

# The Shires at Stretton

## Independent Special School

### Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	857/6004
Unique Reference Number	131018
URN social care	SC065071
Inspection number	332444
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI
Social care inspector	Jo Vyas

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.

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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, 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.

An inspection of the boarding provision was also carried out. The full report on this provision is not published but may be obtained from Ofsted by telephoning 08456 404040.

## Information about the school

The Shires School is an independent day and residential special school in the village of Stretton in Rutland. It opened in September 2005 and is owned by a private limited company. There are 10 students on roll aged 11 to 19 years. All have autism, severe learning difficulties and very challenging behaviour which has resulted in most of them being excluded from other schools. A small number have medical conditions such as epilepsy or have visual impairment.

The vast majority are White British and just under half are looked after. Two are day students and the rest are boarders. A third have been admitted in the past year. All students have a statement of special educational needs and all are referred and funded by a number of local authorities. A range of other professionals, including a speech and language therapist, a clinical psychologist and occupational, art and music therapists work with students and staff. Boarding provision was inspected by a social care inspector at the same time as the school's educational provision. The previous inspection of educational provision was in May 2006 and of boarding in June 2008.

The school aims to *'give every one of our very special young people the best opportunity to develop as full and rewarding a life as possible'*.

## Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is outstanding. Effective teaching and a rich curriculum that is well matched to students' needs, enable them to make exceptional progress in their basic skills and personal development. Behaviour management is excellent and this means students' behaviour is exemplary, given their difficulties. This is a place where students are treated with respect and dignity and are extremely well cared for. The school is well led by a very effective headteacher who promotes a real sense of teamwork to get things done. Parents hold the school in high regard. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The weaknesses

identified by the last inspection have been effectively addressed. All regulatory requirements for education are met.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. The curriculum policy provides an accurate summary of the provision in education and welfare. The curriculum is matched effectively to students' capabilities and the objectives identified in their statements. Appropriate plans and schemes of work exist for all areas of learning. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The curriculum is based on a modified National Curriculum and an Accreditation for Life and Living (ALL) programme of study. Subjects are often linked to termly topics to make learning more meaningful and coherent. Students participate in activities at their own level. Students require a structured routine and they get it, however, there is flexibility to change things day-to-day depending on students' disposition to learn. A very strong emphasis is rightly placed on helping students to become independent and to develop the necessary life skills to enable them to function in the wider world. For example, students routinely go shopping to purchase food to prepare meals for themselves and others.

Education and welfare provision is fully integrated and seamless. This means that from the time students wake up until the time they go to sleep they are engaged in productive activities that move their learning forward. A very wide range of interesting enrichment activities are provided to broaden students' horizons, increase their enjoyment and help prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life. Art and music therapy makes a positive contribution to further developing students' creative development.

Teaching and assessment are good. Consistently good teaching and the effective support provided by outside professionals, enable students to make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Assessment information is used well to ensure work is matched to students' capabilities and to the objectives set in their statements. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and high expectations ensure work is suitably challenging. Life skills are taught very effectively and this means students are encouraged to make choices and look after themselves. Staff management of behaviour is outstanding and students respond well to the instructions given and adhere to the boundaries that are set. Any instances of challenging behaviour are dealt with promptly and with sensitivity. Encouraging students to be independent is an important strength, but there are times when staff do things for students when they are quite capable of doing things for themselves. A range of teaching styles are adopted and time is always used wisely. Good use is made of computer technology to introduce topics and stimulate learning.

Staff regularly use signing and visual aids to ensure students can communicate effectively. However, there are occasions when staff either do not use these techniques often enough or use them but do not ensure students are watching or using signs and symbols themselves. Staff accurately assess students' attainment

using pre-National Curriculum levels (p-levels) and very small steps in progress are noted. The school lacks a formal system of measuring these small steps within and between p-levels to establish the rate of students' progress. Internal moderation of attainment is secure. However, the school does not liaise formally with schools of a similar type to help compare the progress made by students in the Shires with elsewhere.

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

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Excellent relationships coupled to lots of praise and encouragement significantly boost students' self-knowledge and self-esteem. Students are doing very well in modifying their behaviour and know right from wrong. The programme of visits, to places such as the local restaurant for Chinese New Year, Leicester city at Divali time and museums to study Victorian or Yurt lifestyle, helps students gain an understanding of their own and other cultures. Trips to the shops and visits by the emergency services help students gain an understanding of the world of work. Students of different backgrounds mix very well together. Their attitude to staff, each other and their learning is first rate. They clearly enjoy being in school as demonstrated by the regular attendance of day students. Assemblies, daily acts of collective worship and regular visits by clergy are providing students with the opportunity to reflect and gain a basic understanding of the way different people lead their lives. Some students go to church, which further develops their understanding of religious beliefs. Students make a very worthwhile contribution to community life by helping to clean the local church, telephone box and bus shelter. They also deliver the parish newsletter, collect charity envelopes and improve the environment by planting trees and bulbs in the village.

## Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for welfare, health and safety is good. Students are extremely well cared for and the very high levels of supervision ensure that students are kept safe and secure at all times. Welfare plans are up-to-date and are regularly reviewed. However, there are a few occasions when practice does not always replicate what is written in the plan. A good range of health and safety policies exist and are effectively implemented. Risk assessments for the premises and off-site visits are robust. The administration of medicines is secure and all medicines except one are stored in a locked cupboard. A formal risk assessment was lacking for the one medicine carried around by staff. One was completed during the inspection. Accident records are kept for staff and students. The treatment given to staff is clear but not always for students. The school promotes a healthy lifestyle and there is a good emphasis on physical activity, with students swimming weekly and regularly walking and trampolining. A healthy and nutritious diet is provided that takes account of students' allergies or specific dietary requirements. Students adopt a healthy lifestyle by washing their hands before eating a snack and brushing their teeth and washing daily. The previous inspection recommended that the sanctions to be adopted in the

event of a student misbehaving are set out and that written records of sanctions are kept. Both weaknesses have been rectified. This said, the record of sanctions is not always sufficiently comprehensive. A written log of physical restraint is kept but it rarely records the duration of a restraint. The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 are met and attendance registers comply with regulation. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All of the required employment and staff vetting procedures are carried out prior to staff being appointed. All members of the board of directors, and other professionals who work in school have been appropriately vetted. A single central register is kept which contains all of the necessary information.

## School's premises and accommodation

The Shires is located in a listed building that has been effectively renovated for educational use. There are extensive grounds with plenty of outdoor space for play and recreation. The premises and accommodation are of very good quality and are currently being extended. A new building is under construction for a small number of over 19 year olds who want to continue their education in familiar surroundings. Classrooms are of a suitable size and there are sufficient, separate washing and bathing facilities for students and staff. The school is clean, tidy and well maintained. Kitchens and the laundry are kept in a hygienic condition. Bedrooms are of a good size and students are encouraged to personalise them with their own belongings.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information provided to parents and others has improved since the last inspection. The information supplied in the prospectus meets regulatory requirements. Communication with parents is very good and they welcome the weekly telephone conversations they have with the headteacher. Parents and local authorities are fully involved in the annual review of students' statements. Parents receive three comprehensive reports a year about their child's attainment and progress.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets requirements. A good feature is that the procedure allows for a student advocate, who is independent of the school, to support students or their families in making a complaint or in understanding the procedures.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be good. Three National Minimum Standards were not fully met. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- encourage staff to use, at every opportunity, signing or visual aids to support students' learning and development, particularly where these techniques are specified in students' statements
- consider further developing and formalising small-step criteria within and between p-levels to help judge students' progress and set targets
- consider liaising with other schools of a similar type to help compare and benchmark the attainment and progress of similar students.

## 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 students	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		✓		
How well students make progress in their learning	✓			

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

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

### Welfare, health and safety of students

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

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	The Shires at Stretton		
DCSF number	857/6004		
Unique reference number	131018		
Type of school	Special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2005		
Age range of students	11–19		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 8	Girls: 2	Total: 10
Number of boarders	Boys: 6	Girls: 2	Total: 8
Number of statements with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 8	Girls: 2	Total: 10
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Annual fees (day students)	£205,000		
Annual fees (boarders)	£274,495		
Headteacher	Mrs Marina Gough		
Proprietor	Mr Steve Taylor		
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI		
Dates of inspection	20–21 January 2009		