

The Quest School for Autistic Children

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6108
Unique Reference Number	134605
Inspection number	330416
Inspection dates	21–22 January
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is 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 Quest is an independent day special school for pupils aged five to 14 years who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The pupils have social and communication difficulties and additional learning difficulties ranging from severe to very mild. All pupils have statements of their special educational needs and most are funded by their local authorities. The school was founded by a group of parents and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) professionals in 2003 and initially occupied premises in a local village hall in Offham. It moved into new premises in the same small village in January 2007. There are 12 pupils on roll divided between two class groups. Group 1 is for seven higher attaining pupils, and Group 2 is for five lower attaining pupils. Currently, the youngest pupil is nine years old. The school was last inspected in November 2004, with a visit to check the suitability of the new premises in December 2006.

The Quest runs using the ABA approach which uses very detailed programmes to support improvement in each individual's behaviour. The school also uses this methodology to support communication and learning for some pupils, where appropriate. Additional advice, support and input are provided by occupational, speech and language and music therapy services, and other professionals as required. The school's main aim is to 'provide outstanding education and care' so that 'self-esteem is high, and the children are happy, stimulated and motivated to learn'.

Evaluation of the school

The Quest is a good school that provides a good quality of education and makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. As a result, pupils' achievement is good and their personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The school is successful in meeting its main aims and has improved steadily since its last full inspection. It has greatly improved its premises and the quality of education provided and is almost at full capacity. It meets all but one regulation for registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good and all regulations are met. All aspects are effectively supported by a committed staff, underpinned by professional development and very effective leadership and management.

The curriculum is good. The very wide range of pupils' abilities, skills and needs means that, effectively, there are two curricula, one for the higher attaining pupils in Group 1 and one for the lower attaining pupils in Group 2. Both curricula correctly emphasise the development of pupils' social, emotional, behavioural and communication skills. Where necessary, communication is effectively supported by a symbol-based communication system, or by electronic communication devices. Pupils' social development is successfully aided by curriculum subjects such as personal, social and health education (PSHE) and the social use of language programme, the ethos of the school and the use of the community. The Quest has good partnerships with local schools which support pupils' social and academic inclusion. Currently, some aspects of science are studied at the local secondary school and some of the pupils in Group 1 are expected to take GCSEs in several subjects. The school has developed a suitable programme for its older pupils, including aspects of work-related learning. This course leads to accreditation.

The curriculum for Group 1 pupils is rooted in the National Curriculum and takes good account of recent national guidance for literacy and numeracy. Subjects are individually addressed on the timetable and planning is suitably derived from commercially available schemes of work. The school's ABA approach is used to support pupils' behaviour in this group. Group 2's curriculum teaches literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology on an individual basis. Other subjects are covered in topics that are mainly taught to the whole group. Subject planning is drawn from commercially available schemes of work that are written for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Each pupil also has an extensive individual education plan (IEP) which specifically addresses their particular needs and is practiced at various times in the day. Progress towards the IEPs is carefully tracked. The ABA approach is used effectively to support learning, behaviour and communication in Group 2.

The quality of teaching and use of assessment are good. The curriculum meets the diverse needs of all pupils. It prepares them well for the responsibilities and experiences of adulthood by helping them learn, socialise, conform and gain core skills at a level appropriate to their individual needs. The weaknesses in planning identified in the last inspection have now been very well addressed and all subjects have suitable plans and schemes of work. Each lesson has learning objectives which are generally shared with pupils. However, longer term learning objectives for units of work in some subjects and topics are underdeveloped. Consequently, there is no direct link between teaching, learning and assessment in these subjects which makes it more difficult for staff to evaluate pupils' progress systematically. Nevertheless, the school uses a number of systems to assess pupils' progress which, together, provide

an accurate and detailed picture. Progress in subjects is tracked using National Curriculum level descriptors and a commercially available package that tracks very small steps of progress. The analysis is set against benchmarks of expected progress for similar pupils. Clear, very well-presented records and analysis show that pupils make at least good progress in the core subjects, and in their behaviour, communication and social skills. A few individuals are making outstanding progress.

Relationships with pupils are outstanding, and pupils clearly enjoy their work. This is demonstrated by their smiling faces and willingness to conform to the staff's expectations. Behaviour is expertly managed using the school's ABA methodology. The staff successfully use lessons as vehicles for addressing pupils' autistic needs. On one occasion, for example, pupils were asked to role play a plane crash, and describe what they felt. The pupils managed this, which was a significant achievement for them. Staff generally have good professional knowledge, in relation to curriculum subjects, teaching methodology and how to support the pupils' autistic needs. Some of this work is outstanding, and the quality of teaching underpins pupils' good, all-round progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

This aspect of pupils' development is outstanding. Addressing pupils' personal development is of prime importance to the staff. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is well supported by the curriculum and the ethos of the school. The pupils respond very well to the structured approach to improving their behaviour and their ability to learn rises accordingly. Lessons are generally calm, positive experiences, and behaviour is excellent. The pupils enjoy school very much and their attendance is outstanding. Pupils settle quickly into school life and develop positive relationships with staff and each other. For some pupils, it is the first time they have made real friends and felt part of a social group other than their own family. Pupils are encouraged to work co-operatively or, to begin with, in close proximity to one another. Where possible, opportunities are given for pupils to take responsibility and use their initiative. By learning to conform to society's expectations, pupils start to make a valued contribution back to the local and wider community. On one occasion recently, for example, pupils wrote poems and read them to the villagers. Pupils learn successfully about people who help us who work for the public services.

The ethos of the school successfully develops pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem, and the religious education and PSHE curricula help them explore different cultures, beliefs and practices. Racial, religious and other forms of equality are strongly promoted, and staff conduct reinforces moral traits, such as fairness, respect and equality. Pupils' cultural development is supported effectively through subjects of the curriculum and associated visits and activities such as the celebration of various festivals. The improvement in pupils' personal development helps them learn and become more independent. They are better able to respond to new challenges and are well prepared for adult life and whatever the future holds.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school has outstanding systems and practices in place to safeguard the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. All regulations are met. The Board of Trustees offers considerable professional support and advice in this area. Careful risk assessments are made of all activities and venues to be visited. Health and safety, including the arrangements for fire safety and first aid, are suitably addressed. There is a strong focus on professional development, and staff are appropriately trained in a wide range of areas, including child protection, fire safety, restraint and first aid. The robust administration system signals when training is due to expire so that the school has plenty of time to make suitable arrangements. Good policies and practices address challenging behaviour, and the school seeks and welcomes advice from other professionals as needed. Consideration for pupils' personal and emotional well-being has a very positive effect on their personal development.

The school works hard to provide a safe environment for pupils and help them make safe and healthy choices. Healthy living is emphasised in the curriculum, for example, through a range of opportunities for physical exercise and promoting healthy eating in science and food technology. Occupational therapy and a focus on supporting sensory integration help the development of pupils' physical skills. There is no evidence of bullying, and there have been no exclusions. Pupils' mental health is robustly supported by the school's emphasis on reducing their anxieties and frustrations and any consequent challenging behaviour. This helps individuals to be safe, and feel safe.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has a robust and rigorously implemented system to ensure that staff have all the necessary checks on their suitability to work with children prior to confirmation of their appointment. These are recorded as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a newly converted barn on the edge of a farm. The accommodation is of good quality, although space is limited. It comprises an office and multi-purpose kitchen for staff use, suitable toilet facilities, and two large classrooms and a small sensory/therapy/sick room. The school appropriately continues to use facilities in the nearby village hall for extra teaching space and for some subjects, such as physical education and food technology. All areas of the school are in very good decorative order. There is adequate storage for resources and equipment. The small playground is covered in an all-weather surface and is equipped with climbing apparatus. This is supplemented by the use of a field when the ground conditions are suitable. All regulations are met.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, local authorities and other interested people meets all but one regulation. The school has an attractive prospectus. It includes a loose leaf insert with additional information which ensures the prospectus is up to date. The prospectus is supplemented by further detail in a pupil welcome pack which is available for parents once pupils join the school. Inspection questionnaire returns show that parents are happy with the information provided about their child's progress. They receive this in various review and informal meetings, and in written reports. However, the annual reports on the progress of pupils in Group 2 do not include information on attainment and progress in each of the subjects taught. This does not meet regulations. The school conducts suitable annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs, and reports to local authorities on income and expenditure for each pupil in a very clear and helpful format.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a simple, clear and fair complaints policy and procedure. These fully meet regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below.

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

- provide parents of all pupils with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of their child in the main subject areas taught (paragraph 6(5)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Establish a closer link between teaching and assessment of learning in topics and non core subjects.

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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School details

Name of school	The Quest School		
DCSF number	886/6108		
Unique reference number	134605		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2003		
Age range of pupils	5–14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 2	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 10	Girls: 2	Total: 12
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35000–£38000		
Address of school	The Old Stable Church Farm Church road Offham West Malling, Kent ME19 5NX		
Telephone number	01732522700		
Fax number	08719906458		
Email address	quest_school@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Anne Martin		
Proprietor	The Quest School for Autistic Children		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	21–22 January 2009		