

Oliver House School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Caroline Broomhead HMI

Age group: 6-19

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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

Oliver House School is an independent day special school which is registered for up to 40 pupils aged six to 19 years who have complex needs including autism and moderate or severe learning difficulties. There are 12 pupils on roll, all of whom have statements of special educational needs. Nearly half are looked after by their local authorities. Nearly half of the pupils live in nearby residential accommodation owned by the same proprietor. The school opened in 2006 and was last inspected in March 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Oliver House School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Its provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is also judged to be satisfactory. Since the last inspection the school has gone through a period of high staff turnover at all levels. The proprietor has appointed a new headteacher and two additional teachers, all with experience in working with pupils with complex needs. He has also strengthened the school's clinical team to include additional psychological advice, speech and language therapy, and behaviour therapy. An educational consultant has also been appointed on a part-time basis. The school has a clear vision for improvement, is recovering well from its period of instability and has established an effective school structure and curriculum which meets the needs and ages of its pupils. The school is held in high regard by most parents and placing authorities. The school meets most of the independent schools' regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education offered by the school is satisfactory. The school has been restructured into lower and upper school and this has been effective in creating age-appropriate learning environments. The curriculum, which is satisfactory, has been revised to reflect pupils' needs and ages and now has a greater emphasis on preparing pupils for adult life in the wider community. In the upper school, the curriculum is modular and based on commercial frameworks: Entitlement and Quality Education for Pupils with Learning Difficulties (EQUALS) *Moving On* and Award

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

Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) *Towards Independence*. Recently introduced work placements are proving successful and pupils are settling quickly to the challenges these bring. In the lower school, more detailed schemes of work, based on the National Curriculum, are being developed to reflect pupils' autism and learning difficulties. The curriculum also places a strong focus on developing literacy, numeracy and communication skills. There are discrete sessions for literacy and numeracy and other subjects are taught through a topic approach, which works well. Each pupil has a personalised curriculum plan and very practical approaches are used throughout the school to bring the curriculum to life. Personal, social and health education is taught in realistic contexts throughout the school day. For example, pupils are taught to be more independent in their personal hygiene and to develop everyday life skills such as making a snack. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through their diet and by participating in leisure and sports activities. Sex education is taught informally on an individual basis and the school recognises that this aspect of the curriculum should be developed further. Resources to support the curriculum are generally adequate. The resources and provision for information and communication technology are extremely limited and this aspect of the curriculum has not been improved sufficiently since the last inspection when it was raised as an area for development.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory with some good features. Staff expertise is used well to enable pupils to be taught individually and in small groups. Planning for individual needs is good and now makes clear the expected learning outcomes in different subjects. Practical and visual resources generally capture pupils' interest and help them to learn. Careful consideration is given to classroom layout, promoting concentration and reducing the potential for disruption to lessons. Staffing is deployed flexibly to suit activity, behaviour and learning needs. Teaching assistants know what is expected of them and the pupils; they provide effective support for learning and behaviour. The speech and language therapist works closely with staff and pupils to promote positive and effective communication. Personalised communication systems make a significant contribution to pupils' willingness and ability to make their needs and wishes known to adults. Visual timetables help them to see activities planned for each day and so reduce their levels of anxiety. The pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning, improve their eye contact, concentration and ability to stay on task, are increasingly able to tolerate being in a room with others, and improve their ability to follow simple step-by-step instructions. They enjoy their lessons.

Assessment is satisfactory. Most pupils' attainment falls within the early P levels and National Curriculum Level 1. Individual targets are set within all subjects and reviewed half termly. However, information about pupils' learning and progress over time is incomplete, due in part to changes and shortages in staffing. The school has recently changed the assessment scheme it uses to measure the small steps of improvement pupils make and assessment is becoming more precise and focused on achievement of learning outcomes rather than just recording behaviours observed in lessons. Early indications are that this greater rigour is helping the school to track

more accurately pupils' attainment and to identify underachievement in the future. However, opportunities for teachers to moderate and verify the accuracy of their assessments are limited.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The pupils enjoy coming to school, attend regularly and their behaviour is satisfactory. There is a strong emphasis on developing their social and moral awareness. They grow in confidence and self-esteem, learn to tolerate others and begin to manage their own anxiety to a greater extent. This has a positive impact on their readiness to learn and to concentrate in lessons. They take part in activities around the school and some begin to understand what it means to take responsibility, for example for recycling. They also participate in activities to raise funds for others, such as Children in Need. The pupils learn how to behave appropriately when out in the community, for example, when they visit shops and cafes. Some demonstrate growing independence and less reliance on adult support. Through art, music and festivals they begin to learn about different cultures and faiths, but this provision is not sufficiently developed to meet the regulations. Similarly, provision for pupils to develop a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England is limited and does not meet regulations.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. High levels of staffing ensure that pupils are supervised closely at all times and staff take care to respect pupils' dignity and personal space. They manage instances of challenging behaviour calmly and consistently, and use physical intervention as a last resort. Restructuring of the school into lower and upper school has contributed to the generally safe and calm environment which exists. The pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles by taking part in physical activities such as sport and to become more aware of healthy eating habits. The school has a suitable range of written policies, procedures and risk assessments in place to promote pupils' welfare, health and safety. However, some of these policies are being revised or need updating and different versions exist. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures generally comply with requirements, although some aspects are out of date. A number of the staff employed by the company work across both the residential and school settings and there are inconsistencies in some of the policies currently in place leading to a lack of clarity about procedures to be followed. The designated person for child protection in the school has received appropriate and up-to-date training. However, not all staff have received the required basic child protection training in line with company policy and as required by the regulations. The school has conducted an audit of its premises and provision in line with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act; however it has not yet drawn up the required three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has satisfactory procedures in place for staff recruitment. It also has a single central register in place showing all checks undertaken. All staff have undergone enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. In the case of those who have been appointed since 1 May 2007 and have lived outside the United Kingdom, checks have been carried out which confirm their right to work in the United Kingdom as required by regulations. Further checks have been requested with their countries of origin to confirm their suitability to work in a school but the school is still waiting for responses for some staff; therefore, at present the school does not comply with this particular regulation.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises comply with all regulations. The school is in a fairly new building and is decorated and maintained to a high standard. Classrooms are of varying sizes and are suitable for group and individual work, enabling pupils to have privacy and quietness to help them to concentrate. The school does not have specialist facilities for practical subjects such as science and technology and uses normal classrooms for these subjects. A small food technology room allows for pupils to be taught on an individual basis, which works effectively to meet their needs. The school is in a pleasant environment and adjacent to a park which is used for some outdoor physical activity.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school's prospectus includes a range of information about the school's provision and policies. It makes clear the additional information which can be obtained on request from the school. However, the school does not meet the requirement to publish on its website, or send to parents, a copy of its safeguarding children policy. An annual report is provided to parents and placing authorities giving information about pupils' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy for handling complaints meets requirements. The school received four formal complaints in the previous year and each was investigated. However, there is inconsistency in how complaints are recorded and monitored.

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 pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d))
- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

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 safeguarding policy is up to date and that all staff and volunteers receive child protection training in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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

- for appointments from 1 May 2007, ensure that in the case of any person who has lived outside the United Kingdom, confirmation is obtained of his or her suitability to work in a school (paragraph 4(2)(c)).

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

- publish on its website or, where no such website exists, send to parents of pupils (and of prospective parents on request) a copy of the safeguarding children policy as prepared under paragraph 3(2)(b) (paragraph 6(4)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended in 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁴

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

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

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure consistency in policies and procedures across the school, residential and outreach services so that all staff who work with the pupils in these different settings have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
- Develop the provision for information and communication technology.
- Improve assessment procedures by providing opportunities for staff to verify the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' attainment and progress.

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	Oliver House School		
DCSF number	888/6094		
Unique reference number	131575		
Type of school	Independent Special School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2006		
Age range of pupils	6-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 2	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 10	Girls: 2	Total: 12
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4	Girls: 1	Total: 5
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,875		
Address of school	Hallgate Astley Village Chorley Lancashire PR7 1XA		
Telephone number	01257 220011		
Fax number	01257 220033		
Email address	headteacher@oliverhouseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Patti Hudson		
Proprietor	Living Ambitions		
Reporting inspector	Caroline Broomhead HMI		
Dates of inspection	28-29 October 2009		