

Hobbit House

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6112
Unique Reference Number	131564
URN for Social Care	SC024087
Inspection number	333847
Inspection dates	10 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI
Social care inspector	Lucy Ansell

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.

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 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.

Key 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

Hobbit House is a small residential school for up to three students aged eight to 17 who are in the care of their respective local authorities. Students exhibit complex emotional and behavioural needs and have often been out of school for many months prior to admission. The school aims to recapture students' interest in learning and address gaps in their education with a view to reintegrating them into appropriate mainstream or specialist education. Established in 2000, Hobbit House is one of several schools across the country run by Castlecare. The headteacher, also known as the operations manager, has responsibility for other company schools in the south of England.

On admission to the home and for varying lengths of time, all students access the education on site. Some then attend local mainstream or special schools but access additional social programmes at this school as appropriate. Residential staff provide support in the classroom.

At the time of this inspection the one student on roll was absent and no lessons were observed. The quality of provision was judged by looking at students' work, teacher's lesson plans and discussions with staff. The school was last inspected in October 2004. The residential provision was last inspected in December 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Hobbit House provides a satisfactory quality of education which sets pupils on the right track. The teacher, recently appointed, is already very much part of the residential team and the cohesive practice between the school and residence is a significant strength of the provision. This, together with good provision for safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety, successfully helps students to make good progress in their personal development.

This progress is exemplified in their good behaviour, particularly in comparison to their previously poor attitudes to others and towards education. The school meets all of the regulations and has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

However, weaknesses still remain in the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and in the use of students' individual targets. The provision for boarders is good and all but one of the key National Minimum Standards inspected at this time are met.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, as are teaching and assessment. The curriculum provides students with appropriate preparation and inspiration for continuing their education after they reach the end of Key Stage 4. For some this will be as independent adults, having left local authority care and possibly returning to education when other aspects of their lives are settled. Other students continue in residence and attend local colleges. Their self-esteem and confidence as learners improves and they leave school understanding the value of education and the possibilities that it offers them for their future.

The curriculum is suitably flexible to meet the differing needs and interests of the small numbers of students who access the provision at any one time. The long term plans provide sufficient detail to help staff devise individual programmes for the students. A range of commercially produced schemes of work provide additional material for more detailed lesson planning. This ensures that students, mostly Years 10 and 11, have a curriculum that is suitably tailored to their needs, is age-appropriate and provides suitable coverage of National Curriculum subjects as well as syllabuses for GCSE examinations. It also ensures that students are well prepared to reintegrate to local schools and successfully sit GCSE examinations.

The space is adequate for teaching, although it does not allow for specialist facilities to be made available. However, the school makes the best use of what it has and practical work takes place in the classroom. The timetable shows a good range of subjects taught throughout the week with a suitable emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. With a computer, internet access and a range of relevant resources the provision for ICT has improved but curriculum plans do not yet provide a clear programme to develop students' competency in this area.

Good links are provided between subjects through planning work that uses practical activities to cover a range of learning. For example, a trip to a local coastal town combined aspects of social history, wave erosion and tourism. Similarly, a student's reluctance for formal mathematics lessons has been addressed by combining the relevant number skills within practical problems associated with survey work. Activities are often planned to enable students to bring their own experiences, interests and knowledge of current affairs to the learning so that their previous knowledge can be extended and misconceptions challenged.

Examples include, getting booklets from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, learning about the running of the law courts and the European and local elections. The staff are currently looking towards developing a more integrated approach to the curriculum. This is with a view to bringing the curriculum up-to-date with recent national initiatives. These include alternative opportunities and routes for nationally accredited courses, as well as bringing more vocational aspects to the curriculum. Currently the curriculum centres round providing knowledge. Although it occurs incidentally, less attention is given to planned opportunities which systematically build upon skills and develop understanding of what is being learned, particularly those aspects that are most important to students' individual needs.

Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes are used particularly well to get students motivated; these achieve quick success at a range of short tasks that are nationally accredited and provide opportunities to celebrate achievements. These units also support personal, social and health education (PSHE), which is a strength of the curriculum and includes good preparation for students to live semi-independently. Individual PSHE units are well planned to match issues of interest or concern at pertinent times for individual students. However, there is not yet in place a systematic plan to show how all the elements are covered over time.

In the same way that the curriculum provides students with activities that get them engaged in more and more subjects, satisfactory teaching helps them to focus on what they are learning. Lessons are planned thoroughly and support staff are briefed well, enabling them to effectively support learning. This helps to maintain a good pace through work even when students are reluctant or lose concentration. It also means that students can return to the work and extend it at other times. Relationships with students are good and this, together with good management of behaviour, reduces their anxieties, allowing them to concentrate on their learning. As a result work is completed, it is well-presented and the students achieve what they set out to accomplish.

Information and communication technology is not used well by students in lessons to support their learning and opportunities are missed to research topics. This is partly because it has not been promoted sufficiently and students' skills are underdeveloped. Similarly underdeveloped, is the use of individual targets with students. This is at two levels. Firstly, targets are not specific enough or in sufficiently small steps so that students can see how well they are doing and what they need to do next. Secondly, targets that appear on different plans are not sufficiently linked to ensure that there are enough planned opportunities for students to learn and practice the things that they most need to develop. This was also identified as an area for development in the residential inspection.

Students' skills and knowledge are assessed through use of age related spelling and reading tests. This process enables staff to identify the levels at which the students achieve. This effectively ensures that students are presented with work at the appropriate level soon after their admission. Continuous assessments of students' class work, together with sensitive approaches to teaching, help to identify gaps in learning that are then addressed in subsequent lessons.

With significant individual support, students make the academic progress that is expected of them in relation to their starting points. Generally, their progress is satisfactory. Their attendance improves, their participation increases and some are ready to join local schools to continue their studies at a higher level. Increasingly students gain nationally recognised qualifications in a limited range of subjects. This is mostly at Entry Level, although last year a student gained seven full GCSEs at grades C and above. Most students gain ASDAN awards. Over the past few years these include three gold, three silver, and four bronze awards. The headteacher has already identified that improvements are needed to track and measure students' progress more thoroughly.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. By recognising their potential, addressing their behavioural needs and giving them confidence to play their part in the community, staff help students to make good progress in their personal and social development. This is particularly in relation to managing their behaviour and in relation to their complex needs and starting points. Similarly, as a result of consistently firm boundaries, which emphasise the importance of education and reducing anxiety through good behaviour management, students are able to make academic progress. They begin to enjoy learning and most certainly enjoy good relationships with staff. The theme of mutual respect is fostered and strongly in evidence. Students develop appropriate, genuine and lasting friendships within the local community. They may stray into trouble from time to time but learn from their mistakes and regain the trust of staff. Students can be trusted to appropriately engage with members of the local community, including the police, parents of their friends and at local leisure facilities. Students enjoy relationships and pastimes common to most teenagers! Friends share meals with residents and residents are able to visit their friends.

Students learn to respect the rules and expectations of living and working within a community. This includes attending school regularly each day and not smoking on or near the premises, especially during the school day. There have been no exclusions and incidents of seriously inappropriate behaviour are rare. Students do not always appreciate that others may have different points of view to their own, but staff use the PSHE curriculum successfully and sensitively to reinforce the value of knowing and respecting the views of others. Gender stereotypes, cultural difference and aspects of personal relationships are challenged head-on in a spirit of openness. Similarly, aspects of citizenship are developed well through the curriculum.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school's safeguarding of students' welfare, health and safety is good because the effective implementation of policies, practices and procedures makes a significant contribution to students' good personal development.

In addition, risk assessments are very thorough, ensuring not only that adequate attention is given to the safety of students and staff, but also that students access a range of curriculum activities, which include off-site visits. Work in school is complemented in the residence so that students have clear and consistent messages about behaviour and high expectations to stay safe and take responsibility for their actions. Several members of the senior residential team have the appropriate level of training required to be the designated member of staff for child protection and all staff are trained in safeguarding. Most staff have first aid qualifications. The procedures for recruiting staff and making the appropriate checks to ensure their suitability for working with children are very thorough. Some policies are under review so that they more accurately reflect current practice. The school fulfils its duties required under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be good and all but one of the National Minimum Standards are met. 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 January 2005.

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 students' targets are more specific so that their progress can be planned and measured in smaller steps, and that targets from different plans address their priority needs coherently
- further develop students' competency in ICT.

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

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

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
----------------------------------	--	---	--	--

School details

Name of school	Hobbit House
DCSF number	886/6112
Unique reference number	131564
Type of school	Special school for students with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties
Status	Independent
Date school opened	May 2000
Age range of pupils	8-17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Annual fees (boarders)	£243,324.80
Telephone number	01474 816538
Fax number	01474 816628
Email address	mpaige@castlehomes.co.uk
Headteacher	Ms Marion Paige (also known as operations manager)
Proprietor	Castlecare
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI
Dates of inspection	10 June 2009