supported very well by teaching assistants. Teachers use their knowledge of students well to mentally plan and prepare their lessons. However written planning and recording of lessons is not consistent.

Students' academic progress is satisfactory. Staff work hard to build success where possible with Entry Level Certificate and GCSE courses so that the majority of students leave school having gained accreditation in at least one subject. However, in the absence of a whole school approach to assessment, tracking and recording, teachers' individual systems do not provide enough information about students' achievement so it is unclear whether all students are doing as well as they can.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students, which often starts from a very low base, is good. As one parent wrote, 'When my son first came he was a lot of hard work, but with a lot of help from everyone there, he has become a lovely young man, a pleasure to be around'. Students, too, speak warmly of the positive impact of their time at the Education Centre, one student saying, 'I was all over the place when I came here.... now I know how to behave and I'm good at helping others, too'.

Many students enjoy the opportunity to develop skills that they did not know they had, particularly in art, design and technology, and they develop an awareness of other people's lives and cultures through exploring different ideas for their work. Others respond well to the lessons learnt in life skills, humanities and English, where they are encouraged to consider and acknowledge differing points of view. Students' behaviour is satisfactory. Although some find tolerance hard, the example set by every member of staff creates a positive and encouraging atmosphere to which they gradually respond. As a result, although always behaving well remains difficult for many students, extreme verbal or physical outbursts are relatively rare in school.

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Older students choose to help others with their learning and they take full advantage of work experience opportunities. In these ways they contribute positively to the school community and develop skills which will help their future economic well-being.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for welfare, health and safety of the pupils is satisfactory. Although policies and procedures are in place, their implementation is currently affected by the deterioration of the school's buildings and exterior. For example, work has not been done to improve the outside space at the rear of the school so students go out onto the pavement, especially if they feel the need for some individual space. This is closely supervised by staff but, nevertheless, there are risks to students' safety. Fire precaution regulations are met and have been recently checked but, at the time of the inspection, escape via the first floor fire exit was impeded by damage caused by leakage in the roof above. The school is actively addressing this issue.

Despite the limitations of the site and the school's position, policies have been carefully thought out and are effectively implemented. Procedures for students who leave the premises and risk assessments for visits outside the school are robust, and there are appropriate arrangements for first aid and for students who are ill. Child protection policies are comprehensive and supported effectively by good liaison with relevant agencies.

The team approach demonstrated by the staff is evident during lunchtimes and breaks, where shared preparation and consumption of meals and snacks promote acceptable behaviour and encourage healthy eating. Students demonstrate awareness of other aspects of healthy living, including responsible attitudes to sex, drinking and drugs. Health education is supported by regular visits from the school nurse. Now that the decision has been made to remain in the current premises, an appropriate disability access plan has been drawn up.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school keeps the required central register and checks all staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. The company director is appropriately included on this list. However, due to confusion over the guidance, the proprietor, who has an office on the premises, has not been subject to the usual safeguarding checks. The school is happy to rectify this.

## School's premises and accommodation

Due to the intended move and consequent lack of attention to maintenance or improvement, the school's premises and accommodation fail to meet several requirements. Although good attempts have been made to enhance display in some classrooms and common areas, others are clearly in a poor state of repair, with

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boarded up windows doing little to dampen the noise from the passing trains below. One part of the school has suffered damage from a leaking roof. Students do not have adequate, safe space outside for their recreation. There is an urgent need for the school to carry out its plans for improvement in order to rectify all of these failings.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Almost all of the regulations are met. The school provides comprehensive information for parents and carers, both when their children first arrive and regularly as they progress through the school. Staff are readily available to deal with queries and key staff, including the headteacher, maintain close contact with families. Parents and carers receive regular written reports and consultation meetings take place both formally and informally. Of the small number who responded to the parental questionnaire, all expressed satisfaction with the school. The local authorities using the school are also positive in their views. However, the name and details of the managing company and the proprietor are not published as required.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for dealing with complaints are compliant with 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:

- equip each classroom with the necessary resources to fulfil curriculum requirements (paragraph 1(3)(f))
- ensure there is a system for accurately judging how well each individual student acquires knowledge and skills across the curriculum (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

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

- ensure arrangements for fire safety are not compromised by obstructions to escape routes (paragraph 3(5)).

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The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- ensure that all the required checks are satisfactorily completed for the person named as the proprietor (paragraph 4B(4) and (5))
- ensure the checks on the suitability of the proprietor are recorded in the central register (paragraph 4C(6 and 7)).

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

- ensure that the school buildings provide reasonable resistance to penetration by rain (paragraph 5(f))
- take steps to ensure that no area of the school compromises health or safety (paragraph 5(j))
- ensure that all classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy and clean state and are fit for purpose (paragraph 5(n))
- take steps to minimise the disruption caused by noise from the nearby railway (paragraph 5(o))
- raise the standard or decoration to at least a satisfactory level (paragraph 5(q))
- improve the available outside area so that it is safe and suitable for student use (paragraph 5(t)).

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

- provide particulars of the proprietor, including full name, address for correspondence during both term time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which he can be contacted (paragraph 6 (2)(b)).
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## 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:

- devise a policy for developing key skills across all subjects so that teachers and teaching assistants know how to support their development for each student
- standardise the format of record keeping and reporting so that it is relevant and particular to the school.

## School details

Name of school	Education Centre, The		
DCSF number	938/6249		
Unique reference number	126149		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1990		
Age range of students	12-16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 29	Girls: 4	Total: 33
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 29	Girls: 4	Total: 33
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Annual fees (day students)	£ 19,400		
Address of school	17-21 Boltro Road Haywards Heath West Sussex RH16 1BP		
Telephone number	01444450111		
Email address	the_education_centre@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Jacquie Roffe		
Proprietor	Geoff Wyatt		
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI		
Dates of inspection	25–26 June 2008		