

Sheridan House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 926/6133
Unique reference number 121246
Inspection number 334297
Inspection dates 2-3 December 2009
Reporting inspector Julie Winyard HMI

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.

Age group: 10-16

Published:

Reference no: 090070

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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.¹

Information about the school

Sheridan School is located near Thetford in rural Norfolk. It is an independent residential special school which is part of the education provision of the Priory Group. The school was first registered in 1979 and provides education and care for up to 12 pupils aged 10 to 16 who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school recently moved to newly re-furnished and much larger premises in anticipation of enabling several material changes including an increase in pupil numbers. There are currently nine pupils on roll, all of whom have statements of special educational needs. Pupils' attainment on entry is well below that expected for their age and all have experienced difficulties in maintaining places in other settings. The pupils are referred by local authorities (LAs) nationally. There was no inspection of the residential provision for this inspection.

The school describes its aim as 'to prepare the young people to take their place in adult life, enabling them to think and act for themselves with an acceptable set of personal qualities and values and an appropriate educational experience that will allow them to achieve and participate positively in society'.

Evaluation of the school

Sheridan House has made good improvement since the last inspection and has addressed all the issues raised. It provides a good quality of education for its pupils and promotes their personal development well. Teaching is often outstanding and because of this pupils make good progress with their learning. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The curriculum is good because pupils find their lessons interesting and their needs, including those on their statement of special educational needs, are met. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. All documentation is in place and the school meets all the regulations.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

Quality of education

The curriculum is good overall and meets pupils' needs including those set out in their statements of special educational needs. It is supported by a relevant policy and the implementation of the policy is good. There are suitable schemes of work taken from national, age-appropriate guidance. The content is drawn from the National Curriculum for younger pupils and from the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and Computer Literacy And information Technology (CLAiT) courses for older pupils. Programmes of study and courses are carefully matched to pupils' levels of ability and appropriate learning targets are identified so that pupils have suitable challenge to move their learning forward. This is not always the case in science and the school is in the process of ensuring that provision here is also good. The move to the new site has opened different vocational opportunities for pupils including experience in horse-riding and stable management and 14 to 19 provision in nearby secondary schools. The school is also developing links with the local community, including schools, to extend its provision for physical education.

Pupils' time is managed well during the day giving the necessary structure to the learning environment. Lessons to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are timetabled during the morning. They are short and take account of pupils' ability to concentrate. Activities are varied to meet pupils' different learning styles, for example in mathematics where a pupil counted in twos and fives by walking across the room with the teacher. This helped to focus the pupil's thinking because he was feeling the count and was then much more successful at writing down what he had learnt. An appropriate amount of time is given to literacy and numeracy as pupils often have gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding due to time away from formal education. Afternoons are mainly allocated to vocational programmes and practical activities such as food technology and outdoor pursuits. The timetable provides a good balance across the week and all subject areas have sufficient time allocated to them. While this ensures that subject areas are covered it is not always motivating to pupils because they are sometimes learning essential skills in isolation and do not always see how subjects are linked. Where these links are being made the quality of pupils' work, their behaviour and commitment to learning are outstanding. For example the persuasive letters they have written in a personal, social and health education lesson regarding an art project they are keen to pursue on the new site, are of very high quality. The school is currently exploring ways to make the curriculum even more relevant for pupils.

Teaching across the school is at least good in most subjects and often outstanding. Pupils say with enthusiasm, 'Teachers are great!' and 'There's nothing wrong with the education.' In the best lessons, teachers plan different activities for each pupil and these are very well matched to the individual's stage of learning. So much so that pupils get excited about learning and are keen to move on to their next target and to the next assessment level. Teachers and teaching assistants have excellent questioning skills and this helps pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding. Relationships are excellent and pupils want to please the adults they

work with. This was evident in a food technology lesson where the trust developed by the adults leading the lesson enabled pupils to evaluate each other's cooking in a constructive and supportive manner.

Pupils talk about the good progress they have made since they started at the school and this is evident during lessons and in pupils' work. The school has developed rigorous tracking systems in mathematics and English that demonstrates the progress pupils have made. However this good progress is not evident in science where teaching has been less well planned and assessment not as sharp. The school is aware of this and has plans to change their approach to ensure science teaching and learning is as good as it is in all other lessons.

Pupils receive immediate feedback about how well they are doing throughout lessons. Teachers are very sensitive in explaining areas for improvement which means that pupils understand what they need to work on next without losing their enthusiasm for learning. Teachers also write comments on pupils' work to remind them how they have achieved well and the next steps in the learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. They know the difference between right and wrong because all staff consistently implement the school's robust behaviour policy. Pupils say the policy is fair. Behaviour management by all staff is outstanding. This is evident in the pupils' usually good behaviour in lessons and around the school and their outstanding behaviour when they are learning off-site for example on a recent visit to a nearby football club. Pupils' enjoyment of their learning is evident on visits such as these and also in lessons and is evidenced by their good attendance.

Pupils learn about other cultures within the curriculum and also about public institutions and their own cultural heritage. They have a good understanding of their rights and are developing their understanding that they are responsible for their own behaviour. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted well through the time they are given to reflect on their learning and their attitudes. This was evident in a horse-riding and stable management session when pupils were thrilled to be able to demonstrate how well they could care for the horses.

Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning through the good links with the local Connexions service which provides advice to pupils on further training and job opportunities. There is also good provision within the curriculum, for example, in a careers lesson where a pupil was preparing for job interviews and was able to talk eloquently about his aspirations and understanding of the requirements of the job.

Pupils are beginning to take a more pro-active role within the school community. They were very pleased to be involved in selecting their uniform when the school

moved to the new site and are proud of the black and white theme. They describe themselves as 'Men in Black'. This was also evident through the active part they took in the recent official opening of the new school where they chatted amicably with local dignitaries and other visitors. There is no school council at the moment and pupils do not think their views are always taken fully into account. They take an active part in the wider community through fund raising for local and national charities and through work experience opportunities.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. Pupils say they feel safe in school and whilst they do not like the high fence around the site they understand the need for a barrier between the school and the very busy road beyond. The school keeps a detailed log of behaviour and sanctions and there is some mention of bullying. However pupils did not highlight this as an issue in their questionnaires or raise it with the inspection team. Pupils behave in a safe manner around the new site. They are very careful with the stairs to and from some classrooms and keep within the yellow lines when walking to the hall or dining area.

Staff are highly committed to the pupils and care for them very well. For example a very careful risk assessment was made for the change of site. This covered physical and also emotional risks to pupils well being. Because the move was so carefully planned, the pupils experienced as little disruption as possible to their usual routines and have settled quickly into their new school. There is good communication between the care staff and teaching staff and they work together very effectively. Care staff support the close supervision of pupils during the school day and join in the convivial break and lunch times. All child protection procedures are in place. Pupils have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle and talk about this knowledgeably in food technology lessons. There is good access to most parts of the building for wheelchair users and the school has a three year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The systems and procedures for appointing staff, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, their backgrounds and identity, previous employment and medical history are in place and meet the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively, safely and securely. There is a good range of specialist rooms including a very well equipped science laboratory, food technology area and music room. The rooms are of good size and the buildings are in an excellent state of repair. The newly refurbished buildings have high quality decoration and furnishings. Heating is good in classrooms and in the hall and dining hall.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

All regulations are met. An attractive prospectus includes all the information for parents required by the regulations and informs parents and prospective parents about the work of the school. The principal makes a weekly telephone call to parents to update them on their child's behaviour and progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

There are good procedures for handling complaints and parents are informed about these through an insert in the school prospectus. All regulations are met.

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:

- Raise standards and improve the rate of progress in science by improving the quality of teaching and ensure that assessment and tracking are rigorous and robust.
- Develop effective links across the curriculum so that pupils are clear about the key skills they need to learn and how to use and apply these key skills in every subject so that they can be successful in the next stage of their education/ life

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 *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	Sheridan House School
DCSF number	926/6133
Unique reference number	121246
Type of school	Residential/Day Special School
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1979
Age range of pupils	10 - 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 9
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 9
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 65000
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 262184
Address of school	Thetford Road Northwold Thetford Norfolk IP26 5LQ
Telephone number	01366 726040
Fax number	01366 726041
Email address	sheridanhouse@priorygroup.com
Headteacher	Mr Bobby Evans
Proprietor	Priory Group
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI
Dates of inspection	2-3 December 2009