

The Forum School

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	835/6033
Unique Reference Number	116593
Social Care Number	SC026910
Inspection number	333829
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Frank Price
Social care inspector	Stephanie Omosevwerha

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.

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.

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

The Forum School is run by Cambian Education, who also manage a number of other schools. The school is located in Dorset. The Forum School is a co-educational, termly boarding school specialising in the care and education of up to 52 students between the ages of 7 and 19, who are diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder. Pupils span the spectrum of the disorder from high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome to students with additional learning difficulties, but all have a communication disorder. The school's aim is to provide quality education and boarding provision for young people both male and female with autism and associated learning difficulties in order for them to achieve the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes of being happy, staying safe, staying healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving an appropriate, individual level of economic well-being. Since the last inspection in 2006, a new headteacher has been appointed, and the school has developed its post-16 provision and community living programme.

Evaluation of the school

The Forum School provides an outstanding education for its pupils and they make exceptional progress. Pupils learn to manage aspects of their disability more effectively and improve their communication skills, which in turn often improves their behaviour. The residential provision makes an outstanding contribution to the personal development of pupils. The excellent curriculum and good teaching are strengths of the school. The school has made good progress in implementing the recommendations of the last inspection report and it now complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. The well-planned and carefully constructed curriculum enables pupils to make outstanding progress. It is well matched to pupils' individual needs. The personalised curriculum helps pupils to cope with their Asperger's syndrome or Autism more effectively. Excellent use is made of specialist strategies, such as symbols and photographs to increase pupils' understanding and communication skills. Every effort is made to provide a consistent and highly structured approach, based on established routines.

Curriculum documentation is well established, thorough and reviewed regularly. Currently it is being reviewed so that it can become thematically based. The school has gained a number of curriculum awards, for example in the creative arts and in information and communication technology (ICT), which reflect the strengths of the school's expertise. Currently, a few more able pupils are not able to gain GCSE qualifications and the school is exploring options how to achieve this.

The accommodation includes a sports hall and on-site horse riding facilities. Pupils are able to undertake a wide range of stimulating experiences and develop skills in a secure setting. A wide range of therapies is provided, including speech and occupational therapies. These contribute well to pupils becoming more self-aware and more confident in their communication skills. The personal, social and health education programme is fundamental to promoting pupils' functional skills in practical situations, for example teaching pupils how to interact with other people appropriately. Their independence and life skills are promoted very effectively through the curriculum. Mealtimes provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills and exercise choice of food.

The new post-16 development has been very successful and this has done much to promote students' progress and readiness for the future. Post-16 students have individual programmes, based around externally accredited courses. Students are provided with more community-based activities in order to develop independent living skills. A group of post-16 students live in two satellite houses in the community. This prepares them well for future living and develops their maturity and self-esteem.

There are very good links with the residential provision. Pupils carry out accredited modules of work after school and consistent approaches for behaviour and communication span across both care and education. Pupils have suitable work related opportunities. These may be on-site such as in the horse riding stables or, where appropriate, off-site. This provides the pupils with a valuable experience and introduction to the world of work. The school has valuable links with other schools to provide inclusion opportunities for pupils in food technology lessons.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and is sometimes outstanding. Teachers make excellent use of ICT across a wide range of subjects. For example, in physical education, the school has installed an interactive target board to develop pupils' hand-eye co-ordination and this has proved to be extremely motivating for

pupils. Staff work hard to create a calm, positive and supportive ethos in lessons. High expectations are set to encourage pupils to be as independent as possible. Staff know pupils well and are adept at getting the best out of their pupils. Behaviour is managed sensitively and consistently across care and education settings. Lesson planning is good and all teachers follow the school template to help give pupils a secure environment, although the signing of key concepts is not used always used consistently enough. Teaching in the post-16 department is outstanding because students follow vocational accredited courses and the department has a distinctive ethos, which encourages students to be more independent.

Assessment has continued to develop well since the time of the last inspection. Teachers use assessment information well to inform their teaching so that activities are pitched at the right level. The school has started to use an assessment package that will allow it to set targets and track pupils' progress more effectively. The school is aware that the next step is to analyse and compare pupils' progress with similar pupils nationally, where appropriate, so that any under achievement can be identified and addressed.

Pupils' outstanding progress is tracked closely through the achievement of their objectives in their individual education programmes. Most pupils reach four out of five of their demanding targets. End of year reports to parents on pupils' progress over the year are very thorough and give a comprehensive picture of their achievements. Pupils are assessed for progress in their areas of their autism or Aspergers, such as interaction, communication and flexibility of thought. They do exceptionally well.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop positive attitudes to learning and to each other. They become more self aware, aware of others and develop their maturity and self-esteem very well. Pupils enjoy lessons, particularly practical subjects such as the creative arts and vocational studies. Assemblies cover a wide range of cultural and spiritual topics. National days of other countries and festivals of major religions are regularly celebrated with enthusiasm and fun. The school kitchen reflects these cultural opportunities by preparing associated food for lunch and evening meal. For example, during the inspection, a Mexican theme day was held and pupils ate suitably themed food. Pupils have taken delight in observing blue tits hatch using a 'bird-cam'. Pupils are enthusiastic participants in social and educational activities. Pupils through the school council have made useful suggestions for improvements. The work of the council is excellent and members make meaningful and informed choices by formulating an agenda in symbol format and making decisions democratically, such as applying for the eco-award.

The curriculum, including the personal, social, health and citizenship programme broadens pupils' understanding of the wider world, including caring for the environment through recycling projects and tolerance for others. Pupils enjoy

participating in community activities, such as an art fair and taking part in charitable events. Pupils make a positive contribution to the local community by using local shops and leisure and sports facilities such as the swimming pool and library.

Pupils respond well to the clear code of conduct and expectations of behaviour. Their behaviour is good. Each student has a key-worker who helps to manage difficult issues for the pupil. Staff provide good models for appropriate behaviour. Post-16 students' social development is exceptionally well promoted through the distinctive provision of both the post-16 department and the community living residencies. These promote students' greater maturity, self-confidence and independence superbly. This also makes an outstanding contribution to developing their economic well-being by preparing them exceptionally well for their next phase of life.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

There are strong pastoral systems in place, both in the school and in the residential provision to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety is promoted very effectively. Risks that pupils can present are carefully assessed, with suitable action plans to minimise dangers. High levels of supervision ensure pupils are safe and behaviour is managed well. Some pupils are susceptible to aggressive outbursts, but there are effective guidelines to deal with these situations sensitively. The standard of care in the residential provision is outstanding and does much to promote pupils' independence and communication skills.

Pupils are encouraged to make healthy choices at mealtimes and snack times and menus reflect and encourage healthy eating. The school has regularly gained the National Healthy Schools award. Pupils participate in physical exercise at least twice a week and also have access to a wide range of other sports and leisure activities. A range of health professionals provides for pupils' medical and care needs.

Pupils are kept safe through high levels of supervision and trusting and supportive relationships. Pupils have access to an independent listener and counsellor if required. The school has strong procedures in place to ensure that pupils of different backgrounds and abilities can achieve as well as possible. The school has rigorous procedures to ensure pupils are safe and their welfare is safeguarded. Staff receive regular training in fire safety, first aid and safeguarding children. Good handover arrangements from care and education at the start and end of the day ensure a continuity of approach across both settings. Staff suitability checks meet requirements. The school has been actively addressing the shortfall in numbers of care staff through a recent recruitment drive. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be outstanding, and the National Minimum Standards were met. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the regulations.

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:

- provide suitable GCSE courses for higher attaining pupils
- explore how key signs can be used more consistently to assist pupils' comprehension and communication skills
- further develop the analysis of assessment data, to assist with target setting and comparisons with similar pupils nationally.

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	The Forum School
DCSF number	8356033
Unique reference number	116593
Type of school	Special - autism
Status	Independent
Date school opened	January 1988
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 44 Girls: 8 Total: 52
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: Girls: Total:
Number of boarders	Boys: 44 Girls: 8 Total: 52
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 44 Girls: 8 Total: 52
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 16 Girls: 4 Total: 20
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,509
Annual fees (boarders)	£131,000 (38 week placement). £179,000 (52 week placement)
Address of school	Shillingstone Blandford Forum Dorset DT11 0QS
Telephone number	01258 860295
Fax number	01258 860552
Email address	david.keeton@cambianguroup.com; adrian.wylie@cambianguroup.com
Headteacher	Mr Adrian Wylie
Proprietor	Cambian Education
Reporting inspector	Frank Price
Dates of inspection	23–24 June 2009