

Avocet House

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	926/6419
Unique Reference Number	134978
Social care URN	SC063259
Inspection number	332458
Inspection dates	20 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon
Social care inspector	Clive Lucas

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, 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 students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding students and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Avocet House is a small independent residential special school which is owned by Specialist Education Services Limited. The school was last inspected in May 2006 and its residential provision was inspected in July 2008. It is situated in the grounds of a large house in open countryside. The school provides education for a maximum of eight boys aged 8 to 16 years. There are six students on roll aged 11 to 16 years. They all have a statement of special educational needs identifying behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). All of the students currently on roll are looked after by their respective local authorities.

The school's motto is 'Care and learning without limits'. It believes that 'regardless of past experiences every child, given the right circumstances, has the resources to move forward positively to a preferred future.'

Evaluation of the school

This is an outstanding school. It has improved considerably since its last inspection as a result of the dedication and expertise of the headteacher and the staff. The school meets its aims impressively. It meets all but two of the independent school regulations. The quality of education is outstanding. Students who arrive at Avocet House having many barriers to learning are inspired by an exciting and enjoyable curriculum. Teaching is outstanding and extremely engaging and students make rapid progress. Their personal development is excellent as a result of outstanding care and support. Students, parents and local authorities justifiably express a high level of satisfaction with the school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding, which is a fact recognised by the school because staff know how exceptionally well the curriculum engages students and meets all of their needs. Specialist Education Services have been extremely successful in appointing well qualified staff and consultants who are expert, experienced and committed to providing a highly pertinent curriculum in both policy and planning. The policy and planning are very well suited to meet the needs of BESD students and staff tackle their learning difficulties in a very effective, therapeutic manner. This fulfils the educational requirements in each student's statement very effectively. The curriculum benefits from constant review and improvement that is based on how effective it is in promoting each student's academic progress and personal development. As a result, the curriculum maintains a sharp focus on students' needs and is extremely well implemented. During residential hours, a broad range of well planned learning opportunities serve effectively to enhance the curriculum. Student's work and activities are very carefully linked to their attainment and learning difficulties. The curriculum attends very closely to providing work and activities that are planned to capture students' interest and bring enjoyment to learning. The extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT), investigative work and independent learning are key features that engage students' in learning. Moreover, learning opportunities in school and in the evenings are greatly enriched with pursuits reflecting each student's interests and strengths such as football, motor vehicle maintenance and animal care. Links with sports clubs, colleges and local businesses enable this enrichment; this contributes effectively to students' engagement with the community through meeting people and making friends outside of the school.

There is a good breadth to work and activities with an emphasis on, and a good proportion of curriculum time, given to English, mathematics, ICT and personal, social and health education. The detailed planning of all these activities during the day and in the evenings makes an important contribution to the development of students' basic skills, making significant progress in these and, as a result, being very well prepared for the future in this respect. The planning of the whole curriculum is thorough and guided by the National Curriculum programmes of study. Since the last inspection the curriculum has been extended to provide religious education which has been successful and one student is studying this subject for GCSE. A very good choice of accredited courses, both academic and vocational, is offered to students and these suit well their different levels of attainment. Some courses, such as First Aid, Food Life Skills and Work Place Hazards contribute positively to students' healthy lifestyle and staying safe.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. The school acted too cautiously in judging these to be good because a proportion of lessons are led by the teaching assistants. However, a key feature, which is a real strength of teaching, is the excellent team work. In addition, the school's strong culture of support and training ensures all staff are skilled and effective in engaging students and managing their behaviour. Thorough assessment procedures firmly establish each student's learning needs and their levels of attainment. Assessment and the building of positive

relationships with students mean staff know them very well. An excellent rapport with each student leads to them being confident, cooperative and intent on making good efforts with their work. They behave exceptionally well and manage conflicts very positively. Much thought goes into planning lessons and this draws upon the staff's considerable knowledge, skills and experience. This is very evident in the imaginative, exciting and enjoyable activities they devise, which encourage students' interest and learning. The exploration of mummification in the study of Ancient Egypt in a history lesson, allowed the student to enact the various steps in preparing a model corpse using modelling clay and many useful related props. This made the lesson a rich learning experience which included, in addition, the science of human organs and feelings surrounding life and death.

Students' progress in lessons is outstanding. They engage very well in learning because their behaviour is outstanding. Because they are ready to be interested in, and excited by, lesson activities and confident in tackling work, progress is rapid in knowledge, understanding and skills. The regular assessments of literacy and numeracy show substantial increases in levels of attainment. Thorough assessment processes ensure that students' work is effectively planned to close gaps in their knowledge and provide the next appropriate steps in learning. This ensures their progress is systematic and substantial, which is clearly reflected in students gaining accreditation from many courses. These include GCSE mathematics and science, Entry Level Certificates for English, mathematics and food technology, Adult Literacy and Numeracy at Level 1 and Level 2 and Computer Literacy and Information Technology at Level 1 and 2.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The impact of this is that each student grows substantially in self-confidence, takes on a positive outlook and engages constructively with others and the community. Work in PSHE enables students to improve their understanding of services in the community and, more generally, to appreciate how at all levels government helps to develop the community.

The school fully appreciates this impact and correctly judges students' personal development to be outstanding. Behaviour is excellent and it improves at an exceptional rate as students' learn the benefits to themselves and others of thoughtful and considered responses to experiences and events. Students adhere well to the school's expectations and routines. Attendance is good. Students are punctual to lessons, stay in the classroom and work hard. The very good relationships formed with staff help students to take responsibility for their actions and this leads them to resolve conflicts independently. They enjoy enormously their learning and all of their achievements. Students become increasingly conscious of right and wrong and use this moral outlook to be helpful and supportive towards others. This leads to them making excellent efforts within the school community, such as growing vegetables and also wider contributions through raising money for good causes and helping out at a local animal sanctuary. The curriculum helps to show students how their positive attitudes are applied in a culturally diverse society.

The many good personal qualities students acquire, together with their substantial progress in lessons, means they are exceptionally well prepared for their future.

Safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety

The arrangements for safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. The care and support for students is at the heart of the school's aims and provision. It has ensured through its expertise and resources that students' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are dealt with extremely effectively. This has an enormously positive impact on each student's personal development and progress. The high number of well trained and experienced staff ensures students stay safe. The excellent relationships between staff and students minimises challenging behaviour, although in that event any necessary physical restraint is managed expertly and sensitively. Good records are kept and carefully monitored to evaluate the success of each student's personal education and behaviour plan. School meals and the attention in the curriculum to food, diet, staying fit and risks to health contributes significantly to students adopting a healthy lifestyle. The school's child protection policy is implemented effectively. Its high profile is maintained through regular review, staff training and their alertness to any arising concerns. Safe recruitment is very effectively governed by a comprehensive policy, the successful implementation of which is clearly evidenced. All of the required checks are carried out on newly appointed staff. These are recorded appropriately and meet requirements.

The school fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has recently updated its three year plan to improve access for people with a disability.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

An inspection of the boarding provision was also carried out. This was judged to be outstanding and all but two of the National Minimum Standards were met. The full report on this provision is not published but may be obtained from Ofsted by telephoning 08456 404040.

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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure the school has regard for the National Minimum Standards (paragraph 3(3))

- ensure the complaints procedure for boarders meets standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards (paragraph 7(l)).

In order to meet the National Minimum Standards the school must:

- write a summary of the complaints procedures for boarders and make it available for parents and others (NMS 16.5)
- make an accurate record of the reasons when it is necessary to physically restrain boarders (NMS 22.4).

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:

- develop the tracking of students' progress by means of measuring any small improvements in their attainment over short periods of time and use this to plan further small steps in their learning.

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	Avocet House		
DCSF number	926/6419		
Unique reference number	134978		
Type of school	Special, for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	April 2005		
Age range of pupils	8–16		
Gender of pupils	Male		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls:0	Total: 6
Number of boarders	Boys: 6	Girls:0	Total: 6
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 6	Girls:0	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls:0	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls:0	Total: 6
Annual fees (boarders)	£223,184		
Telephone number	01508 549320		
Fax number	01508 549164		
Email address	jon.lees@specialisteducation.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Jon Lees		
Proprietor	Specialist Education Services Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon		
Dates of inspection	20 January 2009		