

Halton School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	876/6000
Unique Reference Number (URN)	133485
URN for registered social care	SC005204
Inspection number	348727
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI
Social care inspector	Karen Forster 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.

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

Halton School is based in a converted detached house. It caters for boys and girls between the ages of seven and 14 years who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Thirteen of the 14 pupils who currently attend have a statement of special educational needs. One of the pupils is a resident of the linked Keys Childcare residential children's home, Halton House. All pupils are funded by local authorities. Pupils start at the school with a history of disrupted education and low attainment. The school aims to develop their self-esteem, re-engage them in learning and foster academic and personal development. The school is managed by a headteacher who, together with the registered manager of the children's home, is responsible to the proprietor, Keys Childcare Ltd. The school was registered as an independent school in September 2000; it was last inspected in October 2007 and the children's home was last inspected in January 2010.

Evaluation of the school

Halton School provides a good quality of education and care. It has improved steadily since the last inspection, for example, in developing the curriculum and increasing the diversity of learning activities to improve the motivation of pupils to learn. The quality of care in the linked children's home is outstanding. The school is effective in meeting the diverse and very considerable needs of its pupils whose previous experiences of schooling have been negative and unsuccessful. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, well taught by an enthusiastic and cooperative staff. The staff are particularly adept at developing the self-esteem of pupils, securing their safeguarding and welfare, encouraging good behaviour and in diffusing challenges sometimes made by pupils. Relationships are good throughout the school. Pupils enjoy their learning, in the main, and they make good progress

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

both in lessons and over the longer term. The school meets its aims and all of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, broad and balanced. It provides a wide coverage of subjects of the National Curriculum together with religious education, a foreign language and personal, social and health education. Activities set for pupils are finely matched to their needs and staff go to some lengths to present them in practical and lively ways. Good use is made of the specialist skills of staff, for example, in art and food technology, and of the expertise provided by visitors, to give breadth to pupils' experiences. The school also makes effective use of its own and external resources for sports; this contributes well to the opportunities for pupils to exercise and the promotion of their health. The school's curricular provision to strengthen pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence and improve their behaviour is particularly effective. It provides a solid foundation for pupils to take responsibility, develop personally and become increasingly interested in improving their basic skills and in wider academic learning. The curriculum supports the school's good provision to prepare pupils for their future lives. Staff know the pupils exceptionally well and have a clear understanding of their specific difficulties and learning needs. This understanding rests on very thorough diagnosis and assessment, including that contained in the pupils' well-focused statements of special educational needs and individual education plans. The records of assessment are meticulously kept and are well used in the planning of the curriculum. Planning is good and carried out consistently throughout the school. Subjects have effective schemes of work and are well resourced with books, equipment and computers. The residential provision in the linked children's home provides excellent support for the personal development of those pupils of the school who reside there.

Teaching and assessment are good. Staff use a wide range of teaching methods and interesting activities. This helps to engage pupils and restore their interest in learning which has been reportedly eroded in their previous schools. Lessons are evaluated by senior staff, though there is scope to sharpen the criteria used to judge their effectiveness. The lessons seen were good throughout the school. They were especially effective in being carefully matched to the specific needs of each pupil. This was aided by the very good individual coaching provided by teachers and teaching assistants for each pupil in the small and well-staffed classes. Subject expertise among staff is good and it supports the effective teaching of the broad curriculum. Staff use targets well to guide pupils' learning in English and mathematics. They make pupils clear about the reasons why lessons and activities are being carried out and engage them in regular evaluations of what and how they have learned within them. Computers are well used to support learning in a range of subjects. Assessments of achievement, both academic and personal, are made frequently and rigorously. They give staff and school leaders a good insight into the progress being made by each pupil, and help them to revise their plans for future learning where necessary. They also help staff to respond sensitively to the changing

moods of the pupils and help them to deal with their particular learning and behavioural difficulties. Staff are firm and fair and have consistently clear expectations for pupils' behaviour and work rates. They are skilled in channelling pupils' energies into productive learning. They make good use of praise and encouragement, and are consistent and effective in applying the school's well conceived sanctions to promote acceptable behaviour.

Pupils make good progress. They have had troubled and disrupted past experiences of education. When they join Halton School they have low attainment because they have previously missed much formal learning. They develop well in their time here and this is steady and consistent throughout the age range. This is a result of the good and well-organised teaching and care provided. In the lessons seen, pupils made steady progress and showed, for most of the time, a clear interest in what they were learning and a willingness to cooperate with staff. Compared with their prior attainment, the achievement of pupils here is good, as is pupils' personal development. There is scope, as the school recognises, to improve incentives to learning by developing further the external accreditation of academic attainment.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall; it is better for moral, social and cultural than for spiritual development. Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy coming to school in the main, and are satisfied with the provision it makes for them to learn and develop interests. Attendance is good. Pupils are encouraged to get on well with each other and to exercise tolerance in their relationships and to have consideration for the property of others. When misunderstandings and disagreements arise, staff are effective in helping pupils to reconcile them, to see other points of view and to reflect on social and moral issues. Pupils respond well to the routines and organisation provided by the staff, and the fair and consistent procedures secure good and cooperative behaviour. Staff are effective in promoting pupils' moral development and their capacity to reflect on the consequences of their actions. The staff go to considerable lengths to improve pupils' self-esteem and this makes a major contribution to pupils' capacity for interaction with their peers and to their social development. Pupils are well supported socially in their preparation for adulthood and work. They develop a good understanding of the country's public institutions through the broad curriculum, listening to visitors from beyond the school, and engaging in trips to external places of interest. This contributes well to their cultural development as does the range of artistic and creative activities carried out within the curriculum. However, pupils have a limited understanding of the lives of members of the diverse cultures living in our country. Spirituality is developed as pupils reflect on their lives and actions but its coverage within religious education is limited.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school has clear and well-conceived procedures to promote good and safe behaviour among pupils; staff follow them consistently and effectively. There are clear and effective procedures to manage challenging behaviour and to help pupils who occasionally display it to calm down and reflect. Pupils' behaviour is generally good and where it falls short of the school's high expectations, staff are effective in securing pupils' cooperation. Pupils have access to therapy provided by specialists from Keys Childcare Ltd. This is reportedly helpful in enabling those who receive it to improve their self-esteem and behaviour. The training given by therapists to school staff also reportedly gives them a clearer insight into how therapy is helping pupils to develop and how they can support this in their teaching. Policies for child protection and safeguarding are robust and implemented vigilantly to promote pupils' welfare and safety. Staff work very cooperatively to secure this; good staff training underlies their consistently effective practice. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and have a deservedly high degree of confidence in staff. Practical lessons are carried out with due regard to health and safety. The school carries out effective risk assessments for a wide range of activities. The premises comply with fire regulations. Health issues are covered in various parts of the curriculum, improving pupils' insight into how to eat and live healthily. First aid training is in order and there are always staff on duty with first aid training. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school complies fully with regulations to check staff prior to their appointment. It maintains an accurate single central record of all adults who work with its pupils in the school.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is satisfactory and provides a suitable space for most of the school's activities. It is well maintained and resourced, and provides a safe venue for learning. Classrooms are pleasant and well-organised spaces which support learning well. They are well decorated and enhanced by attractive displays, including of pupils' work. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of the premises. Effective use is made of external facilities, for example, to provide sporting activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of clear and accurate information for parents, carers and local authorities.

Procedures for handling complaints

Complaints procedures are clear and meet regulatory requirements. No complaints have been received in the last year.

The quality of boarding provision

The care provision in the linked children's home was judged to be outstanding 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').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- strengthen the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, learning and the progress made by pupils in lessons
- develop further pupils' understanding of the diversity of cultures in Great Britain
- develop the use of external accreditation to improve the recognition given to pupils' achievements.

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 *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision	√			
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School details

Name of school	Halton School		
DCSF number	876/6000		
Unique reference number (URN)	133485		
Type of school	Special; for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	11 Sept 2000		
Age range of pupils	7-14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 4	Total: 14
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 9	Girls: 4	Total: 13
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 3	Total: 8
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,540		
Headteacher	Miss Emma McAllester		
Proprietor	Keys Childcare Limited		
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI		
Dates of inspection	16 – 17 June 2010		