

Wessex College

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	933/6210
Unique Reference Number	133522
Inspection number	322067
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl 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).

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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

Wessex College opened in 2001 and provides up to 52 week care and schooling for young people aged 11–18. Students have a range of behavioural, emotional or social difficulties and all have been placed by local authorities in southern England. The school, at Wessex Lodge, is registered for 10 students but at the time of the inspection there were seven students, two male and five female. All students have a history of family crisis, fragmented lives, multiple placements and challenging and risk taking behaviours. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2005. The three residences for students have all received very positive inspections by Ofsted in 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Wessex College provides a satisfactory education for its students. It is successful in helping young people continue to engage with education and gain national test and examination accreditation, sometimes leading to placement in further education. The school takes good care of its students and encourages them to lead healthy lives. During the inspection the full complement of teaching staff was not in the school and this had an adverse impact on the quality of some lessons. The school meets almost all the regulations and has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection in some areas, though there are still aspects of teaching and assessment that require improvement.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and suitably documented with schemes of work and outline plans. A broad range of subjects is studied, closely linked to the National Curriculum and a variety of other accredited syllabuses including GCSE, the Award Scheme and Accreditation Network and Entry Level Certificates. The curriculum is suitably flexible to meet the needs of all students, including those who have a statement of special educational need. Students' attainment is generally below what might be expected because of a history of disrupted schooling. Much of the curriculum is designed to allow students to work at their own pace and overall students make satisfactory progress. Basic skills in literacy and numeracy have an appropriate focus and most students make good progress in improving skills in reading and spelling.

While the curriculum covers a good range of subjects it relies heavily on text book activities and derived worksheets. This provides structure but is a restricted diet and

lacks creativity in the way tasks are presented to students. There are only limited opportunities for investigative work and missed opportunities to work in a more cross curricular way. A visiting art specialist provides the chance for students to make larger artefacts and other artistic creations. Students make meals and cook a range of interesting menus as part of their food technology. Activity days each term provide for more adventurous activities and the option to attend a local gym, play racquet ball and golf and, sometimes go fishing, helps to develop a wider range of skills.

Personal, social and health education (PHSE) plays an important role in helping students develop their attitudes to and knowledge of a range of issues. This contributes very effectively to their all round development.

Teaching is satisfactory and students gain age related accreditation for their academic efforts. Teachers know their students well and successfully encourage them to complete tasks, despite the very unpredictable nature of behaviour and relationships. Teachers give good individual support and successfully help students to discuss their learning, for example, discussing novels and Shakespeare's plays as part of GCSE course work. Students are appreciative of staff efforts and most say that they are doing better in this school than in their previous ones. When it is appropriate, work placements are arranged though some students say they would like more opportunities for this type of activity.

There are occasions when students achieve little in lessons. This is usually when there is an incident of poor behaviour which unsettles the whole group of students. However, it is sometimes because teaching lacks imagination or students choose not to engage with tasks. There are also instances where staff subject knowledge is insecure.

Teachers give every encouragement to students to behave well and are consistent in their approach. They are skilful and non confrontational in their methods. Consequently, when poor behaviour occurs, it is often not too long before students are focussed again. The students work best when they in a one to one situation with a teacher, teaching assistant or care worker.

Assessment is satisfactory. Students are assessed against national standards and this is now being developed into a useful system to monitor their progress over time. Work is marked with positive and encouraging remarks but there are fewer comments to say what could be done to improve work. Every day teachers outline each student's assignments. There is overall planning for each task and unit of work but not enough attention is given to specific short term assessment and related individual lesson planning to show how gaps in learning, when identified, will be addressed. While students set weekly targets for themselves, these sometimes have a greater emphasis on behaviour and attitudes rather than academic achievement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The school's provision for the personal development of students is satisfactory. The moral and social development of students is good and spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Students successfully demonstrate knowledge of right and wrong, addressing many social and moral issues through PSHE and religious education. They are very aware of the rules of the school and also the sanctions that follow if rules are broken. The college effectively raises the self-knowledge and self-confidence of most students, because it helps them to improve their academic performance and to gain confidence in their own ability to succeed. Consequently, they are satisfactorily prepared for future well-being in further education, the wider community and work placements. Students have had part time employment locally, taken part in dog walking, helped at a home for the elderly and one student recently took part in charitable fundraising activities organised by the local football team he plays for.

Attendance is satisfactory and most students say they are pleased to be at the college. Most have adopted an increasingly mature attitude to their learning. The individual support and care provided by staff is appreciated by the students and enables them to have a positive role within the community. Students' views and ideas are gained mostly through informal discussion with staff. Although they make choices about the range of optional activities that take place each day, students say they would like even more opportunity to contribute to some decisions.

Behaviour is mostly satisfactory but very unpredictable. There is often a good atmosphere in the school and relationships between staff and students are good. This is exemplified at lunchtimes when the whole school sits together to eat and chat. Nearly all students show concern for each other. The school enables students to gain experience of and respect for the law and gain an understanding of public institutions and services in England. Links with outside agencies are good.

The curriculum and visits out of school reinforce and promote the students' tolerance and respect for other cultures and beliefs. For example, a recent visit to a Hindu temple has enabled the students to talk with openness and frankness about other religions.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Wessex College makes good provision for students' welfare, health and safety. It cares well for its students, who say that they feel safe. Students are not concerned about bullying and they would know who to talk to if they were worried. This might be a member of the school or care staff. The male students say that they would like more male staff company while at school. Students are well supervised in school and staff are skilful in reducing tension when it occurs.

There is very good liaison and frequent contact between the school and students' residences and this effectively raises the quality of overall care for students. Care staff, who support students at the school from time to time, make a positive contribution to students' welfare and learning by giving one to one support in

lessons, helping with homework and supporting out of school activities and visits that occur out of school hours.

The school has very robust child protection procedures and there is good information given to students and displayed around the school indicating what students could do if they are concerned at any time, including making a complaint.

Issues of healthy living are addressed through the PHSE curriculum and access to a sexual health nurse and other identified specialist practitioners successfully increases the range of ways that students are supported. Students are encouraged to eat healthily and make lunches for themselves at lunchtime. While smoking is prohibited in the school building, staff are aware that there is still a way to go in order to stop students smoking outside. Students have regular opportunities to take part in physical activity at local sports facilities or the park.

A wide range of risk assessments are completed relating to health and safety, fire and more generally to students' activities. The school meets the requirements in respect of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate procedures and keeps suitable records for appointing staff. These procedures follow the national guidelines. All staff have had the required enhanced criminal records check.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises are spacious and well maintained. They provide a range of classrooms that enable a variety of student groupings and allow staff to respond to specific needs at any particular moment. There are two additional small rooms available for practical activities such as art and a limited range of design and technology. One room has a small computer suite. Outside there is a garden area to which students have access at break times and this provides a good area for light recreation and more relaxed periods during the day.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has a wide range of information available for parents, carers and as necessary for outside agencies and local authorities. Full and informative academic reports are written. Appropriate information is provided for the required annual reviews of students' statements of special educational needs.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures meet all the requirements.

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:

- ensure lessons are well planned, and effective teaching methods and suitable activities used and class time managed wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure that staff have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught (paragraph 1(3)(e))
- establish a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly and use the information from such assessment to plan teaching so that students can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

School details

Name of school	Wessex College		
DCSF number	9336210		
Unique reference number	133522		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of students	11-16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 5	Total: 7
Number of boarders	Boys: 2	Girls: 5	Total: 7
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 3	Total: 5
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 5	Total: 7
Annual fees (school)	£43281.60		
Telephone number	01985218486;01373453414		
Fax number	01985218347		
Email address	carols@wessexcollege.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Carol Smith		
Proprietor	Ms Jo Sams		
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl HMI		
Dates of inspection	17–18 June 2008		