

The Amicus School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	938/6265
Unique reference number	131504
URN for registered social 66350	SCO61166
Inspection number	341963
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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

Age group: 7–14

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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

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

The Amicus School is the education centre of the Amicus Community, which is a residential and educational provision for looked-after children aged between seven and fourteen years. It was registered in November 2004 and the school moved to the present building in January 2007. Pupils are placed at the Amicus Community because they have acute emotional needs and often have severe behavioural difficulties. The provision is for a maximum of three children. There are currently three pupils on roll, all of whom have statements of special educational needs. At the time of inspection one pupil was being educated off the school site. The Amicus Community aims to raise pupils' self-esteem by providing a warm, caring, safe, nurturing environment where pupils can have enjoyable educational experiences. The school states that the educational practice is intrinsically linked to Amicus' psychodynamic approach and that the work that the children do in school is part of their therapeutic living experience. The school was last inspected in February 2007 and met all but one of the regulations for registration. The residential provision was inspected in March 2009.

Evaluation of the school

The Amicus School provides a good quality of education and is successful in meeting its aims. It provides a small, specialised nurturing environment for pupils who have been unable to manage in larger class settings. Through the use of a good curriculum and teaching in very small groups, with staff providing sensitive and empathetic approaches to learning, pupils make good progress. This approach enables the pupils to begin to engage in education after periods of non-attendance at previous schools. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and their welfare, health and safety are promoted effectively. The school's procedures to safeguard the pupils are very good. The school has provided an outdoor play area, a

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

shortfall identified at the last inspection, and now meets all the requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. The curriculum is good and meets the particular needs of the pupils. The school aims to provide consistent, personalised and structured learning opportunities throughout the school day. This is complemented by the activities programme provided by the care staff during the evenings and weekends. The curriculum is tailored to the pupils' particular needs, but also gives them access to the full range of National Curriculum subjects. The pupils have planned opportunities during the school week for physical exercise, including swimming at nearby leisure centres and frequent outside breaks in the play area, which the school has developed since the last inspection. The school has recently extended its age range to include children of up to fourteen years of age and has made some appropriate additions to the curriculum, although this provision is not yet fully developed.

Developing the pupils' self-esteem and confidence is a vital part of the curriculum. At the beginning of the school day the pupils and staff hold a meeting where the planned activities for the day and the previous evening's experiences are discussed and evaluated. This helps to develop the pupils' personal skills and raise their confidence; it is an effective element in the personal, social and health education and citizenship programme. The meeting acts also as a handover time, involving the therapeutic care worker on duty, who works very closely with the teaching staff. This provides an integrated approach that puts the pupils' emotional trauma and corresponding impediments to learning at the centre of the detailed planning for therapeutic care and education. The pupils are encouraged to discuss their profound anxieties around learning with the staff so these can be openly shared. This offers opportunities for these fears to be understood and eventually overcome and the cycle of disruptive behaviour and school exclusion to be broken. All Amicus staff are trained and supervised in therapeutic approaches and techniques, enabling them to work with the pupils' past traumas and the underlying disturbances that impede their ability to learn. The pupils' school and home lives are integrated, planned and structured. This enables them to negotiate their relationships and eventually manage larger group learning, with the aim of being integrated into mainstream schooling. One pupil who is new to the school is not yet ready to access the education with the other pupils at the school. The teacher has devised an education plan, which is being gradually introduced by the care staff prior to his integration into the school.

A well-planned range of visits outside school extends the curriculum. During school time, pupils make local visits to Arundel to help shop for cooking ingredients, visit local museums as part of history topics and participate in music workshops led by visiting musicians. The enhanced curriculum, which takes place at the end of the school day, is led by the care staff who plan their activities to support the learning in the classroom. It includes a wide range of activities such as cycling, games, creative

work and helping to prepare the evening meal. There is an opportunity for pupils to take part in a local Scout group.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. The staff are kind, caring and sensitive to the very specific needs of the pupils. They plan a range of activities to engage the pupils' interests, such as a science topic studying birds and plants in the garden. In connection with this the pupils visited a local garden centre and chose a bird table and food so that they could feed and observe the birds. Staff mostly engage the pupils for a sufficient time to enable them to make progress in their learning. Some pupils find it more difficult to maintain their concentration, become distracted and disengage with their lesson. The staff then adopt safe and sensitive methods of behaviour management, with the aim of trying to re-introduce the pupils to the classroom as soon as possible. On the whole, they are successful. The teaching assistant works in close liaison with the teaching staff. The pupils especially enjoy practical activities such as food technology. They made spring rolls during the inspection, which included considerable preparation and a lot of washing up, which they did willingly. They then took pride in sharing them with the staff. Some of the pupils enjoy reading and have achieved a good standard. However, their written work is not of the same standard and additional strategies are needed to improve this. Information and communication technology is used to support learning but this would benefit from more cross-curricular work. The staff and pupils often work together on assessing the progress made at the end of the lesson. This is effective in helping the pupils to understand what progress they are making, which overall is good in relation to their starting points. The teacher uses the National Curriculum levels for pupils with special educational needs, who are working below Level One, when necessary to compile detailed records of each pupil's progress. These are shared at very regular intervals with the placing authorities and other parties involved in the care of the pupils. Written school reports, which are combined with care reports, give a clear picture of each pupil's progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. There is a friendly, welcoming atmosphere and the staff try to ensure that the pupils feel part of the school community, which helps them to feel valued. The pupils are generally positive about school, commenting, for example, 'it's alright...the teachers are really nice to me ... I'll stay a while'. They are introduced to world religions through their religious education studies while the visits outside school extend their understanding of the world around them. The pupils play well together some of the time and get better at negotiating situations, for example working together to assemble a wooden bird table. The consistent and clear structure of activities, both in school and in the residential provision, helps to promote pupils' sense of self-worth and their awareness of others. Staff provide very positive role models and treat pupils with respect. This promotes pupils' understanding of right and wrong and helps to reduce their anxiety. As a result, they have positive attitudes towards school and their behaviour and attendance are

generally good. Their social development is promoted through meal times when they eat together. They mix well in the small group, with both the teaching and care staff, and relationships are positive at all levels. The pupils are introduced to British services and institutions through their regular planned visits outside school, visitors to the school and through lessons. The cultural mix of staff helps them to appreciate other cultures and traditions. Racial harmony is promoted well. Pupils initiate and take part in charity and fund-raising activities. The improvement in their basic academic skills and their personal skills, together with their growing awareness of public services and institutions, prepares them well for their future lives.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils and it is a safe place to work and learn. The school has devised and effectively implemented a wide range of policies, which include anti-bullying, health and safety of pupils on educational visits, behaviour and safeguarding. All staff are trained to a high level in safeguarding and the policy reflects current guidance. The staff are very vigilant about safety; detailed risk assessments are carried out on all visits outside school and on the premises. Procedures for fire safety are rigorous with well-documented fire risk assessments and regular fire drills, which are documented. All fire equipment is maintained annually. The pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and take very regular exercise. Their economic well-being is promoted through the curriculum. Staff are trained in first aid, all accidents are carefully recorded and well-stocked first-aid boxes are located where needed. The attendance and admission registers are kept according to regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act and has devised a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes the full range of checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children. The information is held on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises and accommodation are conducive to learning. The single storey school building is attractive and made welcoming. The premises are well maintained and the standard of decoration is high. The school is located in a rural area, which is used well for planned activities. The pupils enjoy using the new play area, especially for football.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

A good range of information is provided for parents, carers and others and this meets all the regulations. The school reports regularly to parents, carers and others and fulfils its duties with regard to pupils who are in local authority care.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures, which fully meet the regulations.

The care provision was judged to be good and national minimum standards were met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision which should be read in conjunction with this report.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Extend the curriculum for pupils at Key Stage 3.
- Use information and communication technology more widely across the curriculum.
- Adopt additional strategies to raise standards in the pupils' written work.

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	The Amicus School		
DCSF number	938/6265		
Unique reference number	131504		
Type of school	Residential special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	November 2004		
Age range of pupils	7–14 years		
Gender of pupils	Male		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of boarders	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 51, 324		
Address of school	The Amicus Community PO Box 79 Arundel West Sussex BN18 9XA		
Telephone number	01903 885135		
Fax number	01903 885135		
Email address	beccy@theamicuscommunity.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Olga Cumberland		
Proprietor	Mr Stewart Thomson		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	25–26 November 2009		