

Vranch House School

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	878/6007
Unique Reference Number	113571
Inspection number	333821
Inspection dates	19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

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).

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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.

This was a light touch 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

Vranch House School is a small specialist day school which provides education for children and pupils aged between two and 11 years old who have physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties. Many have additional speech, language and communication difficulties. Currently 27 pupils are on roll, seven of whom are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most pupils attend part time, receiving support to attend their local primary school for part of the week. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and have their places funded by their local authority, Devon County Council. The school is in the ownership of a charity, Vranch House School and Centre, and is located in a suburb of Exeter. It opened in purpose-built accommodation in 1969. The school provides a range of services to the wider community to support the education of children with physical disabilities, including a paediatric therapy centre which is located on the same site. It was last inspected in November 2006.

The school places a high priority on the inclusion of pupils in mainstream school and aims to provide each child 'with a challenging environment in which they can flourish and develop confidence as an individual, as a member of the school community and as part of the wider world'.

Evaluation of the school

Vranch House School provides an outstanding quality of education. Teachers, therapists and support assistants form a very strong team and create an extremely caring environment where pupils are encouraged to try their best. As a result, pupils make excellent progress and their personal development is outstanding. The school is particularly successful in achieving its aim to ensure almost all pupils receive part of their education in a mainstream school. The excellent Early Years Foundation Stage provision ensures children make a very good start to their education. The school is continually seeking ways to improve and has good plans for its further development. Since the last inspection the school has made several improvements to the accommodation, including a new information and communication technology (ICT) suite, a therapy store and better access to the library. It meets all except one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. Clear aims are supported by policies which cover each area of learning. A broad range of experiences is provided with a strong emphasis on developing pupils' independence and their preparation for attendance at a mainstream school. The length of the taught week meets requirements and there is an appropriate balance between time spent on therapy and academic learning. Topics promote pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) and have an appropriate focus on independence and sensory awareness. There is also a good balance between individual and group work. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very effectively to provide access to the curriculum. It gives good support to those pupils who have additional speech, language and communication difficulties through the provision of adapted communication aids and computer programmes. The school makes good use of an adjacent swimming pool and its hall to provide physical education. An excellent range of therapies is provided, including speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and occupational therapy. This is carefully matched to each pupil's needs to ensure the requirements of their statement of special educational needs are met fully.

Thorough procedures are in place for assessing pupils' requirements for inclusion in mainstream school and for providing appropriate therapy and support when they begin attending. This has been particularly effective and almost all pupils experience success in a mainstream school. However, for a few pupils, work completed in their mainstream school is not linked closely enough to the curriculum at Vranth House to ensure their timetable includes sufficient balance between subjects.

The high standard of maintenance of the premises has a positive impact on the curriculum. Clear displays, together with the well-organised use of space are very effective in promoting pupils' independence and mobility skills. The attractive outside play area has been developed thoughtfully to create sensory areas and pathways which provide easy access for pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Teachers, therapists and support assistants work together closely to assess pupils' individual needs and to provide them with a stimulating education. In the words of one parent, 'Everyone has a fantastic team approach to working with the children. This helps to bring all the support my child needs together and she is flourishing.' Staff are very highly trained and skilfully provide the right amount of challenge and support to maximise pupils' learning. They make excellent use of a range of augmentative communication systems, including Makaton signing, symbols, switches and talking boards which help pupils to make choices and to express their needs. Whilst lessons are generally well-planned with clear learning objectives, occasionally pupils' targets are not sufficiently precise to enable the small steps in learning they make to be recorded. The school is currently reviewing this aspect of its work. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. An exciting range of activities combined with thorough assessment, ensures children learn and develop extremely well.

The school has a comprehensive range of assessments to identify pupils' physical and educational needs and to measure subsequent progress. This includes the use of National Curriculum levels and 'P' levels (performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities working towards the first level of the National Curriculum). Staff also use photographic evidence and work samples effectively to record pupils' achievements. Pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in developing their independence and mobility skills which prepares them extremely well for inclusion in mainstream schools.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The personal development of pupils and children, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding. Pupils really enjoy coming to school, which is demonstrated by their high rate of attendance and excellent behaviour. Their self-esteem is raised very successfully because staff encourage independence and praise effort and achievement. Staff provide very good role models and treat pupils with patience and respect. This strengthens pupils' feelings of self-worth and their understanding of appropriate behaviour. Pupils also become more socially aware, for example when they celebrate each other's successes in assembly, or participate in 'Chatterbox' sessions which aid communication with a wider group.

A strong sense of community is fostered in the school through regular assemblies and such events as the annual sports day. Pupils make a contribution to the school by participating in the school council where they have discussed themes for assembly and access for the disabled. They also become aware of the wider community, by raising money for charity and taking part in a reception to thank fund raisers and highlight projects that had been successful. Trips to a zoo, donkey sanctuary, shops and parks encourage their understanding of public services and facilities. Cultural awareness is promoted through the celebration of festivals and topics which cover life in different parts of the world, for example a recent topic about Egypt.

Pupils are very well prepared for their future. A few attain standards in numeracy and literacy close to nationally expected levels, many become confident communicators and wheelchair users, whilst others learn to make choices and participate through augmentative communication and gesture. The school is particularly successful in preparing pupils for attendance at mainstream school and in managing the support needed to make this a success.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

Provision for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The range and quality of therapy support is excellent. Detailed health and safety policies are in place which cover all aspects of the school's work. Procedures for intimate care and manual handling ensure pupils are treated with respect and that their dignity is maintained. Most arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Procedures for the recruitment of staff meet most but not all the requirements. All staff have been subject to clearance at an advanced level to ensure they are suitable to work with children. A single register is held to

record checks that have been made prior to appointment, such as proof of identity and qualifications. However, the school does not receive written confirmation of an applicant's employment history or their medical fitness.

There are good procedures to assess key risks for each pupil and appropriate levels of staffing to ensure pupils are safe. Occasionally there is a strain on staff deployment which leads to the curriculum and timetable not being delivered as planned. Staff benefit from a very good range of training, which includes first aid, manual handling and child protection. Fire drills are held regularly and fire-fighting equipment is checked by a specialist company.

Pupils are encouraged and enabled to adopt healthier lifestyles through the nutritious food served and well organised mealtimes. Appropriate feeding protocols ensure pupils with more complex needs are given the right amount of help with eating and a named group of staff, the 'Munch Bunch', are on hand to offer advice.

The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The site is accessible for wheelchair users and it is regularly reviewed to ensure all pupils can take full advantage of the facilities. However, the use of portable ramps in the Early Years Foundation Stage slows access to the outdoor learning area.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and meets the needs of children extremely well. Close links with parents ensure a smooth and happy start to the day. Outstanding teaching and thorough assessment, which involves the children, secure outstanding progress in all the areas of learning. Children then make a seamless transition into Year 1 and also into their mainstream schools. Outstanding leadership is focused sharply on improvement, with clear and well-targeted professional development for the staff.

Children can choose from a good range of motivating, fun-filled activities as well as being guided by the teacher. In one imaginative lesson staff took the children outside to experience the rain, wind and cold, which was then linked to how the children felt about the weather and how to look after themselves. One child exclaimed excitedly, 'I wore my coat.' In another outstanding lesson the staff were developing an understanding of healthy eating, as well as developing physical skills; a child held up a grape and confidently stated, 'These are good for me.' There is also good use of phonics materials to develop reading. Although some high quality activities are provided inside, sometimes opportunities are missed to use the outdoor area for learning. There is an excellent range of resources within the provision which are very appropriate for the needs of the children's various disabilities. Speech and language machines develop children's confidence in communication and the broad range of equipment to assist with physical disabilities ensures children have the ability to experience a wide range of activities.

Children's personal development is excellent and they get along very well together. For example, children were observed being totally engrossed in a session where they

took turns leading the lesson by choosing the songs and actions. Children clearly demonstrated pleasure at the success of others and in their learning overall. The systems to support children's welfare are good. Children already show a good understanding of how to keep healthy, washing their hands before eating and explaining to adults why this is necessary.

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 the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff carry out appropriate checks to confirm their medical fitness and employment history (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

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:

- ensure that the timetable for pupils on part-time placements includes sufficient balance between subjects
- make pupils' targets more precise to enable small steps in learning to be recorded.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Make better use of the outdoor space to promote 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 the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	✓			
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?	✓			
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	✓			
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?	✓			

School details

Name of school	Vranch House School		
DCSF number	878/6007		
Unique reference number	113571		
Type of school	Special day		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1969		
Age range of pupils	2 - 12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 17	Girls: 7	Total: 24
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 19	Girls: 8	Total: 27
Annual fees (day pupils)	£21,225		
Address of school	Pinhoe Road Exeter Devon EX4 8AD		
Telephone number	01392468333		
Fax number	01392468333		
Email address	administration@vranchhouse.org; education@vranchhouse.org		
Headteacher	Ms Maureen Boon		
Proprietor	Vranch House School and Centre		
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	19 May 2009		