

Victoria House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	886/6155
Unique Reference Number (URN)	132101
URN for registered childcare and social care	SC023655
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Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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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

Victoria House is an independent special school that is integral with a children's home. It provides for up to five young people aged from eight to 17 years who are looked after by the local authority. The school currently has three pupils aged 12 to 14 years on roll. They have all been at Victoria House for six months or less. All have a statement of their special educational needs citing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as their prime need.

The school is owned and managed by the Castlecare group. The school was registered in June 2006 and was last inspected in September 2007. Victoria House's care provision was last inspected by Ofsted Children's Directorate in January 2010. The report is published on Ofsted's website. The school's main aim is to provide a safe and secure learning environment where pupils can gain confidence in their abilities and re-engage with learning so that they can move to schools in the community.

Evaluation of the school

Victoria House provides a satisfactory quality of education and makes good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. Safeguarding procedures are good and staff have outstanding relationships with the young people which contribute to the supportive, nurturing ethos of both the school and home. Consequently, the young people's behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils make satisfactory academic progress although assessment systems are not strong enough. The school meets its aims and has made satisfactory progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. It meets all but three of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The curriculum is satisfactory and emphasises basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Records of pupils' reading and spelling skills tests and class work show that they make clear progress in these

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

areas. The provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is good and supports pupils' good personal development. It effectively complements the work of the home, supports pupils' choices for leading healthy and safe lives and helps them to make more appropriate contributions to the community, for example by learning about 'green' issues. The curriculum is enriched by visits, such as to the river to see the effects of erosion, and by the use of off-site facilities. The school uses commercially produced schemes of work derived from the National Curriculum as a basis for its own curriculum which include all the required areas of learning. Good account is taken of pupils' interests, for example in their choice of famous people to research. Information and communication technology and the internet are used well to supplement classroom resources. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. However, the school's planning is overambitious. The plans for each day and week are followed, which ensures pupils gain new skills, knowledge and understanding at a satisfactory rate. However, some of the content in each subject and topic is not actually taught due to the erratic pace of pupils' learning and their particular needs. This limits their rate of progress in gaining knowledge and understanding.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and pupils make satisfactory progress. The class teacher has many good skills. These include: a good informal knowledge of the attainment and learning style of each pupil, which helps him to match work to pupils' needs and interests; outstanding relationships with the pupils, which re-engages them with school and learning; and good behaviour management skills. The pupils generally try hard and are proud of their achievements. This was very well exemplified during the inspection by the pupils' research for, writing, and delivery of a presentation.

Although the teaching enables pupils to learn satisfactorily, progress is limited by an insufficient focus on what each pupil is expected to learn in lessons. Lesson plans derive from curriculum plans but they are brief. While a learning outcome is usually given, these are not always personalised for each individual pupil.

The reason for this weakness is that the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is inadequate. The school has an assessment policy, but practice does not consistently match it as the assessment process relies too much on the informal knowledge of the staff. It does not always allow pupils' small steps of progress to be tracked or enable gaps in their understanding to be identified. Pupils set their own targets for the week and are responsible for monitoring their progress towards them. These are linked to the targets on their individual education or behaviour plans, although sometimes the targets on these plans are not written helpfully enough to focus efforts towards pupils' continuous progress.

Pupils' reading and spelling are tested regularly and they complete commercially available test papers. These provide some information on both attainment and progress but the information is not used well enough to inform plans for teaching

and learning. A new system that tracks small steps of progress has been introduced by Castlecare, but this is in the very early stages of implementation.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is strongly supported by the integrated provision of the school and home, underpinned by outstanding relationships throughout the establishment.

Pupils learn to understand what motivates or upsets them, and how to manage and express their emotions in an acceptable way. Their self-esteem improves and they generally show respect and consideration for staff and one another, for example listening patiently to each other reading their work out loud. The pupils clearly know right from wrong, and increasingly make good choices about their behaviour and actions. Behaviour is good, and often outstanding in class. Pupils have usually had unhappy school experiences before coming to Victoria House and often choose not to attend lessons when they first arrive. However, the school works hard to improve their attendance and is successful in this. Pupils generally learn to enjoy school which enables most pupils to move to community-based schools. This prepares them well for their future economic well-being. Pupils' social development is good. They understand the school and house rules, and the basic institutions, services and rules of a democratic society. Pupils make a good contribution to their home community by helping one another and staff, for example in the preparation of meals. They contribute to the wider community by their recycling activities and growing understanding of sustainability. The pupils' cultural development is supported effectively by visits and curricular activities, such as studying comparative religions and the food and customs of the countries that make up the United Kingdom. This makes a good contribution to their cultural awareness and tolerance.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Staff training is fully up to date and renewal dates are clearly flagged to make sure that no training inadvertently expires. Child protection procedures are robust and outstanding attention is paid to assuring fire safety and pupils' overall safety. Risk assessments are made on all activities and outings, potential events such as bullying, and on the young people themselves. This minimises difficulties very effectively. All required policies and practices to support and safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety, including the child protection policy, are implemented well. However, while policies meet requirements, many of them are generic Castlecare policies which apply to most of their schools and do not always reflect Victoria House's particular circumstances. This was noted in the last inspection. Almost all regulations are met but Victoria House does not have a suitable three-year accessibility plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The school gives pupils' well-being high priority which makes a strong contribution to their good personal development. It provides a safe sanctuary where any difficulties arising in the home can be left behind. Healthy living is emphasised throughout Victoria House, both in and out of school time. Pupils' mental health is effectively supported by partnerships with appropriate professionals and organisations, and by their outstanding relationships with staff. Teaching young people to stay safe is at the heart of Victoria House's work. The school and home have a united approach to this – a practice supported very effectively by the care staff who also work in the classroom. The young people say they feel safe at Victoria House and are happy to approach staff if they have any concerns.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All regulations are met in relation to the safe recruitment of the proprietor and staff. Appropriate checks are made and documented on each person's suitability to work with children and young people. Staff information is meticulously stored in confidential files that are kept off site and the single central register of checks is completed as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The school occupies two small, adjoining rooms in its own part of a detached property situated on a residential street. The accommodation meets requirements and enables pupils to learn safely and effectively. It is supplemented by the use of off-site facilities, for example for sport, and by other home facilities such as the kitchen for food technology. The school rooms are in good decorative order, enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work and commercial posters. Victoria House has its own garden which pupils use for break times and for quiet reflection. The last inspection identified that some roof tiles were unsafe. This shortcoming has been rectified.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school's prospectus contains all the required information including a list of additional policies and documents that are available on request. A good quality, well-illustrated pack has been produced by the young people to inform and welcome newcomers to the home. Various reports are written on pupils' progress including annual reports on their academic progress. However, they are often too brief and do not give enough indication of the pupils' current levels of attainment or the progress they have made and often describe what has been covered in class rather than what pupils know, understand and can do. All other information provided to parents, carers and outside bodies is appropriate.

Procedures for handling complaints

The policy and procedure for dealing with complaints meet regulations.

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 the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and ensure that information from such assessment is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

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

- provide parents and carers with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of each registered child in the main subject areas taught (except where a parent or carer has agreed otherwise) (paragraph 6(6)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁴

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Review all required policies and documents systematically to make sure that they are fully compatible with Victoria House's particular practice and circumstances, and to make sure that they link effectively with one another where appropriate.

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

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

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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School details

Name of school	Victoria House		
DCSF number	886/6155		
Unique reference number (URN)	132101		
Type of school	Independent special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	June 2006		
Age range of pupils	8–17		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (boarders)	£215,160		
Telephone number	01536 711111		
Fax number	01536 712994		
Email address	rburrows@castlehomes.co.uk		
Headteacher	Marion Paige		
Proprietor	Castlecare Education		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	19–20 May 2010		