

Continuum School

Independent special school inspection report

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| DCSF registration number | 878/6213 |
| Unique Reference Number (URN) | 135803 |
| Inspection number | 344580 |
| Inspection dates | 3–4 February 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Mark Lindfield HMI |

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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

Continuum School is a small independent special school situated in a rural location in the South Hams area of Devon. The school is owned by Continuum Care and Education and is one of several such schools throughout England, also run by this company. The building is a former health club and the company has leased a major portion of this. The school was registered in February 2009 and opened in March 2009.

The school provides for 13 boys and girls, aged from 10 to 16 years, who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The majority of pupils are looked after by the company within its local children's homes. The vast majority have statements of special education needs. The company also draws pupils from other care homes in the area and admits pupils referred by the local authority.

The school aims 'to provide a rich and varied learning environment that allows pupils to develop their skills and abilities to their full potential'.

This is the school's first published inspection report.

Evaluation of the school

The Continuum School provides a satisfactory quality of education. The newly appointed headteacher has already developed the standards of the curriculum and teaching at this early stage of the school's establishment and these are now satisfactory, as is pupils' progress. The school has clear and rigorous safeguarding procedures which include thorough checks on the suitability of staff; however, its provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate because there are inconsistencies in the school's use of sanctions and in the procedures to ensure safe transition from school to pupils' residential settings. The school meets all but two of the regulations.

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 the curriculum provided are satisfactory. The curriculum places an appropriate emphasis on improving pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The leadership team has moved quickly to develop schemes of work and programmes of study in a range of subjects, helping pupils to make satisfactory progress. The school is intent on developing the curriculum further to meet the individual needs of pupils. For example, the school has developed the science curriculum this year to allow pupils to complete an applied science course leading to a GCSE qualification. In addition the school has recently introduced vocational courses to develop the skills of individual pupils and has plans to provide further vocational courses in the near future. Curricular provision for information and communication technology is linked to other subjects and pupils use word processing skills and spreadsheets with increasing confidence. Design and technology is a strong feature of the school and pupils create a range of good quality wooden products and enjoy opportunities to participate in food technology lessons.

Satisfactory arrangements are in place to provide work placements and to access support and guidance from careers advice agencies to prepare pupils for their future lives. Trips and visits enhance the curriculum. For example, pupils have visited the local zoo and Stover Park to develop their scientific knowledge and understanding. Pupils have frequent opportunities to engage in a range of outdoor education activities which raise their confidence and add to their enjoyment.

The quality of teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. Planning of teaching consistently identifies the intended learning outcomes and teachers communicate these to pupils. In several lessons, however, these learning objectives are too broad and record work to be covered rather than the specific learning that is intended to take place. Where these learning intentions are precise, pupils have a clear understanding of teachers' expectations and make better progress as a result. Good relationships are evident between the majority of staff. Pupils and teachers encourage pupils to behave responsibly. In these lessons pupils showed good levels of behaviour and application as a result. However, there are variations in the management of pupils' behaviour in a minority of lessons and the use of sanctions is inconsistent. Where pupils are disruptive, additional support is provided by care staff to maintain their attention and concentration so that they make satisfactory progress. The school's introduction of assessments of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning at the end of each lesson is improving both their personal development and their behaviour.

The school regularly assesses pupils' academic progress and parents report that they are kept well-informed. The recent introduction of half-termly assessments to more closely monitor the progress of pupils in the core curriculum is effective and gives teachers a good awareness of pupils' knowledge and understanding in these subjects. These assessments inform the termly reviews of pupils' individual education

plans and ensure that the provision meets the needs recorded in individual pupils' statements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is satisfactory. Pupils' behaviour in lessons, although occasionally challenging, is satisfactory overall. Pupils are increasingly involved in assessments of their behaviour and this is helping them to behave more responsibly. They respond well to the positive role models provided by education and care staff who help them to develop their social skills and to show tolerance and an appreciation of others' feelings.

Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the life of the school. They appreciate the opportunities to make and sell wooden products in a local market and have built benches to enhance the outside area. The school forum presents them with opportunities to voice their opinions and request improvements to the school. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory and represents an improvement for many from their previous settings.

The school's personal, social and health education provides pupils with a satisfactory understanding of cultural diversity. It satisfactorily promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development and this is evident in the daily life of the school. The additional lessons on citizenship develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence, helping to prepare them for their future adult life. The curriculum provides pupils with a satisfactory understanding of public services and institutions and the school is visited by community police officers.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. All the required safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and staff have completed appropriate training. Fire safety procedures are thorough, checks have been completed on fire-fighting equipment and fire drills are held. The school uses referral information as well as baseline assessments to establish appropriate education and behaviour support plans. The school has completed an extensive audit of health and safety, and staff have the required first aid training and maintain the accident book appropriately. Risk assessments are completed for curriculum activities in and around school and during off-site visits. Staff provide sensible encouragement to pupils to follow healthy lifestyles through food hygiene, a balanced diet and regular opportunities for physical exercise. The school has completed a three-year plan with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has completed modifications to the building and resources to ensure improved access for pupils with physical disabilities.

However, the provision is inadequate overall because the school does not consistently and rigorously supervise all pupils in their transition to their residential settings to ensure that risks are minimised. Staff show care and consideration to pupils during the school day both in lessons and at break times and relationships are satisfactory or better at these times. However, when dealing with the rare incidents when pupils' behaviour is most challenging, there are inconsistencies in the school's systems of rewards and sanctions to manage this behaviour. There is a lack of clarity over the timing of the use of restraint, and in the use of calming strategies, which limits its effectiveness.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The company has completed thorough and appropriate checks on all new employees prior to their appointment. Records are comprehensive and maintained well. A complete central record held at the school gives details of all the statutory checks that have been carried out on staff and proprietors.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises provide for safe and effective learning. The playground area is restricted but allows suitable access for fire exits and is enhanced by wooden benches made by pupils. Displays of pupils' work in all areas of the school enhance the environment and provide examples of the range of the curriculum. Notice boards display newspaper articles of current events and include minutes of the school forum meetings. There are sufficient washroom and shower facilities for pupils and a separate medical room with appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill. Classroom furniture is suitable and there are well-equipped areas for design and technology activities. The small computer suite is popular with pupils but does not currently link to the school's network.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school prospectus provides parents and prospective parents with the required information and parents can view other documents on request. Parents receive regular reports on their child's academic progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear written complaints policy which meets all of 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 those listed below.³

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

- ensure that the school's systems for the management of pupils' most challenging behaviour have clearly defined rewards and sanctions which encourage pupils to make suitable choices and develop their self-esteem (paragraph 3(2)(d))
- ensure that school staff are deployed in such a way as to ensure the proper supervision of pupils as they transfer from school to their residential settings (paragraph 3 (7)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development.

- Ensure the consistent use of specific learning objectives to enhance teaching and assessment.

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

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 | | | | √ |
|--|--|--|--|---|

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

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|---|--|--|--|--|
| 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? | | | | |

The quality of boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

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|----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Evaluation of boarding provision | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|

School details

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| Name of school | Continuum School | | |
| DCSF number | 878/6213 | | |
| Unique reference number (URN) | 135803 | | |
| Type of school | Special school | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | March 2009 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 10–16 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 8 | Girls: 5 | Total: 13 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 8 | Girls: 4 | Total: 12 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 5 | Girls: 4 | Total: 9 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £31,800 | | |
| Address of school | Staverton Bridge Dartington Totnes Devon TQ9 6NU | | |
| Telephone number | 01803 762451 | | |
| Fax number | 01803 762451 | | |
| Email address | richard.raistrick@continuumgroup.org.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Richard Raistrick | | |
| Proprietor | Bob Hall | | |
| Reporting inspector | Mark Lindfield HMI | | |
| Dates of inspection | 3–4 February 2010 | | |