

Hythe House Education

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6107
Unique Reference Number	134606
Inspection number	322034
Inspection dates	11-12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Richard Winter

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

Hythe House Education is an independent day special school in the ownership of Hythe House Support Ltd, a fostering agency based in Sittingbourne. Opened in 2003, the school is located in a spacious three-storey detached house in Sheerness, on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent.

The school provides education for boys and girls aged between six and sixteen who experience emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Many of the pupils have a history of disrupted schooling. Some pupils have additional learning difficulties and currently the majority have a statement of special educational need. There are currently seven pupils on roll, two of whom are girls; all are in Key Stages 3 and 4. No pupils have English as an additional language. All pupils are in the care of social services and live in foster placements arranged by Hythe House. Their places are funded by their local authorities (LAs).

The school aims to promote pupils' positive behaviour and social development in a safe and supportive environment. Staff seek to build a trusting relationship with each pupil by providing high levels of individual support designed to improve their behaviour and social skills. The school aims to place a strong emphasis on working closely with the foster families. It also seeks to offer a broad and balanced curriculum which enables pupils to experience a rewarding level of achievement. Where appropriate, pupils are considered for return to mainstream school.

The school was last inspected in January 2004.

Evaluation of the school

Hythe House is a successful, well managed school which provides a good quality of education and ensures that pupils make good progress. The quality of teaching is good, as is pupils' welfare, health and safety. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and the school is highly successful in helping pupils to improve their attitudes and self-confidence and to develop their skills of independent living. The school communicates very effectively with parents and placing LAs. Accommodation and resources are good and have improved since the last inspection, and the school meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good and is effective in meeting the school's aims. The curriculum is good. The school offers all subjects of the National Curriculum. Emphasis is placed on building basic skills, which meets effectively the needs of pupils who have experienced difficulties with their education. More able pupils sit GCSE examinations in English and mathematics. All Key Stage 4 pupils follow the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course. The school is currently introducing new vocational courses, such as horticulture and construction to run alongside the ASDAN course. Lesson plans are based on detailed schemes of work. The school has designed an excellent information and communication technology (ICT) scheme which builds pupils' skills and captures their interest effectively.

Pupils enjoy lessons in personal, social, and health education, including citizenship, and these contribute to their well-being. The school makes good use of assembly and break times to develop pupils' social skills and organise clubs and activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers know their pupils well and are very successful in supporting their academic and behavioural needs. There are excellent relationships between staff and pupils and in general the pupils behave very well towards each other. If difficulties occur, staff use their experience well to ensure that disruption to learning is kept to a minimum. Pupils strongly appreciate the individual help and attention they get for both their academic and personal needs. Pupils are encouraged to think hard; they rise to the challenge and consequently have positive attitudes to learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they vary activities in lessons well. Pupils concentrate well for long periods and work at a good pace but in a relaxed atmosphere. Teachers have high expectations and through their confident and engaging styles ensure that their pupils understand and enjoy their work. They are very ably supported by experienced teaching assistants.

Evidence from lessons and pupils' work shows that their progress is good. Pupils achieve well in the vast majority of lessons across the age range. They make rapid progress in their literacy skills and satisfactory progress in external examinations. However, in some subjects, there is insufficient assessment and recording to measure the progress that pupils make over time. Although teachers know pupils' needs well, systems are not routinely in place to set precise learning targets in some subjects.

Teachers frequently provide opportunities for pupils to assess their own and one another's work, so that they gain a better understanding of how to improve. Teachers constantly check on pupils' understanding with well-targeted questions which makes much of the assessment informal and continuous. The school completes regular assessments in reading and spelling and the ASDAN course contains its own record of progress. Although pupils' individual education plans

contain clear targets for improvement, they vary in detail from subject to subject and it is not always clear how these are used to plan lessons.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social and cultural development is good. This is because the school has high expectations for their attitude towards adults and towards each other. Pupils clearly enjoy their time at school. There is generally good behaviour, as a result of a high degree of trust between staff and pupils. Pupils learn better patterns of behaviour, not only through 'values' and citizenship lessons but at all points in the school day. Records show that there is an occasional outburst but only exemplary behaviour was seen on the inspection. Pupils take part in an effective weekly self-evaluation of their progress. At these sessions, strategies are discussed and adopted that improve their behaviour and academic performance and help them develop self-awareness. Attendance is good. The work of the school is appreciated by carers. They agree that the school has a very positive impact on improving pupils' self-esteem and developing their self-confidence.

Pupils attend special events such as meals in restaurants and visits to the ice rink, bowling alley and cinema to increase their sense of social awareness and increase their maturity. They take good care of the school environment. They learn about public institutions and services through visits from the fire brigade and the prison service. They attend organised work experience to improve their skills for getting on in life; for older pupils there are lessons in careers and helpful contact with local careers advisors.

Pupils take part in a variety of visits to museums and local places of interest. Through encouragement from Hythe House Support, carers successfully enable their children to join groups such as cadets and sports teams. Pupils have raised money for various charities such as Children in Need through running sponsored events. The curriculum helps pupils to live in racial harmony and appreciate the differences in a multicultural society by organising events such as China Week and India Week.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for pupils' health, welfare and safety is good. Pupils benefit from small classes, so that staff are able to give much attention to individuals. The behaviour policy is used consistently by staff. There is effective communication with foster carers which helps to ensure a consistent approach between home and school. Carers report that their children like the school and that they are treated fairly and with respect.

All pupils learn to understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum and by participating in the Fitter Schools Challenge. Pupils respond readily to encouragement to participate in outdoor physical exercise, which helps relieve stress and encourages healthy living.

There are clear and complete written policies to safeguard pupils' welfare and safety. These include child protection, anti-bullying and health and safety and procedures for educational visits. Consequently, pupils feel safe. They say that they feel confident to talk to staff if they have problems. A record book for sanctions is kept and complies with the regulations. Admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately. The school has a clear first aid policy and several staff are qualified. Medicines are stored safely and incidents and accidents are properly recorded. A fire risk assessment has been carried out and the local fire authority has approved the procedures that are in place.

The school has drawn up an audit of accessibility to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Hythe House Support Ltd is the registered proprietor of the school. The managers have established appropriate safeguards to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults by providing for all staff to be subject to thorough checks before their appointment. The school has completed a single central register of staff. The proprietors set high standards for recruitment and selection.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are well maintained and there is a high standard of hygiene and cleanliness which enables pupils to learn effectively and safely. There are three classrooms, a number of spacious specialist teaching rooms, a hall and a small kitchen. The ICT suite is of a high standard. A large lawn with trees provides the outdoor play space, but has limited opportunities for ball games. Physical education is taught off site in a private sports hall. There is currently no specialist science teaching room.

There is no separate hand washing facility for pupils when cooking meals but this can be done in a washbasin nearby. Pupils who are ill go to lie quietly in the library where there are soft bean bags, but no bed or water supply. Foster carers are contacted when a pupil is ill and collect them from the school as soon as possible. Despite being near to a toilet, such provision does not meet the regulation.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There is an informative prospectus which is clear, accurate and up-to-date. The reporting system helps carers, parents and LAs to be well informed about pupils' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for receiving and handling complaints are clear and fair and comply with 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 premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide washing facilities in the room designated as the first aid room (paragraph 5(l)).

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:

- Provide a room with resources for the teaching of practical science.
- Ensure that the system for recording pupils' progress is consistent across subjects.
- Ensure consistency in assessment and target setting so that there is more detailed information that can be used to assist lesson planning more effectively.

School details

Name of school	Hythe House Education		
DCSF number	886/6107		
Unique reference number	134606		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 2003		
Age range of pupils	6-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£25,577		
Address of school	Power Station Road Sheerness Kent ME12 3AB		
Telephone number	01795 581006		
Fax number	01795 668728		
Email address	robertduffy@hythehousesupport.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Robert Duffy		
Proprietor	Mr Robert Duffy		
Reporting inspector	Richard Winter		
Dates of inspection	11-12 June 2008		