

Headstart

Independent special 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

Headstart is a small independent day special school located on a farm on the outskirts of Ninfield, near Battle in East Sussex. It provides for up to 15 students aged between 12 and 18 years who are experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and who have not managed in their previous school settings. Some students have additional complex needs such as autistic spectrum condition and extreme anxiety. They have their own accommodation within the school. There are currently 13 students aged 12 to 17 on roll. Nine of these are looked after. All have statements of their special educational needs and are referred and funded by their local authority. The school opened in 2000 and was last inspected in January 2008. The school's main aims are to build students' self-esteem and self-awareness so that they re-engage in learning and gain the necessary independence, qualifications, vocational and social skills to integrate successfully into society.

Evaluation of the school

Headstart provides a good quality education and makes good provision for students' health, safety and welfare and personal development. As a result, students make good academic progress and their behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Students are safeguarded well by robust arrangements. Headstart has improved considerably since its last inspection and is successful in meeting its stated aims. It meets all but two of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and has improved since the last inspection. Students study a wide range of interesting academic and practical subjects. Visits and after-school clubs provide additional curriculum enrichment. An appropriate emphasis is placed on developing students' basic literacy and numeracy skills and on promoting their personal development. Targets are set in these areas and students' progress is closely monitored. The curriculum includes various practical activities, such as horticulture, construction, egg production and animal care. The students enjoy these because they are different from those experienced in their previous schools where

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

they were not always happy. The subjects also provide natural opportunities for students to learn about the world of work, for example by selling eggs or taking piglets to market, which prepares the students well for their future lives. Provision in art is a strength, and students' work is of a high standard and adds much to the environment. The school aims to accredit as much learning as possible. All students follow courses that stretch them and meet their individual needs and interests. These include GCSEs, AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) accreditation, Entry Level awards and Introductory Certificates in land management. For post-16 students, the planning of their individual courses takes particular account of their subject interests. The curriculum includes a considerable amount of personal, social and health education which appropriately addresses the students' difficulties and supports their personal development. This subject is particularly emphasised in the provision for students with complex needs and is very successful in supporting their emotional development. College links and work experience placements, together with individual support and external advice, prepare students well for the next steps in their lives and for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. Documents to support planning meet requirements, but do not include the most recent developments implemented by the school.

The quality of teaching has improved and is now good. Some teaching is outstanding. In the most effective lessons, teaching is an appropriate mixture of direct input, coaching, and encouragement towards independent working. In these lessons the students' interest and application are outstanding. Relationships are good and often outstanding, which supports positive behaviour. They enable students in the specialist provision to reflect on their own actions and feelings and develop their social skills. New technology is often used very well to support learning, for example for demonstrations by the teacher or for use by students to practise what has just been taught. Very occasionally, teaching is less effective; when this is so, these good qualities of teaching and learning are not evident, students do not enjoy the lesson, and behaviour deteriorates and is ineffectively managed. Written lesson planning is adequate. Plans include learning objectives, but these are not always well enough written to be clear about what students are intended to learn and how this will be determined.

Assessment is good. Students' levels of attainment are assessed in each subject and area of personal development each term. The outcomes are recorded in a helpful format that enables the school to track individuals' progress. This is a recent development. If concerns are raised, additional support is provided in the students' individual teaching sessions. Records of attainment and progress, students' progress in lessons and detailed reports indicate that students make good progress in their academic studies and personal development.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Improved provision means that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now good. It is supported well by the nurturing ethos of the school

and students' good relationships with staff and each another. Their attitudes to school and their work are good, and are reflected in the good progress they make in their studies and personal development. This prepares them well for their future economic well-being.

Students become increasingly self-aware and recognise the impact their actions have on others. Working with the animals helps them learn how to be compassionate and care for others. Their self-esteem improves significantly. The students appreciate how their behaviour and attitudes improve as a result of the school's input, and are open and honest about their difficulties. One student, for example, talks encouragingly to younger, new entrants about his past experiences and diffident feelings on first attending Headstart. Another student, who rarely attended her previous school, now has a 100% attendance record and said: 'I love this school. They have helped me and I am so much better now than I used to be.' The students' pre-inspection questionnaire returns confirm that they enjoy school. Although attendance is below average overall, the attendance of most is greatly improved in comparison to that in their previous schools and several now have 100% attendance.

The students' behaviour is good. It improves as they respond to the school's various behaviour management strategies and they learn to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Students develop an understanding of right and wrong and know that actions have consequences. The 'points' reward system contributes effectively to this. They come to understand the basic institutions, rules and services of a democratic society. Students make a good contribution to the community by, for example, participating in the village carnival which they thoroughly enjoyed. The school makes good provision for the students' cultural development through a rich curriculum which includes visits, the performing arts and high quality provision for art and design. However, less curricular emphasis is placed on supporting students' appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that encourages tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school now makes good provision in this area. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and other policies and practices relating to minimising risks and promoting students' welfare, health and safety are clear and implemented well. Suitable risk assessments are made of individuals and a wide range of on- and off-site activities. Appropriate checks are made on prospective staff's previous employment history, for example by obtaining character and professional references, and these ensure that students are properly safeguarded. The school pays close attention to child protection. Procedures are robust and underpinned by a suitable policy. This supports the school's good contribution to the looked-after students' well-being and local authority reviews. Staff training is up to date in child protection, safeguarding and restraint. However, there is currently no robust system to ensure that the need for refresher training is systematically flagged up. Attendance registers are properly maintained but the admission register does not comply with requirements.

The school gives good consideration to each student's individual needs and physical and emotional well-being. Students know who to turn to if they have concerns. Each student has an individual timetable which allows considerable personal support for learning and behaviour as well as the opportunity to work in small groups. The school gives good support to help students lead safe and healthy lives, and physical activity and an active outdoor life are strongly promoted. Various strategies are provided to support students' mental health and to help them develop appropriate behaviour and relationships. The school has a suitable three-year accessibility plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

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

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school occupies a converted barn on the edge of a working farm. This provides a highly suitable location for the practical, land-based activities that are central to the school's curriculum. The school has its own farm area where students learn to care for small farm and domestic animals. A number of well-equipped classrooms and specialist rooms for subjects such as art, cookery and science open off the central barn area which is used for practical activities such as construction studies. Accommodation for the students with more complex needs is provided in a newly converted suite of rooms. This provides a good, safe environment which supports the students' emotional health very well. The premises and accommodation meet requirements and enable students to learn safely and effectively.

Provision of information

The school's prospectus and website provide all the information required by the regulations and indicate clearly what additional information can be requested. However, a suitable account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each student is not submitted to their funding local authorities. Termly reports are prepared on students' academic progress and personal development. These are of high quality. They show clearly students' current academic attainment and levels of personal development in various categories. Helpful comments outline the progress made in subjects and personal development and the next steps for each individual. Information provided to local authorities for students' reviews is appropriate and professionally presented.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a suitable policy and procedures to address complaints.

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 provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

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

- where a student is wholly or partly funded by a local authority, provide to them, and to the Secretary of State on request, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that student (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- refresh the curriculum planning to reflect current practice
- improve lesson planning by including learning objectives that accurately reflect what each student is expected to learn and the means of determining whether this has been achieved
- develop the curriculum to further support students' appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that encourages tolerance and harmony.

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

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	Day special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and additional difficulties such as autistic spectrum conditions		
Date school opened	January 2000		
Age range of pupils	12-17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 9	Girls: 4	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 9	Girls: 4	Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 25,000–£45,000		
Address of school	Crouch Lane Ninfield Nr Battle East Sussex TN33 9EG		
Telephone number	01424 893803		
Email address	ndann@headstartschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Nicki Dann		
Proprietor	Nicki Dann		