

Kestrel House School

Independent special school inspection report

DCSF registration number 309/6002
Unique reference number 135683
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Reporting inspector Greg Sorrell

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

Age group: 3-16

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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

Kestrel House School is an independent special school which was registered in September 2008 and is situated in a residential area of north London. The school's premises are a large, detached, former stage school and they provide education for up to 50 pupils aged from three to 16 years. There are two children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. At the time of the inspection the school roll totalled 23 pupils, of whom four were part time and two were girls. All have statements of special educational needs related to autistic spectrum condition, although some have additional learning and behavioural needs. Some have experienced significant periods out of full time education prior to attending this school and their attainment on entry to the school is well below average. The vast majority of pupils are referred by local authorities in London and the Home Counties. The school is part of the Eagle House Group. This is the school's first inspection since it was registered.

The school's vision is 'to extend to all pupils an irresistible invitation to learn, to motivate and engage them in all social, communication and academic activities where they are valued for their individuality, strengths, and challenges so that they may be happy and successful members of society.'

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education at Kestrel House School, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is satisfactory at this early stage of its development and enables the children and pupils to make satisfactory progress academically and in their personal development. The school meets all the requirements for safeguarding and the provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school meets most of the regulations but has issues to address in particular concerning the curriculum, teaching and fire drills.

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

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of the education and of the curriculum provided from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards is satisfactory and is effective in meeting the school's aims. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on the development of pupils' communication skills and social interaction as well as the development of their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The comprehensive curriculum policy is based on the National Curriculum with suitable modification to meet the needs of the pupils. Schemes of work have been subject to revision although this work is not yet complete. The school has registered with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, (ASDAN), although programmes for pupils of secondary age are not yet running as described in the school's prospectus. Relevant guidance is provided for personal, social, health and citizenship education. The curriculum meets the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational needs in nearly all respects, except that pupils in Key Stage 3 do not study a modern foreign language. The school has established links with Connexions, although the programme of careers education and guidance for pupils in Year 9 and above is not yet fully implemented. A range of other subjects, including science, information and communication technology (ICT), art and physical education, are taught throughout the week, sometimes using a topic approach. The pupils have regular access to speech and language therapy programmes and sometimes undertake individual sessions. Where appropriate, pupils may also work with an occupational therapist in order to create the correct physical conditions to enable improved access to the curriculum. There are currently no extra-curricular activities. Pupils make timetabled use of the community for sporting activities including swimming, horse-riding and rock-climbing.

The quality of teaching and assessment, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, is satisfactory and it is sometimes good. The progress pupils make is directly linked to the teaching they receive. The strongest teaching is supported by a very good knowledge of the pupils' needs, which is reflected in teachers' planning for individual pupils. This personalised learning is effective in meeting the wide range of need in some classes. Ambitious teachers hold high expectations and plan opportunities for collaborative working, which is a significant challenge for many pupils. Skilful questioning ensures that pupils and staff know how much has been learned and where extra support is required. The adverse impact of staff turnover is seen where newer staff know the pupils less well and teaching lacks the precision evident in the better lessons. Staff make effective use of ICT to produce symbolised timetables and communication aids to meet pupils' needs when required. The use of interactive whiteboards to aid learning is underdeveloped in some classrooms.

Teachers' assessment and marking of work are satisfactory and all pupils receive prompt feedback about their work and behaviour. On occasions, some pupils show challenging behaviour that is associated with their special educational needs. In most cases, staff intervention is quick and effective, ensuring a prompt resumption of learning. In some classes, the pupils are involved in assessing their own performance at the end of lessons. For example, in science, they consider what improvements

they could have made to their clay 'volcano' experiment when they mixed vinegar and bicarbonate of soda to produce an eruption. The ways in which they recorded their evaluations were suitably matched to their literacy abilities.

Teachers work well with the available resources, although there is insufficient equipment for practical science and design and technology investigations. Computer programs to support specific learning difficulties have recently been ordered but are not yet available to pupils. The absence of a video camera means that opportunities to record pupils' interaction are missed.

Monitoring of classroom practice has provided the headteacher with a good overview of the quality of teaching and learning. In post for two terms, she recognises the challenge brought about by staff turnover including, for example, difficulties in recruiting appropriately experienced staff. The proprietor acknowledges the need for additional specialist training for staff to ensure a more consistent match of staff expertise to pupils' aptitudes and needs. Leadership roles have yet to be assigned to subject areas and the systematic evaluation of whole-school academic achievement is at an early stage. The headteacher has identified appropriate priorities for improvement although it is too early to gauge their effectiveness. In part, this is due to the significant amount of time senior managers spend teaching.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. Typically, staff provide good role models and offer a satisfactory and consistent approach to the management of pupils' behaviour. Pupils are aware of the school systems for rewards and sanctions and the majority respond well. The school has relevant data to show a reduction in time out of class for some pupils. Consequently, most pupils show improved attitudes to learning and enjoy attending school. Their behaviour is satisfactory. The majority are unaffected by occasional poor behaviour and remain focused on their own behavioural targets to maintain their studies. The school's management has tried hard to reduce the adverse effect of staff changes and new pupils are sensitively phased into lessons as part of their induction to the school. The recognition of success and the importance of working with others are embedded in the school day and the weekly celebration assembly and help to promote the pupils' economic well-being, enjoyment and achievement. Playtimes are harmonious occasions and, when given the opportunity, most pupils show that they can work alongside others, for example in physical exercises designed to encourage team work. In some lessons, pupils spontaneously applaud the achievements of their peers.

Some pupils contribute to the school community by carrying out tasks as requested, for example, returning registers to the office. Occasionally, pupils use money for transactions at snack time and in mathematics lessons, which assists in their economic awareness. The pupils' views are sought regularly in lessons but as yet there is no school council whereby they can contribute more formally to the running

of the school. Through the curriculum they learn about other faiths and cultures and the roles played by public institutions, for example, studying topics such as 'people who help us'. The range of first-hand visits to and visitors from the community is too limited.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory, including for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. Staff undertake regular training at appropriate levels in child protection to ensure that they are conversant with the correct procedures. The small numbers in each class and the regard for individuals mean that the pupils receive good levels of supervision from staff. Routinely, the school provides short exercise sessions that sometimes involve programmes devised by the speech and language therapist. A few pupils attend breakfast club and healthy snacks are provided prior to break times; however, no lunches are served to reinforce the requirements of healthy eating. The school has appropriate plans to seek healthy school status.

The school's policies are effective in promoting the pupils' health, safety and welfare on site and while on visits to the community. The supervision of pupils in school is appropriate at all times. Off-site visits are few but are supported by risk assessments and a comprehensive written policy. New staff undergo an induction interview and are familiarised with the school's procedures and staff handbook. Regular training is provided in behaviour management including the safe restraint of pupils when required. The school's policies are implemented effectively regarding the promotion of good behaviour and the administration of first aid. Accidents and incidents are recorded in detail and are followed up appropriately. The school has effective working relationships with external agencies.

Routine attention to health and safety is good. Systematic checks are made on portable electrical equipment and fire equipment. However, the school has not carried out fire drills during the school day to ensure that pupils are familiar with evacuation procedures. Registers of attendance are maintained regularly and the school's recent attention to its admission register has ensured that it now contains all of the required information. The school has drawn up an appropriate plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Concerns raised by some parents during the inspection are being examined by the appropriate bodies.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has appropriate safeguards to ensure that the pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment checks and procedures for permanent and temporary staff are informed by the most recent guidance. The school maintains a single central register of all checks as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are satisfactory and enable safe and effective learning. There is an adequate number of classrooms and teaching areas for the numbers on roll. The classrooms range in size and careful thought is given to the numbers of pupils in each group. Good use is made of all the available space although the school has rightly identified the need to improve provision for quiet areas and sensory experiences. Displays are designed to be 'low arousal' where appropriate to pupils' special educational needs. The flooring in most rooms is unsuitable for wet activities and has deteriorated as a result of excessive staining. Other areas of the school are well maintained and attractive. The medical room caters well for pupils who are ill during the school day, although the absence of blinds reduces privacy. The lack of grassed areas for play on site is compensated by pupils accessing the local park under supervision.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school's attractive website and prospectus meet requirements. A significant minority of parents have registered their dissatisfaction with the school on a range of issues and some also conveyed their views to the inspection team through the pre-inspection questionnaire. The school seeks to maintain good contact with parents by regular phone calls, newsletters, progress meetings and home-school message books. As numbers on roll have increased, the school has revised its 'open door' policy and requests that parents make appointments to visit rather than make the 'drop-in' visits that were a feature of school life when fewer pupils attended. Not all parents are happy with these arrangements and meetings have been held to seek a solution. Other concerns relating to the curriculum, staffing and behaviour management are addressed in this report. A small number of local authorities also expressed concerns about the provision in relation to individual pupils whom they referred to the school. The majority of parents who contacted the inspection team reported that they were satisfied with the school and its work. The annual reviews of the pupils' statements of special educational needs are of good quality, as is the quality of academic reports which give a rounded picture of pupils' progress. The school does not send financial information annually to referring local authorities in respect of income received and expenditure incurred on behalf of pupils from those authorities registered at the school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints policy and procedures for handling complaints meet requirements, although the process at the formal stage lacks clarity as to what will be involved.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of provision in Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures are adequate and the children are well cared for and learn effectively. Those policy documents which are not yet in place do not impact on the safety and welfare of the children. The children's achievement towards meeting their early learning goals is satisfactory. Children in the Nursery make satisfactory progress, particularly in their communication skills, which is all important for these children, and in their personal development. They learn about healthy lifestyles and feel safe. However, a lack of adequate resources for creative play and development and physical development hampers children's skills in those areas. Some of the play activities are too teacher directed and a balance needs to be found in allowing the children to make free choices and use their own creativity and imagination fully. Children enjoy what they are doing and were excited by a range of technological resources provided, for example, moving in time to the dancing robot. They behave well and there are good relationships and strong partnerships with the parents. Outside support from external agencies, for example, the occupational therapist, adds an extra dimension to the learning. However, there is limited involvement in the wider community and few opportunities exist for children to learn outside the school. Leadership and management are satisfactory; the manager is new to the role and has yet to have an impact on the work of the unit. She is developing her team and her understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision to take effective steps to improve it.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- implement its written policies by completing schemes of work and other plans for the curriculum (paragraph 1(2))
- provide appropriate careers guidance for secondary aged pupils (paragraph 1(2)(g))
- ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- improve the quantity and range of classroom resources and ensure that they are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

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

- provide improved levels of fire safety by conducting regular fire drills when the pupils are present (paragraph 3(5)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that all flooring is appropriate and in good condition (paragraph 5(s)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- submit an annual account to local authorities, and on request to the Secretary of State, of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each pupil funded by those local authorities (paragraph 6(8)).

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 the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?			✓	
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?			✓	
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?			✓	
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?			✓	

School details

Name of school	Kestrel House School		
DCSF number	309/6002		
Unique reference number	135683		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2008		
Age range of pupils	3-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 17	Girls: 2	Total: 19
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 21	Girls: 2	Total: 23
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,000		
Address of school	104 Crouch Hill London N8 9EA		
Telephone number	020 8348 8500		
Fax number	020 8348 1157		
Email address	admin@kestrelhouseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Kerry Harris		
Proprietor	The Eagle House Group		
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell		
Dates of inspection	8-9 December 2009		