

# Rugeley Horizon School

## Independent Residential Special School

### Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	860/6024
Unique Reference Number	132735
Social care	SC038174
Inspection number	334281
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge
Social care inspector	Julian Mason

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

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

## Information about the school

Rugeley Horizon School is an independent residential special school owned and managed by Priory Education Services. It is situated in a rural location in Staffordshire and provides education for students with autism who have associated moderate to severe learning difficulties. All students have statements of special educational needs or are being assessed for one. The school shares a site with two of the residential houses, a third house is situated six miles away. Most of the students are in residence and most are boys. Currently there are 47 students on roll from 24 different local authorities. Although the school is registered for 48 students from four to 19, it rarely admits children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although there is currently a very small number in this age group. The school has recently applied to change its registration to five to 19 years.

The school's approach to education draws on Daily Life Therapy, a holistic approach that aims to meet the needs of the whole child *'so that they can reach their potential in independence skills and so be able to engage in daily life with increased confidence, self-esteem and dignity'*.

The school was last inspected in October 2006. In 2008 it went through a period of change. This included a time when there was a part-time Principal and two acting heads of care. The Principal became full-time in January 2009 and shortly afterwards the two posts as heads of care were made permanent.

## Evaluation of the school

Rugeley Horizon provides a satisfactory standard of education and the boarding provision is good. The school meets its aims satisfactorily. Most parents are pleased with what the school provides. The change in leadership has resulted in a review of the school's provision and there is a clear understanding of where the school's strengths and weaknesses lie. Suitable plans are in place to address these. The school meets all but one of the education regulations. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. All the required areas of learning are provided and the needs on students' statements of special educational needs are effectively met. Provision for physical activity is a particular strength. This forms the cornerstone of the school's approach and supports students in maintaining concentration in lessons. It also enables them to develop a high level of sporting skills and gives them great pleasure. For instance, almost all are proficient users of rollerblades and thoroughly enjoy this daily activity. Similarly, there is good provision for creative subjects, such as art and music. Many students have communication difficulties associated with their autism, and the school employs two speech and language therapists who work closely with other staff, parents and with students themselves to ensure that all students develop a suitable means of communication.

The school draws on the National Curriculum programmes of study for subjects taught, adapting planning so that it is matched to students' attainment levels. Students are taught in ability groups, and there is a wide spread of ages in each class. The consequence of this is that a small number of students do not get the same curriculum opportunities as others of the same age, such as work-related learning experiences. It also makes it difficult for teachers to plan so that students do not miss out or repeat topics unnecessarily; although this is achieved by constantly revising plans. The school is aware of this weakness and has revised groupings so that in September all students will be taught in key stage groups. Much hard work has been done to review and amend existing planning so that students in each age group should receive the same entitlement and age-appropriate experiences.

Most older students have suitable work-related experiences, such as visits to college, and they take part in enterprise activities. All have individual guidance from a local Connexions officer so that they are prepared for the transition from school to adult life. There is good provision to develop students' independence skills and school staff work closely with those in the boarding houses to support this. A satisfactory programme of personal, social and health education including citizenship is also taught. The curriculum is enriched well by weekly outings into the local community, where students practise their communication and social skills. There is also a residential school journey for older students, which includes challenging outdoor and adventurous activities. Currently, there are limited opportunities for students to receive external accreditation for their achievements, and this is a planned focus for development.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory and this enables students to make sound progress. The school makes good use of initial assessments to establish students' level of skills, and the content of statements of special educational needs guide staff in constructing individual plans with suitable targets for each pupil. However, these targets are not consistently taken into account when planning lessons.

As a result, opportunities for students to use and consolidate communication skills are sometimes lost. Teachers routinely share with students what the learning intentions for each lesson are. They review these towards the end of the session and give very good feedback to each pupil on how well they have done and what they need to do to improve further. Achievement of objectives is celebrated by students and staff with a 'high five', and students enjoy the sense of success that this brings. However, there is little reference to students' individual targets or how well they are progressing towards these. As a result, students do not have enough awareness of their personal targets or their progress towards these.

The most effective teaching is characterised by a slick pace with well-informed content, enthusiastically presented - often by subject specialists who have high expectations. Weaker teaching features a slow pace, with students needing to wait to take turns in doing a single activity. This causes them to lose focus and become agitated. Teaching and support staff work consistently well together as a team. Support staff are skilled in directing students, with verbal prompts and hand signals, so that they remain attentive throughout most lessons. They are alert to any signs of restlessness, and accompany students who need to briefly leave lessons in order to compose themselves by doing a series of physical exercises.

A satisfactory range of resources is used in teaching, including interactive whiteboards. There is limited use of sensory methods or real objects to support students' understanding although when these approaches are used students respond very well. The school uses a variety of appropriate methods to record and evaluate students' progress, including one that enables them to set targets for students. Last year, students achieved recognition for their achievements through the Transition Challenge, accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, entry levels in mathematics and art and unit awards in art and design, athletics, basketball, football and circuit training.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Frequent feedback given to students, including the awarding of certificates and celebration of achievements in assembly and class, ensures that students grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. Occasional lost opportunities to encourage communication skills limit their social development. Good arrangements to encourage greater self-control mean that students grow to manage their frustration and anxiety, and become more adept at dealing with their feelings. Behaviour is good and students generally cooperate well with the adults who support them, which helps them to make progress. Attendance is good, and those students who completed questionnaires indicated that they enjoy school and what it offers them. They contribute well in school and more widely by representing their peers on the school council and their school at local sporting events. Older students work as a team to run a small business that makes and sells greetings cards.

Students learn about a wide range of customs and cultures in humanities subjects. They also find out about how society works when they learn about community facilities such as the post office and library, and services such as the police and fire brigade. They steadily acquire independence skills, such as learning to travel independently, and are prepared well for leaving school.

## Welfare, health and safety of the students

There are good procedures which assure students' welfare, health and safety. Effective handover meetings at the start and end of each day ensure that information flows well between the houses and the school. Supervision and support for students are both excellent and every student has a key worker responsible for all aspects of their care. A family liaison officer provides a link with students' homes and is another valuable source of support for students and their families. Staff are well trained in child protection, first aid and the management of students' behaviour, including how to deal with physical outbursts. The school is in the process of drawing up behaviour management plans for students who have challenging behaviour. Procedures to reduce the risk of fire are very good. All types of risk, including those that arise from individual students, are carefully assessed and suitable action is taken to minimise dangers.

Students are effectively encouraged to keep themselves safe, for instance by learning to deal with their frustrations through carrying out exercises. They are given excellent opportunities to be healthy by having plenty of exercise, drinking and eating healthily. A healthy midday meal is provided and dietary needs and preferences are catered for well. The only weakness in an otherwise outstanding picture is the small level of risk associated with a failure to meet two standards linked to the boarding provision. This is explained in the section on the effectiveness of the boarding provision below. As a result, one regulation for the registration of a residential special school is not met. The school meets the requirements in respect of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school carries out all the required checks on teaching staff before their appointment is confirmed. It maintains a full record of these checks. However, not all care staff have had full clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) before they start working, and although the school does not allow these staff to have unsupervised access to students, this constitutes a breach of one of the National Minimum Standards.

## School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are good. They ensure that students are able to learn effectively, safely and securely.

Facilities for physical activities are excellent and include a very spacious gymnasium which doubles as a hall, a large indoor swimming pool, a fitness room and ample outdoor space with grass and surfaced 'runways' ideal for those using roller blades. Classrooms are spacious and most have interactive whiteboards fitted. There is a good standard of maintenance and decoration, enhanced by displays of students' work including some high quality art work. The food technology room does not have enough space to allow students to eat the food they have prepared at a table. The room used by staff is large and there are good facilities for them to complete records and prepare work. Its layout effectively encourages a high degree of teamwork.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school communicates well with parents and carers. There is an informative brochure that contains all the required information. Comprehensive termly progress reports go to parents and for day students there is a home-school contact book that acts as an effective channel for information to flow between school and home. Personnel from placing authorities are appropriately involved in annual reviews and transition planning. The school provides local authorities with a full annual account of income and expenditure in respect of each pupil.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a suitable policy and procedures that ensure that complaints can be considered fairly.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. The school has not been successful in recruiting a teacher with expertise in teaching this age group, so it has applied to change its registration and will not admit children in this age range in the future. Detailed assessment is carried out when children start, but the school does not use the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for this. Nonetheless, the system used is appropriate and enables staff to set suitable individual targets. The very small number of children currently on roll are taught alongside students of different ages. They are taught all the required areas of learning and are making satisfactory progress. Their achievement is satisfactory. Strengths of the provision include good liaison with parents prior to admission and throughout children's Reception year. Children's personal development is good because they are well supported in adjusting to school life and learning to learn and play alongside others. Good care and welfare arrangements help to assure children's safety and they clearly feel secure. Leadership and management of the provision are satisfactory.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding at Horizon School is good with the service meeting most of the key National Minimum Standards.

One recommendation from the school's last inspection has been successfully completed. This improvement relates to staff having better information about the practical support young people need to behave well. The promotion of equality and diversity is very good. Young people benefit from living in a school where the staff team are committed to providing individualised care and support. Staff fully understand the need to promote social inclusion and to challenge any form of discrimination.

Young people receive an effective service that is clearly focused on their emotional well-being and health needs. They benefit from an informed, coordinated and planned approach to meeting their needs which includes successful partnerships with community health services. Medication is well managed and administered by competent staff. Very good monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure young people's welfare is safeguarded. Food and mealtime arrangements are excellent. Any religious or cultural needs are incorporated into menus which are flexible and appropriate to personal choices and preferences. Young people are fully involved in the selection of foods and sometimes help to prepare their own meals as part of their life skills programme. They have plenty of opportunities to fully participate in a variety of physical activities that are fun and engaging. This ensures that young people benefit from regular exercise.

Young people are clearly benefiting from living in a school where there is a good focus on safeguarding and protection matters. Staff knowledge and awareness about their responsibilities in this area has been improved recently after a delay in reporting a child protection matter. Young people are carefully supervised to ensure their whereabouts are known and staff can be confident that they are safe. The school has well known designated child protection officers and staff attend child protection training that is consistent with their role and responsibilities. The school's recently reviewed child protection policy omits important information that is recommended for ensuring staff guidance about these matters is comprehensive. While the school is vigilant about safeguarding matters this approach is not underpinned by child protection guidance that fully reflects the necessary information.

Staff view young people positively and there is a very friendly, happy atmosphere in the residential units. Young people are encouraged and supported to manage their relationships positively. Staff are trained in the use of behaviour management strategies and physical interventions. Practice is guided by new behaviour management plans which effectively communicate essential information about how to help each young person with their behaviour. Great care and attention is taken by staff to develop supportive, individualised programmes that assist young people manage their own behaviours successfully.

Further positive steps are taken to ensure young people are safeguarded. For instance, they are provided with good levels of physical safety and security.



Frequent health and safety checks are completed, fire drills and evacuations are practised regularly and fire equipment is serviced at appropriate intervals. Complaints are managed effectively. Young people's rights are promoted well by their carers because staff fully understand and embrace their advocacy role.

Generally, there is an effective recruitment and selection process in place for ensuring young people are provided with carers whose backgrounds have been vetted and checked. On a very small number of occasions, new staff have started work before the school received an appropriate CRB clearance. Although the school put in place measures that acknowledged these circumstances, the arrangements did add a small element of risk. This practice has ceased.

The school provides a very child-centred approach to all aspects of the service's operation. There is a real strength in the close, constructive and professional relationships that exist between education and residential staff. Care plans and risk assessments incorporate individual expressions of young people's aspirations as well as their identified needs. This information is comprehensively gathered from a range of sources including the young person, their parents and other agencies. These arrangements highlight that the school has strong and effective working partnerships with people who are significant in the lives of each young person. Young people benefit from outstanding individual support. Key to this is a committed residential staff group who have excellent skills in day-to-day communication and give young people the means to enable improved participation and social inclusion.

Young people are successfully consulted about their daily living arrangements and experiences. Their views, wishes and feelings are valued and they are able to influence the way in which they are supported. Staff use their extensive knowledge about each young person to ensure that they can express themselves according to their preferred means of communication.

Young people are provided with homely and comfortable boarding accommodation. The residential provision is well maintained, very clean and tidy with good-quality décor and furnishings. Young people's bedrooms are highly personalised, decorated and furnished with their own possessions and personal items. The accommodation and personal care routines are organised in a way that respects young people's privacy and this is enhanced by the provision of many en-suite facilities.

Young people benefit from their boarding experiences because welfare and care services are effectively managed. A good range of information is readily available about boarding services, its values and operation. Both heads of care have a very good insight into how well young people's needs are being met. The residential teams are led by conscientious and effective managers who are clearly focused on shaping the service around each young person's needs. Care staff portray professional, supportive practices because they are provided with clear guidance and focused training about their role and responsibilities.

Managers have clear processes in place to monitor and audit the quality of care being provided. In addition, external monitoring visits are carried out by an organisational representative who provides information about the school's operation. Senior managers take an active role in the evaluation of the service and the impact the school is having on the care of young people.

## 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 the one listed below.

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

- in the case of staff who care for, supervise or take charge of children in boarding accommodation, comply with Standard 27 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (paragraph 4(2)(e)).

In order to meet the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and associated regulations, the school must:

- ensure that no member of care staff starts work at the school until they have successfully completed an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check
- revise the child protection policy so that it contains all the required information.

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- Implement plans to group students according to their key stage and revise curriculum planning so that it supports continuity and progression.
- Ensure that teaching is at least good in all lessons, that it takes good account of students' individual targets, particularly those relating to communication, and that it provides students with opportunities to work towards these and gives them an awareness of how well they are progressing towards them.

## 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 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		✓		
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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?			✓	

### The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	Rugeley Horizon School		
DCSF number	860/6024		
Unique reference number	132735		
Type of school	Special residential		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	May 2000		
Age range of students	4–19		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 43	Girls: 3	Total: 46
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 32	Girls: 2	Total: 34
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 43	Girls: 3	Total: 46
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 11	Girls: 0	Total: 11
Annual fees (day students)	£79,510-£84,080		
Annual fees (boarders)	£158,696-£254,615		
Address of school	Blithbury Road Blithbury Rugeley Staffordshire WS15 3JQ		
Telephone number	01889 504 400		
Fax number	01889 504 010		
Email address	joanpearson@priorygroup.com		
Headteacher	Joan Pearson		
Proprietor	Priory Group		
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge		
Dates of inspection	16–17 June 2009		

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