

Sunfield School

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	885/6024
Unique Reference Number	117033
URN for social care	SC038435
Inspection number	334287
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2009
Reporting inspector	George Derby
Social care inspector	Dawn Taylor

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

Sunfield School is a large approved independent residential special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism. It is also a registered charity. All 68 pupils on roll have a statement of special educational needs and are funded currently by 38 local authorities. Many pupils who enter Sunfield have had several unsuccessful placements in previous schools. Sunfield opened originally in 1930 in Selly Oak. It has been on its current site since 1932 and in its present form since July 1971. It is located on a large campus where a new school building is nearing completion. In addition to educating up to 75 pupils aged from six to 19, it has many facets to its work. It provides training for external professionals, undertakes research into autism, supports parents through its family centre and provides a range of therapies and clinical psychology. Since the last school inspection in October 2006, the pupils' needs have become much more complex. Sunfield 'is committed to the development of each individual child's abilities so that he or she may come to experience life as worthwhile'. The last inspection of boarding was undertaken in October 2008. This school inspection took place jointly with social care inspectors who inspected the residential provision.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education and of boarding at Sunfield School is good. A key strength is the way the headteacher and senior staff constantly strive to make activities and learning better for the pupils by reflecting deeply on the quality of provision. As a result, teaching, learning and the curriculum are good and pupils thoroughly enjoy life at Sunfield. Pupils make good progress and their personal development is outstanding; all staff, through their excellent relationships, open pupils' minds to learning and the world around them. The safeguarding of pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory.

Nearly all of the regulations are met and the school has made satisfactory progress since the last school inspection, although the school was judged outstanding at that time. The school is in a transitional phase responding to pupils' changing needs.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good, as is the 24-hour curriculum which extends across the school and the residences. Although these were outstanding at the last inspection, the school is currently modifying its approach to assessment, the recording of progress and the opportunities pupils have to learn in response to pupils' more complex needs.

The vibrant range of activities meets pupils' learning needs well and their personal needs exceptionally well. Pupils are also very well supported by a wide range of therapies which aid their language, social, emotional and behavioural needs. All these result in good academic progress and excellent personal achievement. Parents are particularly positive about how Sunfield improves their children's outlook on life and their relationships; one stated that 'the school gave me back my son through their hard work, understanding and love'.

The school's learning programme is focused carefully around aspects such as staying safe, keeping healthy and enjoyment, and activities are designed to support individual targets to help pupils improve, particularly in their personal development. Other areas, such as literacy, numeracy, communication and subjects relating to the National Curriculum, are clearly planned in the long-, medium- and short-term. These are all designed to support the key personal targets.

A thorough analysis of the pupils' personal development skills and the objectives from pupils' statements is carried out and programmes are built around these on entry to the school and beyond. Although the school clearly strives to produce a cohesive programme, for many there is still not an entirely integrated approach or programme to meet pupils' often exceptionally complex needs. This is not to say that staff, in their own departments, do not work very hard to plan and support pupils' learning and targets; targets are clearly shared and worked on between residences and the school. However, the whole process is not entirely 'joined up' to ensure that pupils' learning is fully cohesive. The school has recognised this and has begun to implement a different way of assessing pupils' needs and working with them; the process is coordinated by a 'student development lead' to tie all services together. This much improved approach has been available for all new pupils over the past year but is not yet fully rolled out to the whole school.

There are many educational visits and 'themed' weeks which focus in a more concentrated way on providing real experiences for pupils. The school makes very good use of the local community to enable pupils to learn about and from their environment. In one lesson, pupils expressed dismay at the litter they had come across in a local town and compared it with the Sunfield community where pupils are careful to put litter in a bin. Staff go the extra mile to recreate valuable opportunities so that pupils can gain experiences on site otherwise inaccessible to them, such as the 'At the beach' topic.

This approach to developing 'virtual worlds' helps to provide valuable sensory experiences, although some of these are not always planned to identify the specific outcomes that staff want for pupils.

A key strength is the 14 to 19 curriculum which is based around life skills, knowledge and understanding of the world and vocational learning, as well as key skills such as literacy and numeracy. Pupils undertake a good range of work-related learning and for those who are able, college courses. They gain a good array of qualifications relevant to their needs such as those from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. They make good progress toward specific targets set in areas such as horticulture, understanding their environment and the world of work and in preparing for their future lives. Transitional arrangements and support from post-16 provision into adult services are exceptionally good in the residences and in school. As pupils are grouped according to needs rather than age, some older pupils from 16 to 19 years are mixed with younger pupils. While the curriculum is made relevant for them, this does not make planning arrangements easy, neither does it help this age group to develop a specific identity.

Teaching and assessment are good. Excellent relationships, together with a thorough knowledge of pupils' social and emotional needs, ensure that the vast majority of pupils are calm when learning. Management of pupils' behaviour is outstanding and where high levels of anxiety exist, pupils are very well supported and any impact on other learners is minimal. High staff morale leads to a great desire to do the very best for pupils. There is a clear focus on developing pupils' communication skills using a range of signs, pictures and objects. 'Communication passports', which identify the best way to approach pupils and the ways they communicate, are excellent and ensure that all know how to get the best from their interactions with pupils. There are well-defined routines during the day which help pupils to be secure and aid transition from one activity to another. However, although some more able pupils show that they have learned to complete a task confidently, they are not always encouraged to move on quickly enough to a higher level of learning.

Lesson planning is usually very detailed and identifies what all will learn. However, learning outcomes for individuals are often too general, such as 'explore similarities and differences'. There are missed opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their literacy and writing in particular. Sometimes pupils handwrite over text when more relevant and appropriate ways, such as ICT, are available in class.

Pupils' good progress against targets is carefully tracked and reported, and thoroughly assessed. Meetings are held regularly to discuss in depth pupils' progress and to review practice. The process is rightly being overhauled to take account of the minute steps of progress pupils with the most complex needs make. The choice of targets is usually reflected on carefully but at times there are too many targets to keep a track of easily and sometimes it is unclear why a particular target is a priority. It is difficult for all staff who have a role in supporting learning across the campus to contribute easily to the school's ongoing recording or for those with responsibility to analyse progress. This is because the system is largely paper based and where computers are used, not all staff have access to the network.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as at the last inspection. There are excellent opportunities for the pupils to think and reflect on ideas through well-planned and often multi-sensory and multicultural activities. These help them make great sense of the world around them and help most to move from a state of high anxiety to a state of calm. Their love of lessons and learning abounds, their concentration is excellent and their attendance at school is good. They reflect carefully on their actions and are outstandingly well supported to monitor and manage their own behaviour. As a result, this too, is outstanding. A key strength is the excellent way in which pupils manage transitions and the confidence that this gives them, especially for the future and for moving on to the next phase of life. This is also aided by the great trust they develop in the adults who work with them and through the excellent contribution they make to their own community and their local area.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The safeguarding of pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. This was outstanding at the last inspection but the school has yet to fully meet all regulations. In most respects the school has comprehensive systems and procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and healthy, such as for first aid, fire safety and the promotion of excellent behaviour. The promotion of pupils' health through diet, medical care and exercise is outstanding. The school vets its staff thoroughly and was able to compile a full single central register of all the required checks during the inspection. All staff are regularly trained in child protection. However, the period of training for those designated as child protection coordinators has expired, as, until now, the school has been unable to obtain places on courses for these staff. However, courses were able to be arranged during the inspection. The school has a small number of matters to deal with to ensure that it meets the regulation regarding healthy and safety, including that all risks are thoroughly assessed. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be good and nearly all 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 Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

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

- implement its written policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education*, in particular to ensure that all designated persons with responsibility for child protection are suitably trained and that this is refreshed at two-yearly intervals (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- have regard to DCSF guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers*, in particular to ensure that all matters raised during the inspection in relation to site safety are addressed fully and that the school is vigilant in monitoring health and safety (paragraph 3(4)).

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 work for more able pupils moves their learning on at a fast enough pace and that all lessons have clearly defined outcomes in relation to each pupil's individual needs
- develop ways of ensuring that key targets selected for pupils are few and are the most important things they need to achieve to help them learn further, and also ways of increasing staff collaboration to help pupils succeed
- assess and record pupils' achievements in small steps, so that all who contribute to assessment can access the information easily and the school can use the data collected to analyse fully the progress made by pupils.

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	Sunfield School
DCSF number	885/6024
Unique reference number	117033
Type of school	Residential special school for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties and autism
Status	Independent
Date school opened	July 1971
Age range of pupils	6–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 55 Girls: 13 Total: 68
Number of boarders	Boys: 49 Girls: 13 Total: 62
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 55 Girls: 13 Total: 68
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 55 Girls: 13 Total: 68
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,118
Annual fees (boarders)	£189,579
Telephone number	01562 881325
Fax number	01562 883856
Email address	lesleyg@sunfield.org.uk
Headteacher	Mrs L Gaukroger
Proprietor	Sunfield Children's Home Limited
Reporting inspector	George Derby
Dates of inspection	16–17 June 2009