

# Helen Allison School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6046
Unique Reference Number	118993
URN for social care	SC024066
Inspection number	330405
Inspection dates	8–9 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell
Social care inspector	Lucy Ansell

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). The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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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.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

## Information about the school

The Helen Allison School is an independent residential special school owned and operated by the National Autistic Society. The school declares its primary aim is to provide a high quality and relevant education designed to meet the specific needs of pupils and students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). It was opened in 1968 and provides co-educational and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with ASD aged 5 to 19 years. All pupils and students have a statement of special educational needs related to ASD and some have additional medical needs and specific learning difficulties. The school occupies two sites. The primary and secondary departments are situated on the edge of the village of Meopham in Kent, in a semi-rural area six miles from the nearest town of Gravesend. The post-16 department and residences are situated on the Overcliffe, near the centre of Gravesend. Pupils are referred predominately by neighbouring local authorities, but also by other authorities from around the country. The school was last inspected in February 2006.

## Evaluation of the school

Helen Allison School provides a good quality of education for its pupils and students. It makes outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this is shown by positive relationships and outstanding behaviour. Their provision for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety is also outstanding. The school is successful in meeting its aims. Parents and referring local authorities report they are very satisfied with the work of the school. The school has improved since the last inspection, maintained its strengths and meets the vast majority of regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of education provided is good and enables the pupils in the main school and students in the post-16 department to make good academic progress and improve their attitudes to study. The curriculum is good and is supported by clear policies and planning based on the National Curriculum. Appropriately, in keeping with the school's philosophy of 'Education for Life', there is a very strong focus on enabling all pupils and students to improve their communication skills and independence. There is also a clear focus on literacy and numeracy within all National Curriculum subjects taught. Key Stage 4 pupils and students in the post-16 department receive comprehensive careers education and guidance. These learners are also provided with regular opportunities to develop enterprise skills where they run projects such as the school tuck shop and the successful craft shop. All learners benefit from extensive, well-planned programmes of physical activities and sports. The revised programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) ensures that all know about the requirements for a healthy lifestyle.

The school's deputy principal (education) has appropriately identified the need to further develop the 14 to 19 curriculum in accordance with recent guidance. Accreditation is offered at GCSE and Entry Level in English, mathematics and science with other awards available in information and communication technology (ICT) and vocational studies designed to maximise personal effectiveness. Additional accreditation in other subjects, including art, is actively being considered. Where appropriate, study is undertaken at local mainstream schools and colleges. There are few opportunities for extra-curricular activities although the school's three day trip is enjoyed by younger pupils. Boarders enjoy a rich programme of social, sporting and vocational experiences in the evenings. Day pupils and students may also benefit from these activities during respite visits. The school is investigating the potential for some of these activities to contribute to the boarders' school-based accreditation.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and enables the learners to make good progress across the curriculum. A significant strength is the emphasis on language and practical experiences that meet the needs of learners. For example, in a language lesson the pupils practise sounds in accordance with their identified needs from speech and language assessments. Where language needs are greatest, staff use a range of communication methods including gesture and symbols. Some pupils and students are proficient users of technology to support their communication. Students in the post-16 department regularly conduct transactions with peers, staff and members of the public in the craft shop. Younger pupils demonstrated that they could identify the largest number in a series and give change from £15 for items bought from a shop. In practical subjects, such as art and physical education, the pupils not only develop their skills but also their creativity and appreciation of the work of others. Group work is encouraged wherever possible to enhance social skills. The staff have responded well to the increased demand for subject knowledge across the curriculum. Teamwork and relationships are typically strong across the school. Specialist knowledge in ASD and specific learning

difficulties is effectively developed in-house with the support of the educational psychology team which is held in high regard for its training and professional development role. The quality of teachers' assessment of progress and subsequent lesson planning is good and has improved since the last inspection. Comprehensive records of work and assessment have a significant impact on pupils' examination outcomes. There is increasing involvement of learners in assessing themselves as to how well they are doing in lessons. Monitoring of classroom practice by the managers is undertaken regularly and the school now makes better use of the information it holds on pupils by improved moderation of work and data analysis.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils and students is outstanding. The school places great importance on the development of self-confidence and members of staff use praise and encouragement very effectively to raise self-esteem. Adults adopt a calm and understanding approach and their firm and consistent behaviour management, allied to good curricular provision and close links with the boarding houses, help to underpin pupils' outstanding personal development. Working relationships are warm and very supportive. Pupils trust the adults around them and most of them clearly enjoy being at school. Break and lunch times are used effectively to promote polite and socially acceptable behaviour. Pupils derive great satisfaction from their learning and attendance is good; unauthorised absences are exceptionally rare. Pupils have a good understanding of the different cultural traditions in modern Britain. This is promoted through a wide range of resources and enjoyable practical activities such as dressing in Sikh clothing and eating Islamic food. Visits from the community, such as the fire and police services, aid mutual understanding of life beyond school in a diverse society. Weekly trips and visits to places of interest, such as Windsor Castle, also enhance pupils' understanding of the community at large. Pupils' and students' behaviour is outstanding. Despite their difficulties, they act responsibly and behave well during the school day. They learn how to understand rights and wrongs in different situations in school and are very tolerant of each other. Through the school council they learn to make decisions and they make an excellent contribution to the wider community through fund-raising for local and national charities such as Children in Need. Enterprise skills and use of the community during the school day and boarding prepare the pupils and students very well for life after formal education.

## Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school's provision for safeguarding the learners' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school uses all available information as well as their own initial assessments to establish appropriate education and behaviour support plans. The small group and individual attention provided also has a positive impact upon the pupils' development. Staff are familiar with the wide range of policies and procedures to ensure safe practices within the school and off-site. Risk assessments are systematically carried out and staff are deployed so as to provide good supervision and to ensure safety at all times. The school promotes healthy lifestyles well, for example with regular opportunities for physical exercise and a wide range of healthy

food being available at mealtimes. In PSHCE, students receive helpful information about staying safe. Boarders also receive extensive support from diligent care staff.

The school works effectively with other agencies, carers and parents to support students' welfare. The internal team, which includes education, care, psychology and therapy managers, liaises closely to ensure a comprehensive view of the school's work, for example in tracking individual pupils' and students' progress following comprehensive psychological and language assessments. The school is regularly involved in research and training with other professionals in this specialist field. This impacts well on the school's ability to meet the needs of pupils, students and boarders.

The school does not yet formally gather the views of parents although the overwhelming majority reported they were satisfied with the school's work. A significant minority expressed some concern about the irregular issuing of homework. Audits conducted by referring local authorities confirm their satisfaction with the school's provision. The attention given to preparing the pupils and students for life after school is excellent. For example, the close working relationship with Connexions staff and a clear programme that eases the transition from and within school. Induction to the school and boarding is well monitored and managed with great sensitivity.

The school safeguards students well. All staff receive regular training on child protection and the designated person is fully aware of requirements and liaises well with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Currently, both sites are the lead responsibility of one person and to improve the provision further, the school recognises that having a designated person on both sites will improve arrangements further. The required training and relevant personnel to achieve this have recently been identified. The school's recruitment procedures are excellent. There are robust systems to ensure all necessary checks are carried out when confirming the appointment of staff. Detailed records are held on individual staff although the school has not yet completed its single centralised register of the checks made. The school has successfully implemented its plan to increase accessibility to the premises and curriculum over time and has made further amendments in light of plans for new post-16 accommodation nearer to the main school.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. The school is meeting and exceeding all of the key National Minimum Standards. There are excellent support, care and activities provided for boarders, to meet individual need. The school has met the previous recommendations.

The school identifies and addresses the routine health needs of boarders, health plans are comprehensive and up-to-date. There are clear procedures for the management and administration of medication, by staff trained to complete this. Records are appropriately maintained. Qualified first aid staff are always available on site. The use of the multi-disciplinary teams, including, psychology and speech and

language within the school and residential houses is effective and successful. The school meets the health needs of boarders holistically through ensuring all health and medication needs are met, educating them to understand how to be healthy, encouraging active lifestyles and eating healthy, wholesome meals.

Boarders feel very safe, and say that instances of bullying can happen, however, they are not common. All staff have received appropriate child protection training and are suitably aware of the relevant reporting procedures. Procedures for reporting significant events and unauthorised absences are in place and understood, though actual occurrences again are very rare. The policy on behaviour management is clear and concise. Emphasis is placed upon rewarding positive behaviour and using de-escalation techniques before invoking physical means as a last resort. The recording of the behaviour in the school and use of this information to support behaviour plans and risk assessments is exemplary. Communication between staff across the different disciplines is excellent and contributes effectively to the quality of welfare and safety. Robust recruitment procedures include careful selection and appropriate vetting processes, occasionally aided by some of the school pupils and students in the post-16 department.

The three houses all offer excellent levels of privacy with boarders staying in personalised bedrooms with bathing facilities sited close by. Each house enjoys the comfort of pleasantly furnished, well-maintained communal areas, which are free from hazards; each one benefits from low arousal decoration. Computers with internet access are available within the boarding accommodation. The residential team's contribution to education is effective. Close liaison between teaching staff and residential staff working part of the shift in the school, ensures an effective service is provided. Such joined-up working positively impacts upon the chances for success and this is further being explored with joint targets being added to placement plans.

Appropriate and meaningful leisure activities are provided. Boarders are particularly positive about this aspect of service provision. The school excels in promoting excellent and creative methods to encourage independence. Excellent examples of this include students planning meals, going to the local shops and then cooking for themselves, parents and peers. The school ensures involvement in the local community and has built strong links with external agencies. The school, however, does not have transport that is suited to community living. A particular strength is the provision of activities for individuals, not simply the whole group. The school has a culture of being very encouraging and positive. For example, staff may say, 'You can do that. How can we help you achieve it?'

The school actively engages boarders in meaningful consultation. The boarders believe their views and opinions really matter and say they are effectively listened to. Forums include each boarding house holding and chairing their own weekly meetings, involvement in contributing to placement plans and reviews, and the school setting up a student council. The surveys were not suitable for the boarders, so the school devised its own in various formats so all could contribute. The overall standard of behaviour at the school is excellent. Boarders' pocket money is stored safely and they are encouraged to keep their own accounts.

Each boarder has a designated key worker who liaises between the school, family and external agencies. Boarders say they feel valued and well supported by the care staff and they enjoy positive relationships with them. The school provides a high level of individualised support to boarders from multi-disciplinary teams and external partners, when they are in the residential houses. Communication systems and behaviour programmes are well established and records well kept. Regular ongoing contact with parents is maintained using written reports and telephone calls from the care staff. Excellent staffing levels, supervision and risk assessments ensure activities occur safely.

The school's overall management structure is strong and the relationships that exist within the school contribute effectively to the protection and promotion of pupils' and students' welfare and independence. Clear written policies and procedures underpin the school's practice. Staff are very knowledgeable about the care needs of the boarders. Revised placement plans ensure the focus is now strongly on achieving outcomes. There are clear supervision and appraisal formats in place, and staff say they feel well supported. All staff have achieved, or are working towards, their NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. Whilst the staffing levels during the day ensure excellent cover for the boys' boarding, they have extra staff employed to cover the waking nights.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout the standards inspected. The school promotes very effectively all aspects of diversity and ensures all boarders are treated as individuals with their own unique strengths recognised and built upon.



## 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 suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- maintain a single central register of staff checks in relation to each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, showing checks made (and certificates obtained where relevant) of: his/her identity; qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB was obtained, or where appropriate, that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99); the right to work in the UK and, where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK, suitability to work in a school and compliance with the relevant National Minimum Standards where boarding accommodation is provided. The register must also include the date on which each such check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraphs 4C(2 and 3))
- in relation to supply staff, ensure the register shows whether written notification has been received from the employment business that the checks referred to in 4C(2) were carried out, together with the dates when these were completed or certificates obtained. The register must also show the date when such written notification from the employment business was received (paragraphs 4C(4 and 5))
- in relation to each member of a body of persons named as the proprietor in post on or after 1 August 2007, ensure the register shows whether a check was made of: his/her identity; right to work in the United Kingdom; and whether an enhanced CRB check was carried out and certificate obtained, or where appropriate, confirmation that he/she is not barred from working in school under section 142 of the Education Act 2002. The register must also show the date on which any check was completed or certificate obtained (paragraphs 4C(6 and 7))
- ensure the information on the register, which may be kept in electronic form, is capable of being reproduced in legible form (paragraph 4C(9))

The school meets the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and associated regulations.

## 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:

- establish lead designated personnel for child protection on both sites
- encourage further parental involvement and review its homework arrangements
- ensure the boarding provision uses a vehicle more suited to community living. (NMS 22)

## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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### The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision	✓			
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## School details

Name of school	Helen Allison School		
DCSF number	886/6046		
Unique reference number	118993		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1968		
Age range of pupils	5–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 64	Girls: 6	Total: 70
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 15	Girls: 0	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 65	Girls: 6	Total: 71
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,186		
Annual fees (boarders)	£60,930		
Address of school	Longfield Road Meopham Gravesend Kent DA13 0EW		
Telephone number	01474 814878		
Fax number	01474 812033		
Email address	jacquiashtonsmith@nas.org.uk		
Principal	Dr Jacqui Ashton Smith		
Proprietor	National Autistic Society		
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell AI		
Dates of inspection	8–9 January 2009		