

The Evolution Centre

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 893/6107
Unique reference number 135511
Inspection number 343183
Inspection dates 22-23 September 2009
Reporting inspector Mark Mumby HMI

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

Age group: 11-16

Published:

Reference no: 090070

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090070

© Crown copyright 2009



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 Evolution Centre provides education and care for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. It caters for students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties and/or are on the autistic spectrum. It is owned by Reflexion Care Group Ltd. All of the current students are looked after children living in the company's care homes, although this is not a requirement for admission. The school aims to, *'support students to move onto further education, training or employment and along with the parent company supports care leavers into independent living.'* The school is located in a rural village setting close to Shrewsbury in the West Midlands. The school opened in 2008 and is registered for 24 students. There are currently ten full-time students on roll. This is the school's first published inspection report by Ofsted. The school has applied to the Department for Children, Schools and Families to extend the age range of its pupils to 18 years. This request was considered as part of this inspection.

Evaluation of the school

The Evolution Centre provides a good quality of education for its students. There are excellent working relationships between the school staff and the students' carers. Consequently, there is a high level of consistency of expectations between the home and school setting for each student. This provides the security that these students need in order to get the most out of life and be able to move on successfully to the next stage of their education or employment. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet current requirements and all but one of the regulations for registration as an independent school are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is based on the National Curriculum and sensible use is made of the wide range of national guidance materials available to plan a curriculum which meets the individual needs of each of the students. Curriculum plans take full account of the requirements of students' statements of special educational need where this is applicable. The school has developed a number of effective partnerships with other organisations to help to deliver a curriculum which engages

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

the interests of each of the students. For example, one student attends an agricultural course at a local college and another benefits from a football inclusion course. Although extra-curricular activities are limited, there are good opportunities to develop a variety of skills and interests through the range of theme days planned for all students. These days include activities ranging from working with musicians or artists to sports days and visits to museums and other places of interest.

A strength of the curriculum is the focus on preparing students for life beyond school. This work ranges from developing cookery skills, including planning healthy menus, to driving and first-aid courses for students in Year 11. Appropriate careers guidance is provided through working with Connexions as well as work experience placements. Consequently, students are prepared well for their future economic well-being.

Teaching and assessment are good and, consequently, students make good progress. Teachers use their good, and sometimes excellent, subject knowledge very effectively to plan lessons which meet the individual interests and learning needs of the students well. Most lessons progress at a brisk pace with teachers having high expectations and using a wide range of teaching strategies to engage and motivate the students. They take full account of the objectives within each student's statement of special educational need when planning lessons and monitoring learning and behaviour.

A particular strength of the provision is the very small teaching groups which enable teachers to focus precisely on each student's needs. This is complemented by the important part played by the students' carers who attend the school each day alongside the students. They provide pastoral support and help to manage behaviour. However, the very small teaching groups and high levels of support occasionally limit the opportunities for students to work independently or in small groups. Consequently, their independent learning skills are underdeveloped. Teachers are occasionally too eager to provide support for students and opportunities to extend learning through extended questioning are missed.

Assessment is used well to monitor the progress students make. Daily report sheets keep students focused on their learning and behaviour as well as strengthening links between school and home. These sheets are linked to an effective system of rewards and consequences which help to motivate the students and maintain good attitudes and behaviour. Teachers provide clear guidance, through comments in lessons as well as marking of tasks, to help students improve their work. Marking of students' written assignments in English is particularly good.

The school has prepared a plan which demonstrates its ability to provide a suitable curriculum for students from 16-18 years of age. This is a sensible approach to support students whose cognitive development is insufficient to enable them to leave a safe, therapeutic environment before they are ready.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Most students say that they enjoy their time at the Evolution Centre and, although attendance is low, it is a considerable improvement on students' previous placements. They get on well with each other and with the adults who work with them. Students have a good understanding about the difference between right and wrong and most of them respond well to the school's systems for managing behaviour. Teaching is rarely disrupted by behaviour issues because of the excellent support provided by students' carers who are always available and visible in school. Consequently, behaviour is good.

The curriculum provides good opportunities to develop students' understanding of our culturally diverse world. However, most students have only a limited understanding of the world in which they live. Nevertheless, students do respect one another and there is racial harmony within the school.

Students play an active part in the local community. For example, they helped raise funds for the local primary school by running a stall at their fete. They also raise money for a range of charities and this is often linked to developing their own life skills. For example, students sell cakes or jam that they have made in school. The school council provides a good opportunity for students to influence the work of the school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. This aspect of the school's provision is rightly given very high priority and the excellent partnership established with the students' carers contributes to this good provision. Risk assessments are very comprehensive and all of the required policies are in place. With one exception, these are suitably detailed and all are fully up-to-date. The first-aid policy does not provide adequate guidance, for example it does not explain how to deal with spillages of bodily fluids. Staff are suitably trained in child protection and there are sufficient qualified first-aiders on the school site. Procedures for fire safety meet requirements and appropriate records of equipment tests and evacuations are maintained.

The curriculum provides good opportunities to develop students' understanding about leading healthy and safe lifestyles. For example, attention is paid to promote healthy and safe relationships through sex and relationships education. The police contribute to the curriculum by providing effective education about knife crime, internet safety and drugs. However, some students continue to make unhealthy choices such as smoking or eating unhealthy snacks.

The school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate procedures in place relating to the checks it makes on prospective employees and volunteers regarding their identity, qualifications, and suitability to work with children. However, it has not routinely carried out appropriate checks on prospective employees' medical fitness.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is housed in an old primary school which has been completely refurbished and adapted for its present use. This has been done to a high standard taking full account of the intended purpose. Consequently the buildings meet the needs of the current pupils well. The premises are spacious, well-furnished, clean, bright and well-maintained. Food technology and science benefit from appropriate specialist areas. There is adequate outdoor space for general recreation as well as a garden area where students are able to grow fruit and vegetables. Physical education takes place off-site where students are able to use specialist sports venues including a dry ski slope. The premises are suitable to accommodate students from 16 to 18 years old as requested by the school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers are kept fully informed about their child's attainment and progress through detailed written reports. The school prospectus is a clearly accessible document which provides all of the required information.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written and fair complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

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 the one listed below.²

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that a check of their medical fitness is carried out (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

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:

- provide more opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills
- identify more effective ways to develop students' understanding about their culturally diverse world.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

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		✓		
--	--	---	--	--

School details

Name of school	The Evolution Centre		
DCSF number	893/6107		
Unique reference number	135511		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	February 2008		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 4	Total: 10
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 4	Girls: 3	Total: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 4	Total: 10
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,720		
Address of school	The Old School Holyhead Road Bicton Near Shrewsbury Shropshire SY3 8EQ		
Telephone number	01743 850517		
Fax number	01743 850828		
Email address	Jacqui.brooks@evolution-centre.co.uk		
Headteacher	Jacqui Brooks		
Proprietor	Reflexion Care Group Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Mark Mumby HMI		
Dates of inspection	22-23 September 2009		