

Child First School and Learning Centre

Independent special school inspection report

DCSF registration number	938/6228
Unique reference number	35691
URN for registered childcare and social care	SCO 42147
Inspection number	341998
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Thirkell
Social care inspector	Paul Taylor

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

Age group: 14–15

Published:

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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

Child First School and Learning Centre was established in January 2008. It is located on two sites with linked, but separately registered, residential children's homes. It provides education for young people who have experienced a wide range of traumas which have contributed to their disruptive and challenging behaviour. Pupils have all had extending periods out of school during their education. They are placed at the school by several local authorities. There are two pupils who currently have a statement of special educational needs. The school is registered for 12 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. There are currently four girls aged 14 to 15 attending, all of whom live at the linked children's homes owned by the school's proprietors. The school aims to help pupils to 'regain their confidence' and to guide and facilitate their 're-engagement with learning'. This is the school's first inspection since registration as an independent special school.

Evaluation of the school

Child First and Learning Centre is still a relatively new school but has made good progress in developing its educational provision since it was first registered in January 2008. It provides a good quality of education for its pupils, who demonstrate growing confidence and self-esteem. Residential accommodation provides a good standard of care. Pupils acknowledge that they are well cared for by their teachers and support staff. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They say that they appreciate the calm learning environment of the school. The school has appropriate procedures for safeguarding pupils. Almost all regulations for independent schools are met.

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

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and appropriate for the needs of all pupils. Each pupil has a curriculum designed to meet their individual learning and personal needs. The school's provision recognises the importance of filling gaps in their learning as all have previously missed aspects of their education. Speaking, listening and literacy are well met through English, including the study of literature, and numeracy through mathematics and science.

Suitable opportunities are provided for all pupils to have access to the full range of required learning experiences built around a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Schemes of work show clearly how other subjects are integrated into the curriculum, including history, geography, art, personal, social and health education and citizenship, religious education, physical education and aspects of design and technology. Personal, social and health education is occasionally and helpfully supported by a nurse linked to the care provision. The curriculum is suitably supported by a range of Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network documents, textbooks and resources. It is planned to provide pupils with the opportunities, as well as encouragement, to raise their educational goals and to continue their education, either at a mainstream school or college of further education.

Careers provision is well planned to meet individual needs, including where pupils have a statement of special educational needs. All pupils have a 'pathways' programme and careers development is closely linked to the development of social skills and supported by an accredited Life Skills course. Good emphasis is given throughout the curriculum to developing skills with respect to organisation, application and punctuality. Social skills and consideration for others are developed which are seen as key aspects of pupils' future career and employment prospects. Support from the Connexions service is provided through a link established with a local mainstream school, which also acts as an examination centre. Whenever possible, pupils are given the opportunity to pursue vocational interests. For example, currently two pupils are taking hair and beauty courses at the local college of further education for two days a week.

Supervised physical education is currently an aspect of pupils' extra-curricular experience due to pressure on time during the school day, and to meet specific needs. Pupils use the local sports centre and swimming pool regularly. A range of activities are clearly mapped through the schemes of work for physical education. Provision for practical activities, including in science, is constrained by the size of the school and available space. Nevertheless, displays around the school emphasise the good opportunities that pupils have for art. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, including trips to museums and places of interest, is provided by the school and through the care facilities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. It is never less than satisfactory and occasionally outstanding. As a result of good teaching, and their growing confidence, pupils make good progress, although rates of progress can vary with individual circumstances. Staff and teachers have a suitable range of training and experience, in particular to support the core curriculum. The progress made by pupils is particularly notable in those who have been at the school longest. Pupils are clear in their appreciation of the support provided by staff at the school. The quality of pupils' learning experience and their opportunity to acquire new knowledge, as well as to develop intellectually, is supported by the generally positive relationships between teachers and pupils. This provides good scope for class discussions. It was particularly notable in an English lesson where all pupils showed great interest in the text of 'Hard Times'. Most pupils are regular readers. One pupil emphasised why in her view a book painted a much more vivid picture for her than subsequently seeing a film version of a favourite story. All pupils could identify a favourite author.

Teachers plan their lessons well taking into consideration both pupils' academic and personal needs. As a result of the careful management of classroom time behaviour is good, although on occasions frustrations arise and disputes occur between pupils. Such occasions are generally well dealt with by staff. Teachers usually demonstrate high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and encourage them to behave responsibly.

Assessment is an area of continuing improvement. Pupils' work is assessed regularly and thoroughly, reflected in the marking and feedback provided on their work. Information derived from marking and testing is well used to support lesson planning, but is also, importantly, supported by teachers' good knowledge of the pupils and their personal difficulties. The school has in place a clear framework for assessing pupils' progress supported by policies and procedures which include reference to national norms as well as their own clearly articulated aims. Although assessment strategies are well established, the school has still to develop an effective means of recording progress in the short term and bringing the range of information recorded together.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school places considerable emphasis on developing their self knowledge, self confidence and self esteem, all of which are central to them making both personal and academic progress. Within the curriculum it is developed through work related to the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network awards and religious education. Pupils' self knowledge is developed as the young people become used to speaking about themselves during regular reviews. In lessons teachers are careful to place emphasis on positive dialogue, to give praise when it is deserved and to encourage pupils relative to their individual difficulties and needs. Staff make every effort to ensure that pupils attend lessons regularly within the needs of their individual learning programmes.

The school provides good support to enable pupils to develop a clear view of right and wrong. Although they are encouraged to have respect for the law, there are currently no planned links with its representatives such as the police. Pupils receive ongoing encouragement to accept responsibility for their behaviour. Their behaviour is good and they say that they enjoy being at the school. They are quick to take opportunities to be helpful. Pupils have increasing opportunities to have involvement in the local community through links established with a local school and college. Their awareness of public institutions is developed through aspects of citizenship related lessons. They develop knowledge of other cultures and religions through aspects of the curriculum and discussion, which encourage developing attitudes of tolerance. The school's equal opportunity policy and practice supports the development of pupils' positive attitudes in this respect.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. It is supported by a full and appropriately prepared range of policies and guidance documents, including those for fire safety, health and safety and first aid, which are implemented as required. The school has clear strategies for dealing with bullying and deals quickly with any incidents that occur. The behaviour policy provides additional support which pupils recognise as strict in some respects but nevertheless fair. Pupils acknowledge the high level of care provided by the school and the concern for their personal well-being demonstrated by staff. The requirements for safeguarding are understood, carefully implemented and staff have completed appropriate training. Supervision is appropriate to pupils' individual needs. All required registers and records are maintained appropriately. A detailed three-year plan sets out how the school fulfils its responsibilities in relation to the expectations set out in the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school fully understands the requirements for checking the suitability of staff. The required checks have been completed and recorded in a single central register as prescribed.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides good accommodation for pupils' education on both sites, despite limitations with regard to practical work due to the limited number of available rooms. Classrooms provide comfortable, clean and calm learning environments which are appreciated by the pupils. Furniture is appropriate to the pupils' age range, the decoration is good and general maintenance is of a high standard. The premises have been inspected by the appropriate authorities with respect to safety and emergency evacuation. The provision of washrooms and toilets are sufficient as long

as there are only girls at the school. Outside space at both school sites is suitable for the ages of the pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school understands the requirements for the provision of information to parents and prospective parents and carers. It provides regular reports to parents and placing authorities as required. Despite this, it has omitted to include a list of staff and their qualifications in the details of information available to all parties as recorded in the prospectus.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a comprehensive policy for managing complaints which sets out clearly the informal and formal steps that may be taken by all complainants. The steps for recording formal complaints, maintaining confidentiality and keeping all those involved informed are securely in place.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

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'), with the exception of those listed below.²

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

- ensure that parents, prospective parents and carers are aware they can request details of staff and their qualifications from the school (paragraph 6(3)(g)).

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

² www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

What the school could do to improve further

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

- clarify systems for recording assessments
- consider how pupils' experience of practical work, in science in particular, can be improved.

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	Child First School and Learning Centre		
DCSF number	938/6228		
Unique reference number	35691		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent Special		
Date school opened	January 2008		
Age range of pupils	14–15		
Gender of pupils	Female		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 4	Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 2	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 4	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,250		
Annual fees (boarders)	£170,000		
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Evans		
Proprietor	Mr Terry Goble		
Reporting inspector	Mr Mike Thirkell		
Dates of inspection	21–22 September 2009		