

The Serendipity Centre School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 852/6009
Unique reference number 131556
Inspection number 341974
Inspection dates 29–30 September 2009
Reporting inspector Frank Price

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

Age group: 11–16

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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

The Serendipity Centre in Southampton caters specifically for girls with severe and complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, aged 11–16 years of age, for whom placing local authorities cannot find a suitable placement in their maintained provision. The school first opened in April 2006 and was last inspected in March 2007. Most students attend within a one-hour travelling distance of the school. Students have had turbulent educational, social and emotional experiences. Typically, they have been excluded from mainstream schools and may have experienced unsuccessful placements in pupil referral units. All students have a statement of special educational needs. There are 17 students on roll with seven students in public care. The Serendipity Centre aims to become a centre of excellence in the care and education of girls with complex behavioural, social and emotional needs.

Evaluation of the school

The Serendipity Centre provides an outstanding education for its students. The curriculum, the welfare, health and safety of students and their spiritual, moral social and cultural development are all outstanding. The centre meets all safeguarding requirements. It provides a calm and purposeful atmosphere, which students value. It has made outstanding progress since the last inspection with significant improvements to the quality of the curriculum, teaching and assessment. The school achieves its aims and makes a real difference to the lives of its students who gain in self-esteem and confidence. The school meets all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is outstanding. The curriculum is outstanding. It is well planned and carefully constructed to meet the individual needs of students. The school offers all the subjects of the National Curriculum and its strength is the flexibility to meet the needs of girls who have gaps in their learning due to disrupted education. Planning in the form of schemes of work is comprehensive and provides a good basis for providing continuity of learning. There is a strong emphasis on meeting the social and emotional needs of students. The school understands that

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

unless these needs are met successfully, then students cannot access learning effectively. Students make good progress in improving their behaviour, relationships, self-awareness and confidence in communicating. As a result, many students make good academic progress, often from very low starting points. This is because the school is very effective in reducing students' emotional barriers to learning, so that they start to flourish. Students achieve well in a wide range of nationally recognised academic and vocational qualifications.

The curriculum is kept under regular review to see how it can be improved. For example, recently, a module called 'i-studies' has been introduced which combines a cross-curricular approach to learning and this has made learning more stimulating for students. Mornings are used mainly for academic work and afternoons are set aside for physical and leisure activities or the creative and performing arts. The curriculum has some unique features such as boxing which is taught under professional supervision and helps girls to keep fit, lose weight, channel their aggression appropriately and raise their self-esteem.

There are good links with the local further education college, where accredited vocational courses are offered such as sport and animal husbandry. The school brings in specific subject expertise, if the staff do not have the required skills to meet a student's particular interest such as dance tuition. All students are offered work experience placements and receive careers education guidance so that their preparation for the future is good. Where appropriate, girls are enabled to re-integrate into mainstream schools. Students' emotional health and well-being is strongly promoted and all students have access to counselling and therapy. The personal, social and health education programme is fundamental to promoting students' understanding of the world and how to protect themselves from key risks such as substance misuse.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, and has some outstanding features. Classrooms provide a very conducive atmosphere to learning. This, together with the positive and supportive relationships, provides students with an uplifting and affirming ethos, where they gain confidence and are willing to concentrate and achieve well in lessons. Resources are plentiful and are of high quality. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning is excellent. Behaviour management is superb and is sensitively carried out. Displays in and around the school celebrate students' work. Every student produces a high quality year book to record their experiences and chart their progress and achievements. These are outstanding, as they are well presented and do much to boost the students' self-esteem. Occasionally, the matching of work to students' abilities is not always precise enough and questioning does not always challenge the most able students. The school is aware that baseline assessment information when students start the school could be clearer, so that their progress can be measured even more accurately. Students' progress against their individual targets is clearly recorded and the practice of having written targets in the front of their workbooks is

good. The marking of students' work is thorough, with helpful comments made for students so that they know how to improve their work.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Given the turbulent experiences that many of the girls have gone through, they develop very positive attitudes to learning and to each other exceptionally well. The prior attendance of students is generally very poor, but their attendance at the centre improves dramatically and they start to enjoy learning. They eagerly anticipate lessons and participate confidently in discussions.

Students' spiritual development is good and is promoted well across the curriculum, for example through the personal, social, health and citizenship programme. There are frequent times set aside for girls to reflect and discuss through counselling and therapy sessions a range of issues. The school carefully measures improvements in students' attitudes to learning and enjoyment and this shows that they make outstanding progress in the area of their social and emotional development. Their self-esteem and self-confidence develops outstandingly well and, as a result, the girls start to flourish academically.

Students' behaviour is good. They gain a rapid understanding of what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. They make good improvements in their behaviour, as they learn successfully how to self-manage their behaviour, for example, by recognising the signs when they are struggling to cope and they are encouraged to have an 'escape plan'. This helps to develop their self-control very effectively.

Students' cultural development is good. Students have participated in multicultural activities such as a Caribbean day and have enjoyed trips to Paris and London to give them a wider view of the world. They develop an appreciation of different cultures well, through the curriculum, for example in art and literature. Their economic well-being is promoted very well through the achievement of qualifications and thorough planning for transition for their next stage of life. Students make a positive contribution to the community through work experience placements in local businesses and by making good links with their neighbours by providing barbecues and using local sporting and leisure facilities.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The school has outstanding procedures to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its students. The school employs a home-school liaison officer who liaises with parents, carers and social workers before students' entry to school and when they make the transition to colleges. The school works well with a wide range of agencies. This makes an excellent contribution to students' overall welfare. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and risks are thoroughly assessed. The school has two designated child protection officers who have undergone the relevant

training and all staff are given regular safeguarding training. Staff are very alert to potential dangers and risks that students may be involved with and are quick to take appropriate action. Students have good opportunities to take part in a range of physical exercise such as boxing, trampolining and climbing, and many girls have lost weight and become fitter and more active, and learn to eat more healthily. Many students are vulnerable and have participated in high risk activities before starting the school. Over time, this is significantly reduced through the good input from the school, so that the girls understand how to lead a safer and healthier lifestyle. There are high levels of supervision for students while in school. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has robust procedures for the appointment and vetting of staff. All of the required checks are carried out prior to the appointment of staff to confirm their suitability to work with children. The school maintains a thorough single central record showing when each check was completed and complies with current safeguarding requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's accommodation has been extended and refurbished since the time of the last inspection. The accommodation is of a high standard and provides a warm and attractive learning environment. Rooms are well equipped and resourced and there are an excellent range of ICT resources to enhance teaching and learning. There are a variety of rooms which are suitable for the needs of the students. The school is in the process of refurbishing an adjacent house, to further expand its facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information to parents, carers and other outside agencies. The attractive prospectus outlines its vision and philosophy for the care and education of its students. It gives helpful information to new and prospective parents and carers. The school provides exceptionally thorough and helpful reports and annual reviews to parents, carers and placing authorities on the progress of students. They view the centre with high regard.

Procedures for handling complaints

There is an effective complaints policy and clear procedures which are helpful and supportive of any parent, carer or student who may wish to make a complaint. There have been no formal complaints during the last 12 months.

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:

- Further improve the teachers' skills in matching work to each student's level of ability in lessons and develop their questioning techniques to enable them to more consistently challenge able students.
- Develop clearer baseline assessment procedures when students enter the school so that their progress can be measured more accurately over time.

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 boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	The Serendipity Centre		
DCSF number	852/6009		
Unique reference number	131556		
Type of school	Independent secondary		
Status	Special		
Date school opened	April 2006		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 16	Total: 16
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 17	Total: 17
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 7	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,000-£68,000 (dependent upon need)		
Address of school	399 Hinkler Road, Thornhill, Southampton, Hampshire, SO19 6DS		
Telephone number	023 8042 2255		
Fax number	023 8042 2255		
Email address	sue.tinson@serendipity-education.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Tinson		
Proprietor	Serendipity Educational Services Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Frank Price		
Dates of inspection	29–30 September 2009		