

Continuum School

Independent school standard inspection report

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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 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Northampton Continuum school is a small independent day special school located in the City of Northampton. It opened in 2000 and was purchased in 2005 by the Continuum group which provides education and care for young people experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school provides for up to 24 students aged between 11 and 16 who have been excluded from their previous schools. Most students exhibit challenging behaviour and have a history of poor school attendance. Some have additional needs such as moderate learning difficulties. There are currently 14 students on roll, two of whom are looked after by the Continuum group. All students have statements of their special educational needs and are referred and funded by their local authority. The school's main aim is to 'provide a well ordered, positive and supportive environment where each student has the opportunity to flourish, succeed and develop into a mature, independent citizen equipped to take their rightful place as a positive member of the community'. The school was last inspected in November 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Northampton Continuum school provides an inadequate quality of education and does not meet its aims. Provision for students' health, safety and welfare and their personal development is inadequate, although procedures to safeguard them from unsuitable adults are good. Students' attendance is poor. As a result of these factors, and despite a satisfactory quality of teaching, students make inadequate academic progress and their behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are also inadequate. An Ofsted progress monitoring visit in March 2009 showed that the school had improved considerably after its last inspection. However, it has been unable to maintain the improvements and now fails to meet a number of regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is inadequate because it does not meet students' particular needs and does not always engage them sufficiently to support their enjoyment and attendance. This contributes to their unsatisfactory progress. The curriculum policy states that as the students have not benefited from their previous schools' curricula, it will, therefore, provide a different type of curriculum. However, this is not the case

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

and the policy does not reflect or underpin practice. The curriculum follows a traditional mainstream-based Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 curriculum. Nevertheless, this gives students experience in all the required areas of learning and enables them to improve their skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy to some extent. Students are given suitable guidance about academic course options, work-related learning and college courses. A few students gain accreditation, for example in GCSE mathematics and Entry Level English and mathematics. Nevertheless, there is insufficient emphasis on supporting students' personal, social and emotional development and the key skills they need for an independent adult life and future employment. There is little of the engaging cross-curricular thematic approach outlined in the school's policy. Students' individual needs, as outlined in their statements of special educational needs, are not taken sufficiently into account when planning the curriculum or any personalised learning. Individual education plans are weak and do not clearly outline what students should learn next. Students' individual behavioural needs are not specifically addressed through planning or target setting.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall. Staff have many good, relevant and effective skills. In the best lessons, teaching is an appropriate mixture of direct input, coaching, and encouragement towards independent working. Positive relationships are established with students, their application is good and they learn well. Staff are creative in planning lessons that engage and interest students. For example, Halloween and Bonfire Night are clearly motivating topics in English, and a relevant, interesting quiz and internet research supported students' application and knowledge in science very effectively. Students' behaviour in lessons is usually well managed by such tactics, if they choose to be present and engage in the first place. Consequently, they make some progress. However, the impact of these effective teaching skills is considerably restricted by the inappropriate curriculum, students' poor attendance and the school's culture which does not sufficiently hold students to account for their actions. In addition, resources are limited and computers are restricted to the information and communication technology room. Consequently, this motivating resource to support teaching and learning is limited, which is reflected in students' lack of interest at times.

Written lesson planning is satisfactory. Plans include learning objectives and in some, students' individual objectives are noted. Assessment for learning in lessons is good and staff know each student very well, which allows them to set broadly suitable work for them. Staff work closely with each student, supporting and encouraging them to work and succeed on the basis of their observations and questioning. Summative assessment of learning, however, is inadequate. The school uses on-line and National Curriculum-based assessment systems to assess students' attainment and track their progress. However, their use is not consistent and does not provide a clear picture of their achievements. The staff's judgements are not effectively moderated and the information gained is not used to inform curriculum planning or planning for individual students' progress. Data currently indicate that students, on average, are learning at a much slower rate than to be expected.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. This is because their attitudes to work, behaviour and attendance are unsatisfactory overall, despite positive examples of these aspects at times. These factors limit the students' personal and academic development, and prevent them from making a suitable contribution to the school and wider community, and from becoming equipped for their future adult lives. No students returned the inspection questionnaire.

Staff work hard to build encouraging, supportive relationships with the students. Consequently, students' self-esteem increases and at times, they can show enjoyment and enthusiasm for their work. In these circumstances, they have good discussions with staff, for example about how to cut and shape materials or why newly-discovered chemical elements are so named. However, too frequently, students choose not to attend or engage in lessons and refuse to do the work set. The students have an understanding of the public institutions, services and traditions of England, reinforced by the curriculum, visits and activities such as the forthcoming school pantomime. Their cultural development and appreciation of their own and other cultures is similarly promoted.

The students' behaviour is unsatisfactory; physical aggression towards each other, staff and the premises is not uncommon. The school's behaviour management strategies are not sufficiently effective, although the students appreciate the new report cards which earn them rewards. However, sanctions for inappropriate behaviour are not sufficiently effective. Students do not take responsibility for their actions or show enough concern for the impact they have on others. Exclusions have risen dramatically this term as staff try to set clear boundaries and consequences, but they are not yet having the desired effect.

The students' attendance is poor. Last year's data was not available. This term, attendance has rarely risen above 60%, and unauthorised absence is very high. In the four days leading up to and including the inspection, only one third of the students attended school. Nearly half of the possible sessions were missed through unauthorised absence, and three students (more than one fifth) were absent for some of the time through fixed term exclusions.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes inadequate provision in this area. Students' welfare is not sufficiently well promoted by relevant, systematically applied and monitored policies and practices. Nevertheless, suitable attention is given to child protection and minimising risks to students when on off-site visits. The company procedures for checking prospective staff's credentials to safeguard students are good. Child protection policies and procedures are effective. Staff training in safeguarding students and first aid is up to date, but fire training is not. Several policies, such as that on physical restraint, are neither specific to the school nor followed. The behaviour management and anti-bullying policies are not implemented as written.

The school does not carry out risk assessments on individuals, or develop behaviour plans to address their difficulties. Students do not have clear boundaries set, or sufficiently rigorous consequences for misbehaviour. Consequently, there is too much inappropriate behaviour, including bullying and aggression, and students are too much in control of what they will or will not do in class. This was a finding of the last inspection. Records of routine and non-routine events, such as regular safety checks, sanctions and physical restraints, are often inconsistent and incomplete. Diverse filing and recording systems mean that some records, such as those on fire drills, are not sequential or immediately available. The school has a suitable three-year curriculum and premises accessibility plan, as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended, but the admissions register is not kept as required.

The curriculum includes work to support students' personal development and to teach them how to stay safe and healthy. However, the school does not sufficiently support this in practice, for example condoning smoking on the premises. Despite these weaknesses in provision, the staff care about the students and have established strong, positive relationships with them. This contributes to some students' engagement and attendance in lessons.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All regulations are met in relation to checking the suitability of the proprietor and staff to work with children and young people. The single central register records the checks as required.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school occupies a relatively modern building situated in an early 20th century residential area near the centre of Northampton. The building and decoration have been significantly improved since the last inspection. The main accommodation now provides a range of attractive, tidy, well maintained and decorated rooms that support learning effectively. The accommodation is enhanced by displays of students' work and support for their personal development. The English room is a particularly good example of this positive environment. The school is set in a plain, grassed garden where there is additional accommodation which can be used for practical subjects such as food technology, design and technology, art and science. Students use the garden at break times. Some inadequate security arrangements were brought to the attention of the headteacher.

Provision of information

The school has a clear, illustrated, accurate and up-to-date prospectus which provides most of the information required by the regulations. However, it does not indicate the full range of information that must be available to parents and carers on request. This was also a finding of the last inspection. Information provided to local authorities is appropriate; this includes a suitable annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each individual student. Termly reports are

prepared on students' academic progress but they do not include an indication of their attainment and progress as required. No parental or local authority inspection questionnaires were returned.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a suitable policy and procedures for handling complaints that meet regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- develop and effectively implement a written curriculum policy which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work (paragraph 2(1))
- ensure that the subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of the students, including those with a statement of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(b))
- ensure that the education provided fulfils the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(e))
- ensure that the curriculum provides adequate preparation of students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 2(2)(j))
- provide classroom resources that are of adequate quality, quantity and range, and use them effectively (paragraph 3(f))
- develop and implement a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, and use the information derived to plan teaching so that students can make progress (paragraph 3(g))
- develop and put into place a framework by which students' performance can be evaluated by reference to the school's own aims, as provided to parents, and/or by national norms (paragraph 4)).

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (standards in part 2) and must:

- encourage students to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the law (paragraph 5(b))
- encourage students to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative, and understand how they can contribute to community life (paragraph 5(c)).

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

- develop and implement suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of students, with regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7)
- write and effectively implement a policy to promote good behaviour which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of students misbehaving (paragraph 9)
- develop and implement effective procedures to prevent bullying which have regard to the DCSF guidance *Safe to learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools (SCSF-00656-2007)* (paragraph 10)
- ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- maintain a suitable record of sanctions imposed upon students for serious misbehaviour (paragraph 16)
- maintain an admissions register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that adequate security arrangements are in place for the grounds and building (paragraph 23(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- inform parents and parents of prospective students that they can request the following information:

particulars of academic performance in the preceding school year, including the results of any examinations

the number of formal complaints in the preceding school year

the number of staff employed including a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 24(1)(b))

- provide parents with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of their children in the main subject areas taught, except where a parent has agreed otherwise (paragraph 24(1)(f)).

Inspection judgements

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

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special day school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	2000		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 12	Girls: 1	Total: 13
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 13	Girls: 1	Total: 14
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,824		
Address of school	67a Queens Park Parade, Kingsthorpe, Northampton, NN2 6LR		
Telephone number	01604 719711		
Email address	Richard.platt@farrowhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Richard Platt		
Proprietor	Bob Hall		