

Castle Homes Upper Forge

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	894/6005
Unique Reference Number	133371
Inspection number	334290
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

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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.

Information about the school

Castle Homes Upper Forge School is an independent day special school in Coalbrookdale, near Telford which had its last inspection in July 2006. It is one of several schools owned by Castle Care Limited and provides education for up to five boys, aged between 11 and 17 years, with severe and specific emotional and behavioural difficulties who are at risk of offending. There are five students aged between 14 and 17 on roll, of whom four have statements of special educational needs. The students are placed in the school by a number of local authorities across England. All of the boys are in the care of their local authorities and Castle Care Upper Forge accommodates them in a separate residential provision where professional therapy is provided. The school aims to keep students safe and secure, re-engage them with education, develop their independence and improve their self-esteem.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is good as the curriculum is suited to preparing students well for the future. They are taught effectively and make good progress, particularly in gaining the accreditation that reflects their academic capabilities. The strong partnership between the school and the students' residential setting promotes good personal development. The residential and school staff are expert in meeting students' needs and they make outstanding provision for their welfare, health and safety. Improvement is good and all of the regulations are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It was judged to be satisfactory in the previous inspection and has improved. This is the result of the teacher's clear vision for developing relevant activities, suited to students' interests and to many of their needs. Accreditation opportunities have increased. These reflect well the range of students' capabilities and give them a good foundation on which to plan their options for future education and employment. Accredited courses provide a variety of learning experiences encompassing academic and vocational pathways. GCSE courses in a good number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science are offered along with Entry Level Certificates (ELCs) and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network's Youth Award. These also fit well with meeting most of the

key needs of post-16 students, and if appropriate, adult literacy and numeracy tests are available. Work experience and college placements are offered when individual risk assessments indicate these pathways are appropriate. Good careers education and guidance form a part of every student's curriculum and each student is supported by the Connexions careers service adviser in making plans for the future. Literacy and numeracy have a high profile throughout the courses open to students. Students' basic skills are extended effectively, especially their enjoyment of reading and confidence in writing, to which a good proportion of the weekly timetable is devoted. The expansion of the library and the increased variety of fiction has been instrumental in improvements.

One particular strength of the curriculum is its promotion of students' personal development. In this respect, the high level of collaboration between school and the students' residential activities makes a very substantial contribution to improving behaviour, emotional well-being and social skills. Considerable headway has been made on increasing the role played by information and communication technology (ICT) in students' learning opportunities. Good computer and other electronic resources are used effectively in all subjects, enlivening learning and giving students the opportunity to learn ICT skills, research topics and work independently. The curriculum is enriched well by the use of the local leisure centre for racquet sports, football and climbing. Students also take part in outdoor adventure activities and some have thoroughly enjoyed working with a disc jockey in a youth club. Involvement in Wolverhampton Art Gallery's education programme has provided students with a good range of creative activities and first-hand experience of works of art from all periods.

Overall, teaching and assessment are good; along with an effective curriculum, they lead to students making good progress. However, there are aspects of assessment that need to be improved in order to give greater focus to analysing students' difficulties in academic areas. Most teaching is lively, engaging, briskly paced and enjoyable for students, which leads to them concentrating, sustaining efforts and achieving. Students work well in groups with the teacher and classroom assistants, or fully independently on specific tasks such as their research using the internet. Lessons have a positive atmosphere created from students' interest in their work and their pursuit of the clear learning objectives. There is a good rapport with the teacher and between students, generating enthusiasm, sometimes leading to students helping each other. Lessons are planned well, drawing effectively on the requirements of the accredited courses. Behaviour is good overall.

Assessment using the examination criteria of the different accredited courses is effective and leads to students' success in gaining a number of GCSE passes and ELCs. However, the sort of assessment that uncovers the gaps in students' learning and the areas where they have most difficulty in making progress is not developed well.

This means the targets in their individual education plans are too vague to be of much help in tackling a student's learning difficulties.

This assessment was better in the past, but with changes in staffing over the past few years, the good practice has slipped.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. This is because the school's aims and those of the students' residential programmes are united in promoting personal development. This is achieved very effectively in some key respects such as in building students' self-esteem and their confidence. Students grow stronger both emotionally and socially. Equally, behaviour improves considerably because of the high level of individual support, effective discipline and very good relationships. This leads to students enjoying school and their educational achievement; overall, their behaviour is good. Students have a good regard for each other and the staff, which reflects a strengthening moral outlook. Some are conscious they can be racist in what they say, acknowledging any such utterances will be firmly dealt with, which they think is right. The curriculum provides students with some education on the different faiths and races of people living in Britain but not enough first-hand experience through contact with different people and places. This was an issue highlighted for improvement in the previous inspection and the progress in developing provision has been satisfactory. Other aspects of students' cultural development are well provided through links, such as with Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Castle Homes Upper Forge's own Youth Forum. The latter also involves the students in many fund-raising activities for their chosen charities.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The arrangements for students' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. The high level of individual support for students and the expertise informing this support ensure that they are able to feel better about themselves and form a positive outlook. This means the risk of offending in the future is greatly reduced. Students appreciate the care they receive and hold staff in school and their residential setting in high regard for their commitment to each student's well-being. Through weekly therapy and frequent workshops in the residential setting, students are equipped extremely well with the personal resources to manage their anger and to deal with stress. This is very effectively supported in school and increases their capacity to act safely. It is further strengthened by the close monitoring of their behaviour and social interaction. Physical activity and a good diet are promoted, which along with improving student's emotional well-being, leads them towards a healthy lifestyle. Safeguarding arrangements protecting students are robust, although the school does not place high enough emphasis on its safeguarding policy and commitment to student's welfare in its staff recruitment information. The standard of health and safety in and around the school is high.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of all adults working with students, ensuring that students are properly safeguarded. The procedures for checking the backgrounds of newly appointed staff are robust. All of the required checks on staff and other adults are clearly and fully recorded in a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides one general-purpose classroom in which the main portion of teaching each week takes place. The Upper Forge building, which is in good condition, contains some of Castle Care's administrative offices and training facilities, which do not interfere with the school's function. The classroom is of an adequate size for the five students. The lack of other areas for different practical activities restricts the full scope of the investigative, experimental, physical and creative areas of learning desirable for science, physical education (PE) and art lessons. The curriculum is planned effectively and offsets these limitations to an extent, especially through the use of outside resources for physical education and art. The large room used for staff training purposes is sometimes used by the school for a variety of group activities including PE.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Castle Care publishes detailed information for parents and others on the aims of the school and its educational provision. All of the regulations governing the information that parents and others should receive are met. The regular reports made on each student and their annual reports set out clear and detailed information on their progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy is made available to parents and the complaints procedures are set out in easily accessible terms. They meet all the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- develop assessment procedures so that the targets in each student's individual education plan focus sharply on where they have difficulties in learning and making progress
- extend the opportunities for students to learn at first hand about the diverse faiths and cultures in Britain
- ensure that Castle Care's commitment to safeguarding young people and promoting their welfare is published in all of its recruitment information.

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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School details

Name of school	Castle Homes Upper Forge		
DCSF number	894/6005		
Unique reference number	133371		
Type of school	Special school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	May 2003		
Age range of students	12–17 years		
Gender of students	Male		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Male: 5	Female: 0	Total: 5
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Male: 4	Female: 0	Total: 4
Number of students who are looked after	Male: 5	Female: 0	Total: 5
Annual fees (day students)	£25,391		
Telephone number	01952 432660		
Fax number	01952 432873		
Email address	spitt@castlehomes.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Hagland		
Proprietor	Castle Care Limited		
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon		
Dates of inspection	4–5 June 2009		