

Fitzwalter Greencorns

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	877/6010
Unique reference number	135638
Inspection number	342483
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Yodaiken
Social care inspector	Elizabeth Taylor

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: 11-18

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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.

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

Fitzwalter Greencorns is a special school and children's home that provides exclusively for looked after children aged from 11 to 18 years. Students have a history of unsuccessful placements in local authority homes or in fostering placements. The proprietors are part of the Continuum Education Group. The school operates from a semi-detached house in a quiet residential area. The school provides 24 hour care and boarding for students; the current student on role does not have a statement of special educational needs. Students are taught by a team of visiting teachers who cover several such schools in the area. The school's aim is to provide 'excellence, equality and high achievement for all, by unconditional positive regard for everyone.' This is the first education inspection of the school. The residential provision was also inspected in parallel to the education inspection. The previous social care inspection was in June 2009.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education is good and is supported by good provision for residential care; as a result, the overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is good. Students make good progress in most subjects. The school offers a good curriculum overall, although in some subjects it is not creative enough, with too few resources being used to support learning. The curriculum provision for English, science and art is good and these are subjects which students really enjoy. Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and the welfare, health and safety of students is good. The school works hard to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students but such are their complex needs that often only a satisfactory impact upon personal development can be evidenced. The school meets its aims and all of the regulations for independent schools.

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 overall quality of education is good. This is because the curriculum provision and progress made by students in most subjects are good. The curriculum is particularly good in English, science and art. It is largely based upon the National Curriculum but supported by vocational and nationally accredited courses. It is well adapted generally to meet the complex needs of students, focusing upon recovering lost ground. It makes extensive use of Entry Level courses to get students started upon accredited pathways. There is a clear focus upon boosting skills in literacy, numeracy and science and preparation for students' future economic well-being. Students are prepared for GCSE's in subjects that they enjoy and in which they succeed. The curriculum has been carefully planned to provide a broad education and to meet the specific needs of the students. This includes the development of their self-esteem and confidence. The curriculum in most subjects is supported by appropriate schemes of work. However, in a few subjects planning is less effective and a lack of equipment and resources to support learning restricts opportunity for active learning. The planning of the 24 hour curriculum is good and is linked appropriately to students' individual education and care plans.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. When students join the school, staff undertake good testing procedures, the information from which is used as a basis for evaluating progress. There is regular and effective assessment of progress in most subjects and this is used to inform planning. Within the lessons, teachers forge good relationships with students; however, there is an inconsistency of teaching quality among the various subjects. Where teaching is good, there is effective planning, challenging pace in the lessons and some incisive questioning that probes students' learning and challenges their thinking. Teachers' use of praise and recognition of effort ensure a positive learning environment. Resources are well utilised to engage students' interests. Consequently, in these lessons progress is good. On occasions where teaching is less effective the pace is too slow, resources not utilised well, with activities not matched to the needs and aptitudes of students. As a result, in these lessons progress is barely satisfactory.

The school is effective in accumulating and using assessment and test information about the attainment of students. This is done through a range of tests including those which are standardised. The outcomes of these tests and assessments are discussed in regular meetings when all lead teachers and residential staff discuss students' progress. As a result of this discussion a summary report is prepared every two months which is then circulated to all staff. The teaching of personal, social and health education (PSHE) across the educational and residential provisions is good; the good quality of social care prepares students well for the future.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The provision for students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. The school works hard to promote this but sometimes the impact of what they do in

students' personal development is not always fully apparent. This is because of the complex needs of the students and on occasions, their adverse reactions to what the school provides. The school uses many strategies to develop the students' self-confidence and self-esteem, for example, displaying their artwork around the home and encouraging students with strengths in English to write poetry. Behaviour management strategies are good; students are encouraged to make the right choices and to understand that, should they not do so, there will be consequences. In this way students are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions.

Notwithstanding this, on occasions behaviour can be unsatisfactory, although generally it is satisfactory. Designated learning time, both within personal, social and health education and within cross-curricular lessons, supports students in this aspect of their education. Whilst good overall, attendance at lessons is at times lower than it could be. When this happens, it results in valuable learning time being lost. Care staff and teachers work well together and meet often to discuss students' progress and the best mediation strategies to use. Students say that they thoroughly enjoy English, science and art but there is some negativity towards some other subjects. Promoting future economic well-being is a priority for the school and various strategies are used effectively both by teachers and care staff. Self sufficiency is promoted as far as possible through the use of independent time away from the home. Students make a good contribution to the community through taking part in charity work, the school council and visits to a local old age residential home. Students are given a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. There are very detailed child protection and safeguarding procedures in place across all areas of the school, with appropriate training of staff to keep them up-to-date with developments. Student safety is a high priority with staff, both within and outside of school. Fire safety provision, first aid and everyday maintenance checks are fully monitored. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place and students expressed the view that they feel safe and well cared for. However, there have been incidents of students absconding from the residence, although not from the school. The school and care staff manage these events effectively and ensure students' safety. The impact upon students' learning is identifiable in the period following their return to lessons when progress is slower. The school promotes a good understanding of healthy living. There are clear links through the curriculum and also practical activities incorporated into science, and food technology lessons, where students cook the food for themselves and other adults in the home. Internet safety is well promoted. Opportunities for physical education are well taken up; however, there are too few visits and extra-curricular activities to support healthy living.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school maintains a single central record of all staff and carries out the required vetting checks prior to their appointment. All staff have checks carried out by the Criminal Record Bureau to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises enable students to be taught effectively and safely. There are no specialised classrooms within the house, with teaching taking place in a downstairs room which adjoins a lounge. The room is light and airy, suitable for purpose and has an appropriate dedicated computer facility for both teacher and student use. There is a back garden which offers satisfactory opportunities for physical recreation and horticultural sessions.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The information provided to parents and carers is clear, accurate and up-to-date. This includes provision of a prospectus and the most recent examination results. The parent and student handbooks are informative and helpful. School policies are provided on request and the school's arrangements for consultation meetings and reporting on students' academic progress are regular and frequent.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints meet all requirements.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be good and national minimum standards were met. A full report on this provision is available in the social care section of the Ofsted website.

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:

- improve teaching by providing activities more consistently that are a better match to each student's attainment and needs.

- ensure that resources are enhanced to support creative teaching and provide more challenging learning opportunities.

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	Fitzwalter Greencorns		
DCSF number	877/6010		
Unique reference number	135638		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	July 2008		
Age range of pupils	11-18 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of boarders	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,800		
Annual fees (boarders)	£270,429		
Email address	angela.norris-heyas@greencorns.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Norris-Heyas		
Proprietor	Green Corns		
Reporting inspector	Jonathon Yodaiken		
Dates of inspection	8-9 December 2009		