

Potterspury Lodge School

Independent Residential Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	928/6039
Unique Reference Number	122136
Inspection number	332459
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI
Social care inspector	Jo Vyas

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 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.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Potterspurty Lodge School is a long-established school which opened in 1956. It is situated near Towcester in Northamptonshire. It is an independent special school for boys aged 8 to 18 years who have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and associated learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils have Asperger's Syndrome or Autistic Spectrum Disorders. The school offers weekly boarding and day provision. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and are referred to the school by their local authority. Currently there are 62 boys on roll aged 10 to 17 and they come from a wide geographical area. A new post-16 provision opened in September 2008. There are currently three 17-year-old students who board at the school and attend college four days per week. The school was last inspected in May 2006 and the previous welfare inspection of its boarding provision was in November 2007.

The ethos of the school is linked to the Rudolf Steiner philosophy of educating pupils in a holistic manner and providing opportunities for progress in all aspects of life and study. The school aims to ensure that pupils develop into responsible, confident and considerate members of the community and to prepare them well for the demands of independent adult life.

Evaluation of the school

Potterspurty School provides a good standard of education. The overall quality of boarding is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school and boarders say that they are very happy here. Teaching and the curriculum are good and enable pupils to make good progress in their personal development, basic skills and academic achievement. Work on developing pupils' communication and social skills is particularly effective because pupils are given many opportunities to use these skills in lessons and in outdoor pursuits. The quality of care is good. The recommendations of the previous

inspection have been addressed well and the individual education and care plans are now good. The great majority of parents and carers hold the school's work in high regard and one older student said, 'The school must be good if they managed to keep me here for five years and prepare me for college so well.' The school meets its aims well. All but one of the regulations are met.

Quality of education

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which caters effectively for pupils' individual needs and circumstances. The curriculum for more able pupils offers challenging activities and relevant accreditation through the GCSE and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. Preparation for these examinations is good. For example, in English, pupils are given structured opportunities to prepare and deliver oral presentations aiming for the highest possible grades in GCSE. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy with effective planning to meet the full range of abilities. Information and communication technology is a strong motivator and staff are diligent in ensuring that it is used safely and is seen as a vehicle for learning. Practical work, such as in food technology and physical education, alongside the excellent range of outdoor activities enables younger pupils to learn about themselves and to develop their self-esteem. Pupils especially enjoy the creative learning opportunities and this is reflected in their good achievements in art and music. Curriculum resources for boarders include easy access to laptops and 'reading for pleasure' materials, such as books and magazines. The personal, social, citizenship and health education (PSCHE) curriculum and the effective links with the Connexions service make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development, careers education and future learning. There is, however, insufficient use of visitors to the school to help pupils learn about local and national institutions and the law. The post-16 provision is very new and still under development. The curriculum, provided off site in three local colleges, is relevant to students' needs and aspirations. The school recognises that there is potential to develop links with the providers and to organise more structured activities for the one day when these students are on site.

The quality of teaching is good. There is some outstanding teaching which ensures that pupils make rapid progress. Consequently, achievement in some subjects, particularly in English, mathematics, science and humanities, for some individual pupils is very good. For example, pupils in a science lesson asked many interesting questions demonstrating their curiosity and eagerness to learn. In mathematics, the excellent one-to-one support improved pupils' chances of success and, consequently, their interest in their work. Key strengths are the commitment and perseverance of staff and the good partnership between teachers and learning support assistants. Staff have a high level of subject knowledge and good grasp of examination requirements. The management of challenging behaviour in some lessons is not always secure. Teaching is less effective when staff struggle to keep pupils on task, and when lesson time is not used fully. The effectiveness of the learning support assistants is excellent because they know the content of the lesson, they understand pupils' emotional and learning needs and are exemplary in the way they listen to each individual and seek to help them. A few parents said that homework should be set. This inspection found that there is flexibility in the school's policy for this to

happen. Teachers are willing to provide homework tasks but they are rightly concerned not to increase pressure on pupils, particularly on day pupils who travel very long distances. Following this inspection, the school has agreed to define precisely what is meant by homework and to consider setting relevant tasks to develop independent learning, working in partnership with parents and carers.

Overall, from a low starting point pupils make good progress and many said 'the school is brilliant'. The boarders make particularly good progress in learning because the transfer between day work and evening study is smooth. Education and care staff work well together. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. However tracking of academic learning to monitor the progress that pupils make over time is insufficiently robust. The school is aiming to develop a 'learning journey record' for each pupil but this development is currently at a very early draft stage. Some day-to-day marking is cursory. It is good, for example, in geography when it clearly indicates to pupils what they do well and what they need to do to improve further.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The supportive environment successfully develops pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. Behaviour is good overall. The impact of the school's work in this aspect is demonstrated particularly well because there is a significant difference between the unsettled behaviour of recently arrived pupils and the calmer attitudes of those who have been at the school for a longer time. Pupils said, 'The school is making a difference to my behaviour. I am better and more confident.' However, some parents and pupils are still concerned about bullying. The inspection confirms that some pupils need to improve their attitudes towards their peers but education and welfare staff know pupils very well and are very diligent. Instances of bullying are not tolerated and are addressed swiftly. Pupils know right from wrong and understand the impact of their actions on those around them. This was demonstrated very well during the inspection when snowball fights, during breaks and lunch time, were amicable and safe. This is a major achievement given that most pupils have real difficulty interacting socially and emotionally with others.

Spiritual development and respect for cultural diversity are strong. The PSCH programme and regular educational visits provide pupils with a secure understanding of the world around them and of services in the wider community. The focus on basic skills prepares pupils well for independent living and their future economic well-being. The power of morning song is exemplary. This was demonstrated very effectively when the principal announced the unexpected death of the head gardener whom pupils knew well. One could have heard a pin drop in the chapel and pupils showed strong moral development and clear understanding of the serious nature of the announcement. This was followed up very effectively through discussion in a circle time session. Pupils are making a positive contribution to provision at the school by involving themselves in decisions about their welfare and education through their council meetings and raising money for charities. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their social skills. Students in the recently established sixth form are keen to be seen as positive role models. There is potential for them to

contribute more to the life of the school, for example through mentoring younger pupils.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Safeguarding procedures are robust, including on educational visits. Risk assessments are detailed enough to ensure that all risks have been adequately considered. The school has implemented an appropriate recruitment policy to ensure that staff have undergone the necessary checks before commencing work at the school and in boarding provision. The first-aid policy is suitable and there is a sufficient number of staff with first-aid training. Provision for pupils' health is good in the main school and satisfactory in the boarding provision where some procedures do not meet the National Minimum Standards. Pupils are frequently reminded about health and safety issues during lessons and behave sensibly. For example, in food, they were trusted and acted very responsibly with peelers and knives when preparing a fruit crumble. Pupils have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. Access to large playing fields, the students' own garden, the very good range of sports activities and the high quality of meals, all prepared on site, make an excellent contribution to pupils' health and general well-being. At the previous inspection, the school was asked to provide appropriate changing facilities for physical education. This is not yet in place but building plans were seen for a major extension of the sports hall due to begin in Summer 2009. The school has prepared and implemented an accessibility plan and fully meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of the boarding at this school is satisfactory. The majority of the National Minimum Standards are met, with some exceeded. The school has worked hard over this last year and has taken appropriate action to address all the recommendations contained in the previous report. These included improved records of meals, complaints and placement plans and notifying the appropriate authorities of notifiable events.

The school's ethos and underpinning philosophy is strong throughout, ensuring pupils live in a supportive and caring community within which boarders feel valued and safe. Boarders develop close relationships with each other and with staff. Boarders are happy to be living at the school.

Staff are focused and committed to ensuring a good quality provision of health care for all boarders. A significant number of staff are suitably trained in first aid and provide appropriate care when pupils are ill or injured. There are clear procedures for the management and administration of medication. However, boarders who self-administer medication are not assessed or monitored and their medication is not appropriately stored to prevent access by other boarders. Also, despite regular auditing, some medication was found to be out of date. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to partake in physical activities, both on and off site. The school provides a varied, healthy diet which is of a high standard and which is greatly appreciated by the majority of pupils.

The safety and rights of both staff and pupils are protected. Staff are competent in their knowledge of the school's safeguarding procedures. Boarders said that if they are unhappy there are plenty of people they can talk to. Staff take them seriously and always 'sort it out'. The privacy of boarders is respected. The school has a written procedure for action when pupils are absent without authority. There are very few incidents of absconding from the school but these are dealt with appropriately. The school's recruitment procedures are robust, ensuring all safety checks are carried out and pupils are protected.

Some pupils have experienced incidents of bullying but staff are pro-active and responsive to all bullying behaviour. Boarders said that bullying mostly takes place in the school rather than the hostels. The high staffing levels, vigilance and working practices adopted by the school go some way to reducing opportunities for bullying to occur. For example, staff work with pupils to develop their understanding of the diversity of their community and the importance of tolerance of others. Discussion with pupils supported that this work takes place.

Staff view the students positively and there is usually a relaxed, family atmosphere in the hostels. However, this changes at lunch time in some hostels when day pupils join the boarders for lunch. At these times, behaviour can be disruptive and excitable. The behaviour of the pupils is not always managed well at these times. However, there is a minimal amount of physical intervention carried out in boarding and all staff have received appropriate training.

Staff are able to provide appropriate care for boarders and meet their individual needs with the knowledge and understanding they have of them. Individual support is detailed in each boarder's file and observations and discussions with staff showed that staff ensure each boarder's individual needs are met. Staff are positive in their approach to education and its value for boarders. There is communication each morning and evening between care and education staff as well as a whole-school meeting once a fortnight to discuss pupils, their challenges and their progress. Staff report this is very useful in creating a consistent approach to pupils across school.

Hostel meetings for boarders are held every week and recorded. There is a fixed agenda including hostel issues, bullying, activities, birthdays and complaints. Minutes include action to be taken and evidence diversity and tolerance are regular agenda items. There is also an active school council.

The overall standard of boarding accommodation at the school is good. Boarders' rooms and the facilities provided afford appropriate levels of privacy and are well maintained. Boarders describe feeling safe at the school and a number said they like their rooms. The school premises and grounds are spacious and well maintained with suitable provision for recreational activities.

The school has comprehensive risk assessments for most aspects of safety of the premises and grounds, including fire. Risk assessments are not completed for windows that may present a risk to boarders. All staff are given fire safety training during their induction and then annually. Fire drills are carried out on a regular basis

and at different times of the day and night. Most fire safety equipment is checked regularly and a detailed record kept. Emergency lighting, although checked by contractors four times a year, is not checked as per the fire regulations i.e. monthly. All other health and safety procedures are carried out routinely. All visitors sign into the school and must show identification.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Pupils receive an individual service in the hostels which is designed to meet their personal needs. All staff have a good knowledge of the pupils they are working with ensuring their needs are consistently met. Staff work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure a good quality service where the ethos is centred around meeting the individual needs and aspirations of pupils.

The levels of staffing in boarding is sufficient to meet the needs of the boarders. Staff are committed, caring and competent. However, support for staff and the head of care is unsatisfactory. There is no formal appraisal system in place and staff rarely receive supervision. Although this is planned, it is often cancelled or cut short. The head of care receives no supervision currently. Although team meetings are twice a week, these are very short. However, staff report that the senior leadership team has an open door policy and there are plans to rectify the situation by providing more support for the head of care. There is an induction process for new staff, which includes guidance on safeguarding procedures as well as other school policies and procedures. A parent said, 'I always feel that Potterspurty Lodge have my son's best interests at heart and want him to achieve to his fullest extent.'

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 one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum and teaching (standard 1) and must:

- make full use of day-to-day assessment to improve further the consistency in the quality of teaching and the rate of progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

In order to meet the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and associated regulations the school must:

- ensure the policy and written guidance is implemented in practice for administering and storing medication, specifically with regards to security of medication that is self-administered and medication that is out of date (NMS 14.17)
- provide risk assessments for windows which present a risk to pupils (NMS 26.3)

- ensure pupils keeping and administering their own medication are assessed by staff as sufficiently responsible to do so and monitored to ensure medication is taken as prescribed (NMS 14.19)
- ensure all care staff receive at least one and a half hours one to one supervision from a senior member of staff each half term and an annual appraisal (NMS 30.2 and NMS 30.6)
- ensure regular testing of emergency lighting is performed in accordance with fire regulations (NMS 26.6).

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:

- improve the consistency in the quality of teaching so that:
 - good practice of outstanding teaching is shared
 - all staff are confident in managing challenging behaviour
- improve the monitoring of pupils' academic progress to build a comprehensive profile of pupils' achievement and personal development.

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	Potterspurty Lodge School
DCSF number	928/6039
Unique reference number	122136
Type of school	Special school for learners with Asperger's syndrome and emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status	Independent residential
Date school opened	September 1956
Age range of pupils	8–18 years
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	62
Number of boarders	22
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	62
Number of pupils who are looked after	6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,666
Annual fees (boarders)	£46,196
Address of school	Potterspurty Lodge Towcester Northamptonshire NN12 7LL
Telephone number	01908 542912
Fax number	01908 543399
Email address	mail@potterspurtylodge.co.uk
Principal	Mr John Brown
Proprietor	The Trustees of Potterspurty Lodge School
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI
Dates of inspection	4–5 February 2009