

Continuum School

Independent school progress monitoring inspection report

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Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik

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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.^{1,2}

The inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Information about the school

The Continuum School is a small, independent special school located in Northampton. It opened in 2000 and was purchased in 2005 by the Continuum group which provides education and care, in schools and children's homes, for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is registered for up to 24 students aged between 11 and 16 years. There are currently eight students on roll. All are boys but girls are admitted. One student is looked after by the local authority. Most students exhibit challenging behaviour and have a history of poor attendance. All students have a statement of special educational needs and all are referred and funded by their local authority. A new headteacher was appointed in December 2010. At the time of the last inspection he was the school's deputy headteacher. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2011.

The school aims 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.'

Context of the inspection

The school was last inspected in October 2011 when it was judged to provide an inadequate quality of education and did not meet its aims. This was because the curriculum and the provision for welfare, health and safety and for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were inadequate. As a result, students made inadequate academic progress despite the quality of teaching being satisfactory. Students behaviour was unsatisfactory and their attendance poor. A significant number of regulations were not met. The school submitted an action plan to the Department for Education (DfE) in March 2011 but it was judged inadequate. The purpose of this monitoring inspection was to evaluate the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan.

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

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

The school has made satisfactory progress overall in implementing its action plan. It now meets all, except three, of the regulatory requirements for independent schools. The areas of non-compliance are noted below.

At the time of the last inspection in October 2011, the curriculum policy did not reflect or underpin practice and was not implemented effectively. Furthermore, there was little evidence of the 'engaging cross-curricular thematic approach' outlined in the school's curriculum policy. The school planned to produce a new curriculum policy and update schemes of work in all subjects. A satisfactory curriculum policy is now in place and it is implemented effectively. The curriculum continues to cover all of the required areas of learning and satisfactory schemes of work are in place for all subjects. Provision suitably focuses on developing students' basic skills and is effective in improving their behaviour. Cross-curricular thematic approaches are now used to link subjects together to make learning more meaningful.

In October 2010, the curriculum did not meet students' particular needs and did not sufficiently engage them to support their enjoyment and attendance. Students' individual needs, as outlined in their statements of special educational needs, were not taken sufficiently into account when planning the curriculum or any personalised learning. Individual education plans were weak and did not clearly outline what students should learn next. The school planned to personalise the curriculum, to more effectively engage students, to improve their attendance and increase their enjoyment of learning.

Subject matter is now appropriate for the age and needs of the students. Effective use of assessment information ensures that work is suitably matched to students' differing capabilities. Lesson planning pays good attention to the objectives outlined in individuals' statements so that learning is suitably personalised. Staff provide regular feedback to individuals on how well they are achieving with regard to any objectives set. As a result, students' academic and personal needs are met effectively. Individual education plans have been improved and are now satisfactory. They clearly outline the small steps in learning, and the teaching methods to be adopted, to accelerate individuals' progress. The attendance of most students is not good enough, although some individuals do come to school regularly. The school is doing all that it can, by using a range of strategies, including the involvement of outside agencies, to get students into school.

The last inspection found that there was insufficient emphasis on supporting students' personal, social and emotional development and developing the key skills necessary for adult life. Inspectors also judged that resources were limited. Computers were restricted to the information and communication technology (ICT) room. The school planned to improve resources and the curriculum to better prepare students for adult life. Behaviour management plans are now effective in bringing

about improvements in students' behaviour. The improved curriculum appropriately focuses on developing students' basic skills so that they acquire the necessary skills for adult life. The school has invested in new computers and there are sufficient computers for the number on roll. Overall, there are sufficient resources to implement the curriculum although practical science resources are limited.

In October 2010, the summative assessment of learning was inadequate because assessment systems were used inconsistently. For example, the school's use of on-line and National Curriculum-based assessment systems was inconsistent. Consequently, arrangements did not provide a clear picture of students' achievements. The staff's judgements were not effectively moderated and the information gained from assessment was not used to inform curriculum planning or planning for individual students' progress. The school planned to improve the consistency of use of its assessment procedures. Summative assessment procedures are now satisfactory. The majority of subjects are now accredited and standards are suitably verified by external and internal moderation, and by external marking, to ensure that the standards achieved are fair and accurate. The school uses a range of satisfactory assessment procedures to appropriately determine students' attainment on entry and the standards achieved at the end of each term. Procedures are now consistently applied and staff judgements about students' performance are suitably moderated by senior leaders. The scrutiny of work in art and English reveals that marking is at least satisfactory. It is regular and developmental.

At the time of the last inspection students' behaviour and attitudes to learning were unsatisfactory, with physical aggression towards each other, staff and the premises. Students did not take responsibility for their actions or show enough concern for the impact they had on others. The school sought to bring about improvements by improving the provision for students' personal, social and emotional development.

This inspection visit found that students know right from wrong. Students' behaviour is much improved and in the lessons observed it was good. It was satisfactory outside classrooms. No physical aggression was observed. Students have positive attitudes to learning and are now more aware of the impact their actions have on others. An appropriate code of conduct is in place. Clear boundaries are set with appropriate sanctions adopted in the event of any misbehaviour. Staff use a range of appropriate behaviour management strategies to encourage students to behave well in class and outside. An appropriate range of sanctions and rewards is used to get students to conform. Teaching methods appropriately encourage students to show initiative and work independently. The premises are clean, tidy and free from damage. Students have been involved in maintaining the building which has given them a greater sense of ownership of the premises and has reduced vandalism.

In October 2010, provision for welfare, health and safety was inadequate because behaviour, anti-bullying, physical restraint and fire safety procedures were not

implemented effectively and security arrangements were unsatisfactory. Child protection and recruitment and vetting procedures were good.

The school has effectively addressed all of the welfare, health and safety regulatory weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. Satisfactory behaviour, anti-bullying and physical restraint policies exist and these procedures are implemented effectively. Suitable behaviour management plans are in place and the strategies used to modify students' behaviour are effective. Students say that they are not bullied and are free from harassment. Provision is effective in modifying students' behaviour. An appropriate range of sanctions is adopted in the event of students misbehaving. All staff, including the designated persons for child protection, have been trained at the appropriate level to fulfil their responsibilities. A fire marshal has been appointed and has been suitably trained and certification is up to date. A satisfactory fire assessment has been carried out and all fire fighting equipment is subject to regular inspection. Fire drills are undertaken regularly and a formal written record is kept of the outcome of fire evacuations. Security arrangements for the premises and grounds have been improved and are now adequate.

During this monitoring inspection the school's safer recruitment procedures were scrutinised as new staff had been appointed since October 2010. All staff and others who come into contact with children have undergone a Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. Two staff that had the right to work in the United Kingdom (UK), but had lived outside the UK, had not undergone further overseas checks to establish their suitability to work with children as required. As a result, regulation 19(2)(b) is not met. The single central record did not contain all of the required information regarding overseas checks, so that regulation 22(3) is also not met. As the school's recruitment procedures are insufficiently robust regulation 7 is unmet.

The last inspection found that records of sanctions and physical restraints were inconsistent and incomplete and the admissions register was not compliant. The school planned to improve its documentation so it met requirements. The school now maintains a written record of the sanctions imposed for serious misbehaviour as required. An admission register is now kept in accordance with regulatory requirements. Satisfactory written records are kept of physical restraints.

In October 2010, the school did not provide, or make available, all of the required information for parents and others. Annual reports to parents and carers did not provide a clear picture of students' attainment and progress in the main subjects taught. The school brochure has been updated and all of the required information is provided, or made available, to parents and others as required. Annual reports now provide the required details.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school must take action to meet The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010³ ('the Regulations'), as follows:

- develop and implement effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of students, with regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7)
- ensure that for appointments from 1 May 2007, in the case of any person for whom, by reason of living or have lived outside the United Kingdom, further checks have been made, as the proprietor considers appropriate, to confirm their suitability to work with children, in line with the guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 19(2)(b))
- ensure that the single central record shows the further checks made for any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, including the date on which the check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraph 22(3)).

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

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	2000		
Age range of pupils	11 to 16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:1	Girls: 0	Total:1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 31,824		
Address of school	67a Queens Park Parade Kingsthorpe, Northampton NN2 6LR		
Telephone number	01604 719711		
Email address	Les.haines@continuumgroup.org.uk		
Headteacher	Les Haines		
Proprietor	Bob Hall		