

New Direction School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	830/6027
Unique Reference Number	134395
Inspection number	332463
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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.

Information about the school

New Direction School (formerly Ringer Villa School) is located on the outskirts of Clowne, a small rural town in Derbyshire. The school occupies premises that are also used as a farm and equestrian centre with provision for adults with learning difficulties, all under the same proprietor. There is some sharing of staff and facilities. Students aged from 11 to 16 years with extreme behavioural and emotional difficulties are admitted, currently from Derbyshire and the city of Sheffield. All have been excluded from their previous schools, and all have a statement of special educational needs. The school's aim is to return students to mainstream education or to other suitable provision as soon as is practicable through its ethos of 'A positive present to ensure a positive future.' It encourages students to change their attitude to learning, to attend well and to develop skills that will support them in their adult lives, whether socially and personally or through work. The school's last full inspection was in May 2006, but it has received three monitoring visits since then, the last being in December 2008.

The school underwent an unexpected and almost complete change of staff during the past year, resulting in a period of uncertainty and declining quality of provision. Since the last monitoring visit the staffing has become more settled. Extensive upgrading of the premises has been undertaken and the school is receiving focused external professional advice and guidance.

Evaluation of the school

New Direction School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Since the last inspection the school has made satisfactory progress and now meets all the regulations required for its continued registration. The quality of provision has risen in all respects. There is a need, however, to continue the improvement process, particularly in teaching: lessons are carried out in a calm atmosphere but these often lack the higher levels of challenge that some students would find appropriate.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory because it is flexible in meeting the varied needs of students. There is a good focus on personal and social skills both through a comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum and through

an increased emphasis in other lessons. English and mathematics are taught daily, and information and communication technology (ICT) is taught separately as well as being used regularly in different subjects. Many subjects are approached through projects, such as 'The environment' which includes aspects of science, design and technology, geography, history and art. The school makes good use of the farm and equestrian surroundings to provide motivating activities for students, such as horse riding and care, and horticulture. Other motivating courses include food preparation and hygiene. The school has begun to teach nationally accredited courses, beginning with textiles through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), and now at GCSE level. Too few such courses are offered at the moment, although the school has plans to extend them to other subjects and at higher levels. There are many opportunities to take part in physical activities and sports each week, both in school and at local venues. Opportunities for work experience are created, often with help from the Connexions Partnership, and students may have one day each week at another school or placement, such as for a textiles course, or to learn horse management at a professional racing stables.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Many lessons are well planned and are taught with good humour and a positive attitude by the teachers. Some lessons such as food technology or riding, for example, are outstanding and students are keen and very cooperative. They readily accept the challenges and brisk pace and their progress is good in the longer term. Some lessons, such as reading or horticulture, are not as briskly taught or with such high expectations and pace of learning. This is often reflected in the planning of these lessons, in which the main aim may be a list of activities to do, rather than a clear target to be achieved using those activities. Mostly, the planning reflects a good understanding of students' needs and interests, and is based well on the regular assessments that are carried out. These are often detailed, especially in PSHE and English, and show progress towards students' individual targets as well as being compared with national expectations through the National Curriculum levels or the 'P' scales used for those students working below National Curriculum levels. Mostly, resources are plentiful and used well, including the environment, computers and commercial schemes of work. Sometimes, however, lessons, such as mathematics, are not sufficiently motivating because the activities lack a practical aspect or do not use a range of equipment to aid learning.

When students are admitted, checks indicate that their attendance in school has frequently been very low, and all have been excluded from their previous school. They attain at levels below that normally expected of students their age. At New Direction School, they begin to see the value of education and how it can benefit them. They begin to pay attention in lessons and make satisfactory progress in many subjects. In personal and social education, their progress is good. They put sound efforts into their writing, reading and project work, and progress well in the subjects in which they have taken a special interest, such as horse management, food technology, textiles, and design and fashion.

Teachers' extra efforts in such elements are very productive in maintaining students' interest and motivation. New courses leading to national accreditation are also a major incentive in encouraging students to make good progress in these areas.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school enables students to satisfactorily develop their confidence and self-esteem. They become able to hold conversations politely and to behave appropriately in public. This is because they are taught the difference between right and wrong in situations in school, and how it applies to life in general. Students have sound opportunities to take responsibility, such as in planning and preparing many meals, doing the shopping and organising trips, and choices for physical education (PE) events such as cycling, badminton, climbing and football. They often help each other in lessons, whether working together in the garden or at basketball practice, for instance. The school is developing more ways to allow students to take the initiative more often, including through the present school council.

Citizenship lessons combine soundly with many visits into the community and links with outside agencies. These help students to understand the nature and working of many institutions, and the cultural differences that may be apparent around them. Their learning also develops an increased awareness of wonderful aspects of the world around them. Students' satisfactory contribution to the local and wider community is seen in the help they give to each other and the adults within the farming provision on site, the help given to staff, and their good behaviour and example when visiting the many facilities in the area, for leisure and learning. School plans exist to increase this role further through other visits, fund-raising and a greater involvement in aspects of the local culture.

Students' behaviour is satisfactory, although there are still occasions when some may swear in class or refuse to take part in activities. They enjoy their education, without being too demonstrative about it. As one student wrote, 'I am happy here.' Students show their enjoyment through their cooperation and relationships with each other, and through their greatly improved attendance.

Students learn good personal skills that will help their futures in work or in their social lives. These are supported by learning satisfactory skills in basic subjects such as English, mathematics and ICT, although some students still lack the persistence, effort and concept of pace that is required in many work situations.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for ensuring students welfare, health and safety is good. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002, and has an appropriate three-year development plan in place. The school follows all of the recommendations to encourage students to live a healthy lifestyle, especially by allowing students to

plan many meals and make choices about their PE activities each week. There are thorough procedures to ensure that safeguarding and child protection policies are followed. Staff have a good understanding of the policies and procedures, and implement them well. They go beyond this however, and know the students and their needs and problems very well, and act in the students' best interests at all times. Most students attend almost every day as they see the value and enjoyment in what they are offered. Occasionally, students may have more difficulty in attending, despite the exceptional effort put in by staff through daily visits, mentoring and counselling for whole families. Although some students have an average attendance rate of 95% to 100%, it can be as low as 60% for individual students.

The professional staff who work in the adjacent centre for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also work regularly, valuably and effectively with students on individualised support programmes that include their families.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Staff are thoroughly checked for their qualifications, experience and suitability to work in this situation. The records are up to date and are kept securely on a single register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are appropriate and enable students to learn effectively and safely. The classrooms are spacious and have been upgraded recently to include a high standard of interior fittings and decoration. The outside areas provide many opportunities to vary the curriculum using the farm, the equestrian centre or the rural setting generally, whether for horticulture or long country rambles. Although parts of the site are shared, this does not detract from the provision offered by the school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides clear, accurate and up-to-date information for parents and others. Frequent, detailed and high-quality reports are compiled about students' progress and these are sent to parents and local authorities each term, or more often if required. The school maintains daily contact with many families, whether for sharing information in times of difficulty, or to encourage better attendance, including daily home visits when necessary.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear and fair complaints policy that is made known to parents. There have been no formal complaints within the last 12 months.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the 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:

- in order to improve the quality of teaching, ensure that lessons follow a clearly planned aim of what students are expected to achieve, and do not rely principally on a list of activities
- develop a greater range of strategies to keep students motivated and challenged throughout the period of all lessons
- increase the range of subjects which can be nationally accredited.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

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		✓		
--	--	---	--	--

School details

Name of school	New Direction School		
DCSF number	830/6027		
Unique reference number	134395		
Type of school	Special school for students with severe learning, emotional, behavioural and social difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2004		
Age range of students	11–16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Annual fees (day students)	£37,028+		
Address of school	Ringer Lane Clowne Chesterfield Derbyshire S43 4BX		
Telephone number	01246 810456		
Fax number	01246 810456		
Email address	Yvonne@new-direction.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Yvonne Evans		
Proprietor	Ms Yvonne Evans		
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts		
Dates of inspection	1–2 July 2009		