

Park House

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	874/6035
Unique Reference Number	134893
Inspection number	322263
Inspection dates	8–9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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).

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 school, which opened in February 2005, occupies a substantial part of a large Victorian house set in its own grounds in the village of Thorney in Cambridgeshire. The house was originally owned by the family of one of the proprietors and a family member still lives in a separate part of the house.

The school is registered for eight pupils aged 4–16. There are four pupils currently on roll, aged 10–12, one of whom is newly admitted and attends part-time until his induction is complete. All of the pupils have a statement of special educational need identifying an autism spectrum disorder, meaning they have greater difficulty than most in social interaction, communication and behaviour.

The school was last inspected in May 2005. It aims to provide a warm, caring and structured environment in which pupils feel secure, are treated as individuals and develop to their fullest potential.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is outstanding because a very expert and effective team of staff plan and teach a wide range of appropriate activities superbly well. The school has improved significantly since its last inspection. Pupils learn skills and strategies to help them manage the most debilitating effects of severe autism and make excellent progress in communication, social skills and behaviour. They are cared for well and their personal development is outstanding. The school meets almost all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It benefits enormously from the strong direction in planning pupils' work and activities provided by the school's highly effective team. In the school's previous inspection, the curriculum was judged to be very good and this was attributed largely to the impact of the multi-disciplinary team. The speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, clinical psychologist, along with the teachers and classroom assistants, continue to work together extremely effectively. They bring a significant level of expertise to assessing pupils' progress and planning their individual work and they do this very regularly. The curriculum is exceptionally

closely matched to each pupil's learning needs and to everything specified in their statements of special educational need. As a result, they make excellent progress.

The curriculum policy and programmes of work focus sharply on learning opportunities best suited to pupils with severe degrees of autism and this makes learning opportunities highly relevant. While their performance is greatly impaired by autism, in certain respects some pupils are working at the level expected for their age, while others are well below this. The difference in pupils' capabilities is extremely wide and their curriculum is planned to reflect this. Moreover, work and activities are made interesting and they engage pupils very well. A particularly good balance has been struck between classroom based work and learning opportunities outside school.

The school's promotion of social skills, moral development, communication, good behaviour and independence runs through all of the pupils' work, reflecting the strength of the personal, social and health education programme. High expectations are set for pupils to do as much by themselves as possible. Work is planned most effectively, particularly in literacy and numeracy. For example, some learning resources are kept within sight but out of pupils' reach so they have to gain an adult's attention and ask for a piece of equipment; a simple approach which really helps pupils gain key communication skills. Carefully planned educational visits, shopping and use of local amenities are linked closely to pupils' work in the classroom. This gives pupils excellent opportunities to apply and improve a broad range of knowledge and skills such as using money, travelling and behaving appropriately. The previous inspection highlighted the need to increase pupils' contact with the wider community and progress on this has been excellent. Furthermore, one pupil is enjoying the opportunity to make new friends in an after-school club at the local primary school.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. All of the staff know the needs and capabilities of each pupil extremely well. This is the result of exceptionally good teamwork and, in particular, the thorough assessment that comes from this. As a result, relationships with pupils are very positive and the support this creates enables them to respond positively to the high expectations being set. Pupils' work is really challenging and the pace of learning is brisk. Behaviour is managed expertly and with a high degree of consistency. Pupils behave exceptionally well and this ensures they cooperate fully, follow routines, make marvellous efforts with their work and thus progress very rapidly. The substantial experience and expertise of the staff team has meant a wide range of very effective approaches and resources for meeting pupils' needs have been incorporated into lessons, including information and communication technology. Pupils' individual plans benefit enormously from sharply focused targets which contribute substantially to them making excellent progress. Progress towards targets is reviewed very regularly by the whole team. There has been great success in involving parents and carers in evaluating their children's progress and agreeing their targets.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent. The very positive rapport with staff means pupils gain considerable self-confidence, an essential ingredient in them making progress. It also accounts for pupils' huge enjoyment of school. The very successful emphasis on pupils increasing their independence in a wide variety of situations in and out of school contributes enormously to broadening their outlook. Pupils have learnt to tolerate many things for which they had a previous aversion and their attendance is excellent. They act appropriately in a wide variety of settings and cope very well with new situations, showing that the world that surrounds them influences their thoughts and feelings. This is a very positive indication that pupils can begin appreciating culture, cultural differences and how public institutions work. Similarly, learning social skills as effectively as they do means pupils have a regard for each other by sharing, helping and taking turns. In this way pupils are able to make significant contributions to each other, the school and the wider community. Pupils value the school's effective reward system which defines for them important aspects of right and wrong and helps them to behave appropriately. Assemblies are very effective in allowing pupils to celebrate each other's successes and for them to gain a sense of their own achievement. Their exceptional progress in personal development, communication and social skills means pupils are prepared outstandingly well for the future.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare health and safety is good. They are exceptionally well cared for in respect of their well-being by all of the staff. A healthy lifestyle is given a high priority and pupils eat a healthy diet of snacks and lunches. They have many opportunities to improve their physical skills and fitness. Importantly, pupils are made to feel secure and happy in school and the clear routines established contribute greatly. All of the staff are clear and consistent in their expectations of pupils and they manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. Pupils are safe and act safely. Many features of good health and safety are in place such as hygienic food preparation, fire precautions and safety procedures when pupils are away from school on visits. However, while the school has policies and procedures meeting most of the requirements relating to child protection and first aid, some of the staff training necessary for both areas has not been kept up-to-date. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All of the staff and the proprietors have undergone the range of checks necessary to confirm their suitability to work with children, including with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school maintains a single, central register showing that all of the required checks have been carried out prior to confirming the appointment of staff.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation meet requirements. There is a sufficient number of classrooms to allow for individual teaching. The school also has the capacity to extend classroom provision to cater for individual teaching when more pupils are admitted. Each classroom is safe, well organised and resourced to meet the needs of pupils. There are also sufficient space and resources for pupils to work together whenever shared activities are planned. A well equipped and safe kitchen is used regularly with pupils to plan and prepare meals. Outdoor space in the school's grounds and the public park adjoining the school provide a variety of good options for play and educational activities. Village amenities and facilities in Peterborough are used frequently and to very good effect to broaden the curriculum.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school publishes a prospectus providing a comprehensive amount of information on its policies and practices. Moreover, the school keeps parents closely engaged with regular updates on their children's progress and it involves them in consultations on the targets for their children's individual education plans.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints procedure meets all of 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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that every member of the permanent staff is appropriately trained in child protection and, in addition, the designated person for child protection is trained appropriately for that responsibility (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- ensure all staff who administer first aid keep their training up-to-date (paragraph 3(6)).

School details

Name of school	Park House		
DCSF number	874/6035		
Unique reference number	134893		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	February 2005		
Age range of pupils	4–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
	3	0	3
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
	1	0	1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
	4	0	4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
	1	0	1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 50,000 – £57,000		
Address of school	Park House Wisbech Road Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE6 0SA		
Telephone number	01733 271187		
Fax number	01733 271187		
Email address	parkhouseschool@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Mr A Crossland		
Proprietors	Mr A and Mrs J Crossland		
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon		
Dates of inspection	8–9 May 2008		