

Pontville Residential School

Independent school inspection report

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Unique reference number	133540
Social care reference	SC 061727
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Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI
Social care inspector	Jeffery Banham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 5-19

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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

Pontville Residential school is part of the Witherslack group of schools. Pontville opened in 1910 and is located on the outskirts of Ormskirk. The school caters specifically for pupils with social communication difficulties. There are 71 pupils on roll aged 11-19, the vast majority of whom are boys. The school's registration has been extended recently to include pupils aged 5-19, but there are no primary aged pupils in the school at present. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and are placed in the school and funded by their local authority. Most pupils attend daily, but 12 pupils board in the residential provision. An inspection of the boarding provision took place at the same time as the inspection of educational provision. The school was last inspected in June 2006 and by Ofsted's social care inspectors (boarding) in March 2009.

Evaluation of the school

Pontville is an outstanding school which provides high quality care and education. It is particularly successful in improving pupils' communication skills, increasing their self-esteem and confidence and preparing them for adult life. The outstanding overall quality of education enables pupils to make outstanding progress. The school cares exceptionally well for its pupils and safeguarding procedures meet all the requirements. The school's leadership has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection and the school now meets all the regulations for registration as an independent school. The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is outstanding.

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

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is outstanding. The curriculum and other activities are outstanding in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils. It is a highly relevant and specialist curriculum which improves pupils' self-esteem and confidence, is motivating and gives pupils a sense of worth and achievement. In particular, it enables pupils to develop skills for adult life. The curriculum is structured around a communication framework which develops pupils' learning skills across all subjects. The key aspects are pupils' performance in comprehension, expression, social communication and the key skills required for functional development. These skills are seamlessly entwined into the curriculum planning for all subjects. The lesson objectives in every lesson have a communication focus as well as a subject focus. In this way the communication skills learnt in speech and language lessons are applied and reinforced throughout the curriculum.

The full National Curriculum is provided in Key Stages 3 and 4. In Key Stage 5, the curriculum offers a broad range of vocational choices for pupils. Most pupils are entered for a variety of externally accredited qualifications including entry level and GCSE. Pupils can undertake link courses in a local mainstream school. Access is also available to work-based learning and work experience using local employers and training centres. Personal, social and health education is an integral part of everyday life for pupils in the school and boarding settings. Activities after school for boarders are carefully planned and build effectively on learning during the school day.

The impact of senior leaders on this outstanding curriculum is excellent. They have reviewed the curriculum following internal audits and have expanded pupils' choices. Most importantly, the integration of the communication skills, driven by the work of the speech and language therapists, is outstandingly effective. Training is in place to support staff and the therapists frequently work with teachers to develop their skills in the communication aspects of the curriculum. Planning is fully in place and is supported by very good schemes of work and policies. The planning is well matched and effectively adapted to pupils' individual needs in each class. Modifications are made with regard to language ability. The curriculum organisation, planning and delivery reflect the strong emphasis in each subject on social communication skills and language development. On entry to the school, each pupil completes several assessments which are analysed and collated to give a 'Pontville' points score (number). This is a standardised system and is used to place pupils in one of four sets. Also, strong consideration is given at this stage to pupils' social and emotional development and some pupils are placed into sets on this basis as an overriding factor. The curriculum is specifically tailored to the needs of each set and to each pupil's needs taking into account the content of pupils' statements of special educational needs, care plans and Individual Children's Education Plans (ICEP's) where appropriate.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment are outstanding in meeting the full range of pupils' needs. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding and the vast majority was good or outstanding. This matches the school's monitoring records which indicate significant

improvement in teaching since the last inspection when the judgement on teaching was good. A variety of teaching styles are evident ranging from the very formal to the very practical. Outstanding lessons were seen for each of these styles and were very suitable in each case in meeting the needs of pupils. This demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of the teaching provision. School leaders' evaluations also comment favourably on the variety of methods used. A significant strength of teaching are the lessons provided by the speech and language therapists. In these lessons, the learning environment is very positive and lessons begin with a cup of tea, creating a social learning occasion in which pupils feel valued and supported. The clear intonation of voice and high quality questioning skills used by the therapists enable pupils to build their learning step by step. As a result, they develop their listening and speaking skills and are able to apply them across the curriculum into other subjects. Features of all the outstanding lessons observed are the high quality of questioning techniques used by staff, very good subject knowledge, rigorous planning, good understanding of pupils' prior learning, high expectations of pupils' behaviour and extremely well-matched tasks and activities. Bright, well displayed classrooms value pupils' work and motivate and encourage learning. In the small number of satisfactory lessons, too little account is taken of pupils' prior learning so that they become bored and lose interest because they are repeating things they already know and can do. As a result, the pace of learning is slower and progress falters.

Teachers use a good variety of resources to deliver lessons, ranging from commercial texts to computers and practical facilities such as for painting and decorating. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to aid pupils' learning is much improved since the last inspection and most lessons use digital projection to illustrate the focus of the learning. However, pupils have insufficient opportunities to use computers to extend and develop their learning across all subjects.

Assessment procedures are very good and much improved from the last inspection when they were judged as satisfactory. On entry to school, rigorous cognitive and language tests ensure that each pupil's baseline of attainment is identified and this is well used to set pupils according to their needs. Regular standardised tests are used which inform teachers and leaders about pupils' performance. Reviews are held of pupils' performance every term and records are kept of this in each curriculum subject and for communication skills. The annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs are effectively informed by the termly reviews and provide an opportunity for pupils, parents and staff to evaluate pupils' progress in their personal and educational development. Pupils are set challenging targets for their future learning and development.

The school's leadership has a good system in place to support staff development, including mentoring. The impact of the speech and language therapists in sharing their very strong practice is improving the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum, though currently not all staff benefit from their expertise. There is strong support for staff who wish to undertake external training. Good use has been made of external consultants to provide staff training in the observation of lessons. This has ensured that consistent and accurate judgements are made. As a result, the

leadership can suitably target staff training where it is most needed. The school is making good progress to convert the satisfactory teaching to good and the good to outstanding.

Due to the outstanding curriculum and outstanding teaching and assessment, pupils make outstanding progress in their learning. All pupils enter school with attainment levels lower than those of their peers nationally. Pupils bring significant barriers to learning because of their behavioural, social, emotional and communication needs. The school successfully lifts those barriers and prepares pupils extremely well for future life. In 2009, all pupils who entered for entry level GCSE examinations passed. Some pupils gained seven GCSE passes. Pupils were also successful in gaining a range of other nationally accredited qualifications. A number of pupils have moved on to gain places at mainstream colleges and one ex-pupil has attained a university place. Pupils make exceptional progress in their personal development, becoming increasingly confident as their self-esteem is raised through their celebrated school success. Pupils are very positive about their progress and talk enthusiastically about their achievements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The strong staff team ethic creates a caring community underpinned by a shared vision of community success. The school is a very calm environment. A strength of the school is the consistent way in which all staff promote the positive behaviour policy which results in very effective behaviour management. The points and merit systems successfully motivate pupils. Consequently, pupils develop a good attitude to learning and enjoy attending school. Attendance is very good and behaviour is outstanding. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community through the school council, in assemblies which they frequently plan and run, school productions and self-assessments in lessons. In the local community, pupils raise funds for a range of charities and they make flower boxes which they give to local hospices. Pupils' awareness of the global community is well promoted through a Cambodian fund-raising project to provide children with education and transport. The programmes for personal, social and health education, careers and communication skills interrelate to support pupils' personal development and engender a sense of their own worth and potential. They also promote pupils' economic well-being in preparing them effectively for adult life. Pupils learn about world religions and faiths through the curriculum. They have opportunities to visit places of worship, such as the local parish church, Liverpool's two cathedrals, and mosques situated in Manchester and Liverpool. Daily assemblies develop pupils' cultural awareness through topics such as racism, perseverance and friendship. Theme days provide pupils with experiences that include tasting foods from other cultures and listening to music from around the world. The staff dress up in cultural dress to add to pupils' experience. The school welcomes a variety of visitors, such as the emergency services and pupils make a range of visits such as to the library and

the magistrates' court. Through this, pupils learn about British institutions and traditions.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils are outstanding. The school carries out rigorous risk assessments to ensure pupils are kept safe. The policies and procedures meet all the regulations and are kept up to date. Staff are trained appropriately in first aid and child protection. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Pontville is part of the local authority healthy schools' programme. Staff lead by example in making healthy meal and snack choices. Pupils are very involved in decision making about meals, snacks, and dining room arrangements. The home economics curriculum reinforces the healthy eating message. Pupils have lots of exercise trips, such as swimming and laser quest. They also have an opportunity to take part in outdoor adventurous activities and lunch activities include football and basketball. The headteacher and staff know the pupils very well and provide outstanding care and supervision. As a result, pupils say they feel safe and are confident they can turn to a staff member for help if they need to. Any instances of bullying are dealt with well and quickly by the school.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The procedures for checking and vetting all staff and volunteers are rigorous and fully comply with the regulations for safeguarding pupils. All staff are subject to an enhanced criminal records bureau check. A single central record is kept as required by the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises provide spacious accommodation which is well maintained and decorated. The main buildings include several good sized classrooms, a science laboratory, gymnasium, ICT suite, two dining rooms and a range of offices. Residential accommodation is organised in two blocks. Externally, there are very good facilities including a basketball court, football pitches, a horticultural area and additional classrooms in large sheds adjacent to these. The premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively and safely.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents, carers and local authorities with good information about the school and about the progress pupils make. The questionnaires received from parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work. Many written

comments praised the headteacher and the school. A comment typical of many reads, '*School life for our son before going to Pontville was so emotionally hard and stressful. He is now a much calmer and centred young person overall due to Pontville's effect on him. We are absolutely overwhelmed by what a wonderful school it is.*' A small number of parents raised concerns about homework. Inspectors looked at the school's systems including the support in the residential setting and judge that the provision is suitable for the pupils' needs.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure fully meets requirements and is available on request.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. One of the most significant aspects of the provision is the school's commitment to team working. Staff from all departments bring together a range of skills and resources which offer pupils care that meets their needs and enhances their education, development and self-esteem.

The residential provision is well managed. There is a clear structure in which the Head of Care has overall responsibility for the setting and each of the two residential units has its own team leader. Pupils are cared for by staff who are clear about their responsibilities and to whom they are accountable. They are given a strong sense of direction and a clear focus on putting the needs of individual pupils at the forefront of all they do. There is a strong emphasis on the evaluation of practice and continuous improvement. Staff are recruited, trained and supported to promote the safe care and personal development of young people in all aspects of their care and education. The staff team is enthusiastic, committed and clearly child-centred. The monitoring of the welfare of pupils in the school does not separately identify issues directly relevant to the residential provision. This limits the ability of the school to detect trends and monitor practice in these areas.

Staff in the residential units are competent and experienced and provide detailed and individualised support for every pupil. The staff team is stable and has worked together for some time. The use of a key worker system ensures that identified individuals develop detailed knowledge about the pupils for whom they care. The system ensures that staff are able to develop secure relationships that enhance the confidence of pupils. Well-organised rotas ensure that they are deployed in order to meet pupils' needs. They set clear boundaries and are consistent in enabling students to take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour.

Pupils are supported by detailed care plans that identify their needs, the areas for development and the responsibilities of staff. The plans are developed from comprehensive background information and with the involvement and contribution of the pupils themselves. Key workers ensure that the care plans are implemented and

reviewed where required. Family contact arrangements are supported and pupils' personal interests and hobbies are provided for. Discussions about progress involve all staff, pupils, their parents and carers. They are all encouraged to be involved in the review of progress and the setting of targets. Pupils are given every opportunity to be involved in their care. They are supported to take as much responsibility for their own development as needs and abilities allow.

The school does not always obtain full details of each young person's background, such as who has parental responsibility for them, before they are admitted to the school. This may impact on the care of pupils in respect of the provision of information about pupils to parents and carers, contact and obtaining consents for health care, and participation in activities.

The residential areas are homely and well furnished and equipped. They provide a relaxing and secure environment in which pupils can live safely and which enhances their self-esteem. The whole school environment is secure, well situated and well maintained.

There is an excellent relationship and frequent communication between care and education staff. The key issues of care and education relating to each pupil are taken into account and acted upon. The school uses a number of monitoring and evaluation techniques to check progress in areas such as the development of communication skills and these contribute to the development of each pupil.

Pupils' health is given a high priority. Staff focus on giving pupils information and guidance to enable them to take responsibility for their own health needs. Staff are trained in all aspects of health care such as first aid, health and safety and the administration of medication. Key workers ensure that pupils receive routine and specialist health care as required. They work closely with parents and keep them fully informed and involved. They promote healthy lifestyles through information and guidance about diet, exercise and drug and alcohol use. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of activities that enhances their education and sense of self-esteem. Staff share their enthusiasms and interests and support the development of new hobbies and activities. Staff consistently demonstrate the strongest possible commitment to the pupils for whom they care. Relationships between them are relaxed and informal, yet structured. These are based on the setting of clear boundaries and consistent responses. Pupils in the school feel safe, and are safe.

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.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Increase pupils' opportunities to actively use computers in lessons.
- Improve satisfactory lessons to good, and good to outstanding by further staff development and training.
- Ensure that the school obtains all relevant information about a pupil before their admission. (NMS 18)
- Ensure that the governing body monitors fully the welfare of pupils in the school. (NMS 33)

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	Pontville Residential School		
DCSF number	888/6050		
Unique reference number	133540		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1910		
Age range of pupils	5-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 67	Girls: 4	Total: 71
Number of boarders	Boys: 12	Girls: 0	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 67	Girls: 4	Total: 71
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 9	Girls: 2	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,053		
Annual fees (boarders)	£44,948		
Address of school	Black Moss Lane Ormskirk Lancashire L39 4TW		
Telephone number	01695 578734		
Fax number	01695 579224		
Email address	isim@pontville.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Iain Sim		
Proprietor	Mr J Bowers		
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI		
Dates of inspection	7-8 October 2009		