

Clarence High School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Nigel Cromey-Hawke
Social care inspector Jeffery Banham

Age group: 7-19

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000³ 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.

Information about the school

Clarence High School is part of Nugent Care, a charity run by trustees operating from Liverpool since the 1880s, which offers a diverse range of social and educational provision. The school, which has been open since 1984, is residential and is registered for 56 students. The school provides places for pupils between the ages of 7 and 19 years. Currently there are 33 students on roll; a very small number are boarding. Only one boarder was present at the time of inspection. All pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties and some have social difficulties as well. All but one has a statement of special educational need and almost all have been excluded from local authority maintained schools across the country. There is an increasing number of students on the autistic spectrum and those with low attendance at previous schools. Since the last inspection in July 2006 the number of pupils on roll has halved. There have been significant staffing problems and the school has undertaken two rounds of redundancies. It is currently in consultation over the proposed closure of its residential provision which was inspected last in March 2009. The school has had no substantive principal in place for the last two years and is currently led by an acting principal. A new principal is due to take up post immediately following the inspection. The school aims that pupils will 'learn for life' and that they are enabled to fulfil their potential.

Evaluation of the school

Clarence High School provides a satisfactory quality of education and meets its aims. The quality of boarding provision is satisfactory. It is reviewing its provision to cater for the needs of its changing intake, although it recognises that aspects of students' personal development are not as strong as at the time of the last inspection. The behaviour of the majority is satisfactory, although the use of the behaviour management strategy across all classes is inconsistent. Teaching, assessment and

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

the curriculum are satisfactory, with improving vocational provision for the older students and a good range of externally accredited courses open to all. The welfare, health and safety of all students are satisfactory, with the very small number of boarding students not being adversely affected by the uncertain future of the provision. All safeguarding requirements are met. The school meets all the regulations required for its continued registration. At the time of the last inspection the school provided an outstanding quality of education. The staffing problems and redundancies have impacted detrimentally on the quality of provision but the school is now improving again.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and increasingly meets the varied needs of students. Basic skills are promoted well, including citizenship, and there is a strong focus upon literacy and numeracy. Individual education plans are used effectively by staff who constantly check on pupils' progress against their targets. A good range of visits is used, including the use of the local community, to enrich the learning experiences of pupils. Students access Entry Level GCSE courses one year earlier than normal in order to help them make as much progress as possible. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught as a separate subject and students clearly enjoy these lessons, although use of ICT skills within other subject lessons is underdeveloped. Nationally accredited courses are provided for older students in hair and beauty and construction; links with other providers for further vocational opportunities are being pursued to support students' future economic well being. Effective work experience placements are created with the help of the Connexions Partnership. There are opportunities to take part in football, which is a strength of the school, and other physical activities but these are not fully taken up by a majority of students. Care and education staff work consistently together to support students and ensure that the personal and health education programme provides appropriate guidance in these areas. The need to promote students' social and emotional development and help build more positive attitudes to learning has only just begun through the introduction of a specific programme within the curriculum and its impact has yet to be seen. This is why the curriculum is not yet good.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall although is better for some students than others. As a result students' progress varies across the school. Some lessons are well planned and taught with good humour and positive attitudes by the teachers. In these lessons, a wide range of activities are provided within a well paced, challenging yet highly supportive environment. Teachers and assistants provide good one to one guidance and ensure that appropriate learning takes place. Students clearly enjoy such lessons and make good progress, developing increasingly positive attitudes to school life. In a good English lesson a challenging review of learning near the end of the session extended students understanding considerably and the quality of language used by them was high. Lessons which are not as well planned do not engage learners as effectively and activities are not as well matched

to students' needs. Inconsistencies in the use of the behaviour management strategy result in students leaving the classroom to attend the pastoral unit for 'time-out'. Whilst there is little disruption to the learning of others within the classroom the progress of pupils on 'time-out' suffers. Assessment of students' progress is frequent, well charted against National Curriculum levels and communicated well to parents and carers. Where teaching is good, it is a strength that staff assess how well pupils respond to learning in lessons and adjust teaching accordingly. Students say they value this feedback. Subject 'pen portraits' of each student also help teachers to identify their needs in lessons. These often contain important care guidance as well as health and safety advice.

When students are admitted to the school, checks indicate that their previous attendance at school has frequently been exceptionally low. They have attained levels well below that normally expected of their age. At Clarence High School they begin to see the value of education and how it can benefit them. They begin to pay attention in lessons and the majority make at least satisfactory progress. Many of last years' leavers gained four or more GCSE grades, with performance in English and mathematics being the strongest. Many also gained Entry Level accreditation in other subjects. Current students' progress is more varied but the majority make satisfactory progress, with some making good progress. Interviews with students showed that older ones know their learning targets for their main subjects; the school's marking is helpful in telling them what level they are working at and what they need to do to improve further.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Care and education staff work together to enable students to develop satisfactorily their confidence and self-esteem, helping build more positive attitudes and life-skills that prepare them for their future. Many hold conversations politely and enter into mature debate within classroom situations. They develop a basic understanding of public institutions and services in this country and are taught the difference between right and wrong through the citizenship programme, and how this applies to life in general. The majority enjoy their time in school and all who were interviewed said they are well cared for and feel safe. No parents returned the pre-inspection questionnaire but pupil returns and an extensive pupil and parent survey carried out by the school earlier this year shows the majority to be happy with most aspects of school life. The curriculum helps them to gain a better understanding of their own and other cultures but the school recognises that it has to work hard to promote tolerance and harmony between some of its students, especially new arrivals. The behaviour of the majority is satisfactory. When incidents arise they are generally dealt with satisfactorily but differing interpretations of the behaviour policy by staff sometimes builds up resentments within some pupils. These and other issues are often resolved well by the students' key workers. Most students attend almost every day as they see the value and enjoyment in what they are offered. Overall attendance is affected detrimentally by a small number of persistent

absentees. The school recognises that it does not monitor these as effectively as it might and that it needs to more vigorously pursue defaulters.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The quality of provision for ensuring students' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. The school follows all of the recommendations to encourage students to lead a healthy lifestyle. Many arrive with significant welfare needs often part way through their compulsory education, but the impact of the school's work in this respect is often good and makes a considerable difference to the lives of the young people in its care. There are thorough procedures to ensure that safeguarding and child protection policies are in place; staff training is up-to-date. Staff have a good understanding of these policies and implement them effectively.

The school's self evaluation shows that the incidences of bullying last year were increasing. The majority of this was low level but staff undertook appropriate action to reduce this, including the involvement of the police community support officer, anti-bullying focus days, modified individual behaviour plans for students and enhanced key worker involvement. The impact has yet to be demonstrated.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Staff are thoroughly checked for their qualifications, experience and suitability to work in the school. The records are up to date and are kept securely on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises enable students to learn effectively and safely although the decoration is rather tired in places. The classrooms are spacious and well resourced. There is a purpose built theatre on site but it is underused. Part of the school's main building houses a local authority assessment centre but no direct access to it is possible by students. There are extensive external areas but, with the exception of the main playground, they are underused to support learning and the curriculum.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides clear, up-to-date information for parents and others. Frequent, detailed and good quality reports are compiled about students' progress and these are sent to parents and local authorities each half term, or more often if required. The school maintains daily contact with many families, whether for sharing information in times of difficulty, or to chase up attendance. Home visits are made if necessary.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints policy which meets requirements. It is made known to parents and carers.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of the boarding provision is satisfactory. There is uncertainty about the future of the residential provision and there has been underinvestment in recent years. There is no regular monitoring of the residential provision.

Staff in the residential unit are competent, experienced and provide safe and effective support for students. The staff team is stable and has worked together at the school for a number of years. Effective support and supervision of students is provided through the key worker system. Well organised rotas ensure that staff are deployed in order to meet students' needs. Staff set clear boundaries and are consistent in enabling students to take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour.

The staff are well supported, trained and managed in their teams and have created a strong child-centred ethos which translates itself into good outcomes.

Placement plans effectively support care and development. The plans are developed from comprehensive background information and the involvement of students. Key workers ensure placement plans are implemented. Family contact arrangements are supported and personal interests and hobbies are provided for. Discussions about progress enable all staff, parents and carers to contribute. Key workers ensure that students are given every opportunity to be involved in the assessment of their progress and to take as much responsibility for their own development as their needs and abilities allow. Records do not always provide accurate up to date information such as who has parental responsibility for a young person or their legal status.

There is a good relationship between care and education staff. Frequent communication enables key issues of learning and behaviour to be taken into account. Staff work consistently together to support students in their personal and educational development. Residential staff encourage homework to be completed.

The health care is given a high priority. Staff are aware of the importance of supporting students to take responsibility for their own health needs. Staff are trained in aspects of health care such as first aid and the administration of medication. Key workers ensure that routine and specialist health care is provided as required. They work closely with parents and carers to ensure effective communication and consistent care. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged through diet, exercise and the provision of information about such areas as drug and alcohol use. Information about health needs is not always current and can be contradictory.

The school ensures all aspects of the residential premises and equipment are safe for young people, staff and visitors. The residential accommodation was designed some years ago for more young people than currently use it. Large parts of it are empty. Staff work with students to provide accommodation that is domestic in style, homely and well furnished. Some of the communal areas such as corridors and bathrooms are however institutional in appearance. Aspects of decoration, both internal and external, and carpeting, are shabby in parts.

Access to the residential unit for visitors is not always possible as there is no way of alerting staff to anyone arriving at the locked front door. At the time of the inspection other doors were left unlocked.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations')

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated regulations with the exception of the following;

1. Ensure that the governing body receives a written report on the conduct of the school from a person visiting the school on their behalf half-termly (NMS 33) (Organisation)
2. Review the residential units to ensure they provide good quality and well maintained accommodation (NMS 24) (Economic well being)
3. Ensure that effective precautions are taken to ensure the security of the school from access from unauthorised persons (NMS 23) Economic well being)
4. Ensure that a child's health records accurately describe their current health care needs (NMS 14) (Being healthy)
5. Ensure that a child's records describe who has parental responsibility for them and whether the child is in care (NMS 18) (Organisation)

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improve the quality of teaching across the school to match that of the best, especially in relation to the match of activities to meet students' needs and maintain their interest

- ensure the consistent use of the behaviour management strategy amongst all staff and monitor the reasons behind incidents more effectively to help reduce exclusions
- monitor persistent absentees more effectively and challenge long term absenteeism more vigorously.

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	Clarence High School		
DCSF number	343/6131		
Unique reference number	104975		
Type of school	Special residential school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1984		
Age range of pupils	7-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 12	Total: 28
Number of boarders	Boys: 4	Girls: 1	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 19	Girls: 13	Total: 32
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,389		
Annual fees (boarders)	£85,662		
Address of school	West Lane Freshfield Formby Liverpool Merseyside L37 7AZ		
Telephone number	01704 872151		
Fax number	01704 831001		
Email address	alisonford@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Ford (Acting Principal)		
Proprietor	Nugent Care		
Reporting inspector	Mr Nigel Cromey-Hawke		
Dates of inspection	30 September–1 October 2009		