

Acorn Cottage

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	935/6084
Unique Reference Number	130854
URN social care	SC047894
Inspection number	332461
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Gillian Smith
Social care inspector	Joe Staines

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

Acorn Cottage School is a small residential special school which opened in the autumn term of 2005. It aims to make educational provision for up to three girls in the age range 11–16 years. Most of their educational needs relate to social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection there were three girls on roll. All require individual supervision for the majority of the day. They have attended the school for periods of time that range from four months to just over two years. All were referred and are funded by their local education authorities (LAs) and one has a statement of special educational needs.

There was a concurrent inspection of the residential provision, undertaken by a social care inspector. The most recent full inspection was in April 2006. The residential provision was most recently inspected in July 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Acorn Cottage provides a good quality of education. It makes good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this is reflected by their responsible behaviour and positive relationships. Provision for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety is also good. The school is successful in meeting its aims. Students and referring local authorities report they are very satisfied with the work of the school. The school has improved well since the last inspection, maintained its strengths and now meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education provided is good and the school meets all the regulations. The curriculum is good; it is based on the National Curriculum and its range and relevance enables students to make good personal and academic progress. In line with recent guidance, the school has revised the schemes of work and has adopted a cross curricular, themed approach. The school's principal aim is to equip students with the personal and social skills and accreditation they need to lead a semi-

independent life after they leave at the end of Year 11. The success of the curriculum is reflected by the fact that the overwhelming majority of leavers successfully complete the transition when they leave at the end of Year 11.

There is a clear focus on the core skills of English and mathematics. Working within a nurturing environment, students make better progress than would be expected in their work and personal development. In relation to their starting points, students are maintaining at least the standard of work expected and, in some subjects, are exceeding the anticipated level. Good links with a partner-maintained school and West Suffolk Further Education College boost the range of accredited courses available to the pupils. Accreditation is offered at GCSE and Entry Level in a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics and science. Other awards include the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (COPE). However, the school agrees there remains further scope for extending the extent to which students use information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school curriculum. Careers education and guidance is good and local authorities and students agree that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education or working life. Students undertake work experience placements in Years 10 and 11 and strong links with Connexions ensure each pupil prepares thoroughly for the future. Through their individual independence plans, students learn skills such as household management, how to use public transport and access community services. They learn how to budget and set financial priorities. Students decide how to spend their monthly allowance, help with the shopping and supplement their income by volunteering to, for example, prepare meals and tidy the school. Overall, students make a good contribution to school life and their membership of the local gym and library and support of youth organisations extends their role into the wider community.

The school's strong provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) helps them to develop self-confidence, improve their social skills and understand how to lead a healthy life. They fully understand the dangers of, for example, smoking and drug abuse. There is a wide range of extra curricular activities. One girl commented, 'There is lots for us to do.' Students enjoy choosing from activities that include singing, horse riding and swimming. Seamless links with the residential provision help to build close working relationships and there is a palpable trust between students and the adults around them. Students say they enjoy being at school and that they feel very safe.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students are taught individually and make good progress. Teachers carefully base their planning on their assessment of the progress made and pupils' responses during previous lessons. Students like the individual attention and one commented, 'I like the fact that we get one to one. It has helped me a lot.' The school has also improved the level of teachers' subject knowledge and now employs well-qualified specialists in key subject areas, including art and design and technology. During

lessons, teachers deploy assistants skilfully; they act effectively as a second pupil, providing outstanding examples of how to behave. They also inject an element of friendly competition, which adds greatly to enjoyment and inspires students to listen and learn. Teachers model very safe working practices and this behaviour becomes second nature. During a practical science lesson, the student voluntarily donned eye protection, gloves and stood up. When the teacher complimented her on her knowledge and initiative, she replied, 'I learned it all from you'.

Assessment procedures are good. On entry, students undergo baseline testing, followed by assessments each half term or end of module tests. Teachers are flexible; they review each lesson and adapt future plans accordingly. Students are fully involved in setting their weekly attendance, behavioural and academic targets. Their understanding of the steps needed to move on is reflected in their good overall progress. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide advice on how individual students can improve in the future. However, there are few examples of students responding to the written guidance provided and teachers' comments usually pass unheeded. The range of learning resources has improved since the last inspection and there is now a sufficient range to cover the curriculum.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good and all the regulations are met. The school places great importance on the development of self-confidence and members of staff use praise and encouragement very effectively to raise self-esteem. Adults adopt a calm and understanding approach and their firm and consistent behaviour management, allied to good curricular provision and close links with the residential provision, help to underpin students' good personal development and behaviour. Working relationships are warm and very supportive. Students trust the adults around them and they clearly enjoy being at school. Break and lunch times are used very effectively to promote polite and socially acceptable behaviour. Adults provide outstanding examples of how to behave and students usually respond by behaving responsibly. Students become increasingly self-aware. For example, they may apologise if their behaviour has let them down or ask if their music is too loud and is disturbing others. Students learn to differentiate between right and wrong and recognise misdemeanours from the past. This growing moral and social awareness prepares them well for their future lives and helps them to make valuable contributions to school and community life.

Attendance varies according to students' individual circumstances and is satisfactory overall. Students rightly say that the school helps them to understand people from a range of backgrounds. Members of staff represent a cross section of society and visits to the local church and mosque are supplemented by celebrating events such as Eid and the Chinese New Year and designing national meals from around the world. This helps students to develop tolerance and understanding and a good appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures. Work undertaken through

life studies challenges national, racial and sexual stereotypes and gives students an understanding of public institutions, such as the police and the air cadets.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of students is good and all but one of the regulations are met. The school establishes appropriate education and behaviour support plans and any incidents of restraint are correctly recorded. Staffing levels are high and risk assessments are systematically carried out. Procedures for safeguarding students' on-going safety are good and nutritious meals help to keep students fit and healthy.

The school works effectively with other agencies to support students' personal welfare. Students say they feel very safe and agree with referring local authorities in saying they are pleased with the school's work. Attention given to preparing the students for life after school is good. The working relationship with Connexions is close and each student has a clearly planned programme that eases their transition when they leave.

The school safeguards students well and all staff receive regular training on child protection. The designated person is fully aware of requirements and her identity is known to all staff. The school has not prepared a plan designed to increase accessibility to the premises and curriculum over time and must do so in order to meet this requirement.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school fulfils its responsibilities in ensuring that all staff are appropriately checked prior to taking up their appointments. The regulations are met in full.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is located within a two-storey, former private dwelling. The house has been adapted to provide both accommodation and education for up to three students. Education takes place on the ground floor, which consists of a kitchen with an adjoining utility room and wash room, a bathroom, two bedrooms, a small office, a lounge and an additional teaching area referred to as the study. These premises are adequate and there is sufficient space for the very small classes; this enables students to learn effectively, safely and securely. Practical subjects take place in the kitchen or study and physical education takes place either in the lounge, the rear garden or the village sports field and basketball court. The school also makes good use of the local swimming pool, sports field and sports centre.

The school meets all the required regulations, although some of the doors that were replaced some time ago are not yet painted white to match the rest of the accommodation.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents and referring local authorities with all the required information.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, written complaints procedure that meets all the regulations.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be good and National Minimum Standards were met, with one exception. 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 ("the Regulations"), with the exception of the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- Ensure that all internal doors are painted to match existing paintwork (paragraph 5(u) and associated National Minimum Standard).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as amended (DDA) the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Further develop the use of ICT within the curriculum.
- Ensure students respond to written guidance provided when teachers mark their work.

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	Acorn Cottage		
DCSF number	935/6084		
Unique reference number	130854		
Type of school	Special residential school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2005		
Age range of students	11–16		
Gender of students	Female		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 0	Girls: 2	Total: 2
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 0	Girls: 3	Total: 3
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 3	Total: 3
Annual fees (students)	£ 59,623		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 153,316		
Telephone number	01473 657030		
Fax number	01473 658779		
Email address	administrationoffice@carefocus.co.uk		
Headteacher	Miss Claire Guernari		
Proprietor	Jean Lloyd		
Reporting inspector	Gillian Smith		
Dates of inspection	3–4 February 2009		