

Cornerstones School

Independent School

Inspection report

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| DCSF Registration Number | 8456043 |
| Unique Reference Number | 131356 |
| Inspection number | 332618 |
| Inspection dates | 9-10 October 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Richard Winter |

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

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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.

Information about the school

Cornerstones School is a small independent special school. The school occupies a converted house in a residential street in Hove, Sussex. Founded in 1997 (at its present site since 2000), it provides education for boys and girls aged between 7 to 16 who have significant complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and complex needs. There are currently 10 pupils on roll. The school is part of the Lioncare Group. Although most pupils come from the group's residential homes, the school also accepts students who live elsewhere in the area.

There are currently ten pupils attending the school, with ages ranging from 10 to 15 years. Some pupils have additional learning difficulties and currently each has a statement of special educational need. Local authorities fund all the placements. Pupils display a wide range of ability and many exhibit extreme negative behaviours and many have previously experienced extended periods of disrupted schooling and poor attendance. As a result, they start at the school with low levels of academic and personal skills.

Cornerstones aims to provide each pupil with the skills to achieve a high degree of independence and self-determination in adult life. Education is provided in a therapeutic way creating a living / learning programme integrated with approaches used within the residential homes.

The school was last inspected in November 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Cornerstones provides a satisfactory education for its pupils, enabling them to continue their education and prepare them for their future. This is achieved in a highly caring environment, which has a clear focus on learning, welfare and safety. The quality of teaching, assessment and the curriculum are satisfactory. The school has a purposeful and settled ethos. The school is still in the early stages of tracking pupil progress more carefully so as to improve the use of such information in the planning and teaching of lessons. The school meets most of the regulations. It has rectified the areas of non-compliance with the regulations identified at the previous

inspection but despite these improvements further developments in the curriculum and teaching are still required.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. Pupils study most subjects of the National Curriculum with the exception of modern foreign languages at each key stage using commercially produced schemes of work. There is a strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills so that pupils make good gains in their progress. Although planning is sufficiently detailed to provide pupils with experiences in all areas of learning, taking account of individual needs, there are no clearly coordinated curriculum policy statements on what is taught in each subject and when. Although it exists in practice the structure of the curriculum is not clear in the documentation. Links between subjects and opportunities for the use of information and communication technology also exist but these are not clearly identified in schemes of work.

Opportunities to follow examination courses, particularly in General Certificate of Secondary Education and vocational subjects are limited, although the school makes strenuous efforts to provide courses for pupils wherever it is appropriate. Pupils receive satisfactory guidance in preparing them for the next stage in their education or working lives through individual counselling.

The school's programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship is satisfactory, although this is not reflected in clear documentation. The curriculum is considerably enhanced through a good range of educational visits and physical activities. These include swimming, canoeing, rock climbing and visits to local places of interest such as museums and castles. This is clearly enjoyed by the pupils.

Teaching and assessment are generally satisfactory. These provide pupils with a purposeful learning environment. As a result of developing effective working relationships with adults, pupils are keen to come to lessons. Much teaching is good which results in generally satisfactory learning and behaviour. The positive atmosphere allows pupils to become motivated resulting in satisfactory progress in lessons and in their written work. Test and examination results in English, maths and science show that progress is good for many.

Teachers generally plan activities that match the ways in which individual pupils learn best, but there is some inconsistency in ensuring that resources are always suitably prepared or adapted to meet individual needs. Support staff are effective in ensuring that pupils are focused on their work. The school has effectively tackled the issue of over dependence on adult support which was raised at the last inspection. Pupils make most progress when staff are clear about what is to be learned and how best to challenge them. However, not all pupils make as much progress as they could because some activities are too dominated by the teacher.

There are ample opportunities for both informal and formal assessment. The school uses a commercial scheme which records and monitors progress. Plans are in place to make further use of this as currently, the information is used ineffectively to plan further learning. This limits pupils' progress.

Pupils have targets that form the basis of their individual education plans. These strongly emphasise literacy, numeracy and behaviour. Teachers assess how well pupils are achieving these targets in lessons, but it is not clear how this information is used in broader curriculum or lesson planning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in moral and social guidance. The school is run in an orderly way with staff providing good role models. Behaviour overall is satisfactory, representing considerable improvement from pupils' point of entry. Systematic and consistent responses to students and their behaviour improve their social relationships effectively. They are encouraged to appreciate right from wrong and to be aware of the consequences of their actions for themselves and others around them. Pupils strongly appreciate the efforts of staff for both their academic and personal needs. They comment on how kind and helpful staff are. Pupils generally enjoy their learning. As a result they are keen to come to school and attendance is good. The work of the school is appreciated by carers. Once pupils have settled into the school routine they learn to be polite and are confident in speaking to visitors about the school. Frequent educational visits and use of local facilities help pupils understand how to behave in public.

Daily meetings of all the school community help enhance social development and respect as pupils gradually learn to cooperate with each other. Pupils are given responsibility for the plants around the school and for recycling. Pupils are adequately prepared for their future through individual careers discussions and work experience.

Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced through religious education (R.E.). A wide variety of visits and activities to museums, libraries and local places of interest provide opportunities for pupils to examine and extend their cultural horizons. Despite little evidence of activities in the PSHE/citizenship scheme of work, pupils gain an understanding of public institutions and services through visits to the local lifeboat station, fire station and the Samaritans. This provision has improved since the last inspection. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility towards the wider community through fund raising for local charities, for example for the homeless, the YMCA and a children's hospice. An understanding of diverse cultures and beliefs is gained through the R.E. curriculum and across the subjects. Pupils also celebrate various religious festivals.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for health, welfare and safety is good. Pupils benefit from very small classes which provide a caring, safe environment. Skilled staff provide very good levels of supervision. High priority is given to their well-being particularly in relation to emotional and behavioural needs. Consequently, pupils develop trusting relationships; these often help them to regain control of their behaviour during times of tension or anxiety. Staff act quickly and effectively to intervene and ensure a student's safety when he / she loses control. There is effective communication with carers which helps ensure a consistent approach between school and home. Policies relating to behaviour management, staff recruitment procedures and health and safety are in place and are implemented effectively. Healthy eating is promoted through the curriculum and students are made fully aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. All staff receive annual training for first aid, fire risk awareness, child protection and restraint. First aid equipment is kept readily available on site; other medicines are quickly obtainable from the care homes. However, as reported at the last inspection, the policy for first aid is not comprehensive enough to inform staff of key procedures. Senior staff are aware of this and use a full time health and safety coordinator to review policies. Appropriate records of admissions and attendance are kept. A record book for sanctions is correctly maintained. Thorough risk assessment procedures for taking pupils on visits off-site. This enables pupils to have safe, regular access to local amenities, particularly for outdoor activities. Consequently, they can benefit from educational visits that enrich the curriculum. A fire risk assessment has been carried out and some minor matters attended to.

The school has drawn up a suitable audit of accessibility to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The company managers have established appropriate safeguards to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults by ensuring that all staff are thoroughly checked before their appointment. The school has completed a single central register of staff. The procedures for the recruitment of staff are rigorous.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a large end-of-terrace building which provides two classrooms, a computer suite, a library, kitchen, dining room, staffroom and offices for the headteacher and administrative staff. The school makes very good use of its excellently maintained accommodation. Classrooms are large, airy and well equipped. Pupils use the hard-surface play area behind the school and recreational facilities are considerably enhanced by the use of the local park, swimming pool and outdoor activity centres. The school has medical facilities for pupils who are ill.

Inspectors drew attention to an issue relating to the school site which needs prompt action.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There is an informative prospectus which is clear, accurate and up-to-date. The reporting system helps carers and local authorities to be well informed about pupils' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for receiving and handling complaints are clear and fair and comply with the regulations. Time scales within which the school should respond are clear in the formal stages of complaint but, currently, are not made clear at the informal stage.

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 those listed below

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

- provide a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that the good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- ensure that the framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain a fully compliant first aid policy by adding detail on some key procedures (paragraph 3(6)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that the PSHE and citizenship schemes of work are presented more clearly.

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 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

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|--|--|---|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils | | ✓ | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|

School details

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| Name of school | Cornerstones School | | |
| DCSF number | 845/6043 | | |
| Unique reference number | 131356 | | |
| Type of school | Special for students with complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | 1997 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 7-16 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 5 | Girls: 5 | Total: 10 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 5 | Girls: 5 | Total: 10 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £42,915 | | |
| Address of school | 87 Payne Avenue Hove East Sussex BN3 5HD | | |
| Telephone number | 01273 734164 | | |
| Fax number | 01273 734129 | | |
| Email address | headteacher@lioncare.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Mrs Julia Dance | | |
| Proprietor | Lioncare Ltd. | | |
| Reporting inspector | Richard Winter | | |
| Dates of inspection | 9-10 October 2008 | | |