

The Ashbrook Centre

Independent school standard inspection report

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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

The Ashbrook Centre is an independent day special school, which opened in 2006. Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a number of significant, approved changes. In September this year, it re-located to a two storey semi-detached building in a mixed residential and commercial area of Margate with an increased capacity for up to 16 pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years. There are currently ten pupils on roll of whom three are girls. All are looked after by their local authority and three have statements of special educational needs related to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The majority have had several school placements in the past, including special schools and most have missed extensive periods of education prior to this placement. The headteacher has been in post since April 2012. The school also has a new proprietor. The school's last full inspection was in June 2009 and there was a subsequent progress monitoring inspection in February 2010.

The school's aims may be summarised as 'providing a supportive environment where the pupils are encouraged to achieve their potential in their academic and personal development resulting in sustainable and successful outcomes'.

Evaluation of the school

The Ashbrook Centre provides a satisfactory quality of education and meets its aims. The majority of pupils are new to the school and their behaviour is satisfactory. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, as is the quality of teaching and assessment, which enable the pupils to make satisfactory progress. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. The provision that the school makes for pupils' welfare, health and safety, including the arrangements for safeguarding, is also satisfactory. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and most of the regulations for independent schools are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. It provides adequately for the pupils' needs, including those with statements of special educational needs. The school is a registered

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

examination centre and pupils work towards gaining a range of qualifications including Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network modules (ASDAN), Unit Awards and GCSE. Careers education is provided, linked to the ASDAN modules. The morning timetable provides National Curriculum subjects and a programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). In Key Stages 3 and 4, there is a suitable emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills in discrete English and mathematics lessons and also in other subjects. The Key Stage 4 and post-16 programmes also provide opportunities for work experience and attendance at a local college of further education where the pupils follow National Vocational Qualification courses in catering and hospitality. The school's afternoon timetable is largely devoted to use of the local community facilities for physical activities including swimming, badminton, cycling and boxing. There is also a weekly opportunity for pupils who show good behaviour to engage in reward activities of their choice.

The school has a comprehensive policy document to support the curriculum. However, the school has not applied the policy sufficiently to its practice. For example, there are references to facilities and resources that are not present at the school. The policy also identifies the need to engage all pupils in how lessons are planned and taught, although there is little evidence of this in the school's current practice.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Teachers and teaching assistants have appropriate experience of teaching pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Their management of behaviour is good and ensures any disruptions to learning are reasonably well managed. The most successful teaching is typified by high expectations, good planning, brisk pace in lessons and timely checks on pupils' understanding by the teacher. For example, in an English lesson, the pupils were invited to give their opinions on a poet's intentions and use of English in *Back in the Playground Blues*. The pupils willingly offered thoughtful opinions and volunteered to read the poem aloud. Their peers listened intently and responded well to the poem's theme of bullying. The teacher's skilful choice of material gave relevance to the pupils' learning and enabled the pupils to make good progress in their literary appreciation and personal development. Their progress in reading is also promoted through the school's 'book club'. Occasionally, lessons lack these qualities, with few opportunities for practical experiences and an over reliance on worksheets. For example, in science the pupils were studying the environments of animals and their impact upon their form. Most activities were worksheet based and this limited the pupils' opportunities to investigate and experiment. Scrutiny of pupils' files suggests that worksheets are much in evidence.

Although there are adequate resources for most subjects, there is a shortage of equipment for science, and of resistant materials and tools in design and technology. During the inspection information and communication technology resources were limited. However, a significant number of computers and interactive whiteboards were in the process of being installed.

Teachers' planning for individual lessons and units of work is satisfactory, although sometimes there is not always a clear indication of how learning can be different for different pupils or how staff are to be deployed. Assessment of pupils' progress is included within the majority of lesson plans and verbal feedback assists pupils to improve. The staff possess recent guidance to maximise the impact of assessment on learning and recognise the need to ensure all pupils are aware of the National Curriculum levels at which they are currently working. Personal learning plans have recently been devised to match identified specific needs with learning targets. Most of the pupils have been on roll for less than one term. Examples of their work, analysis of school data over time and observations of lessons show that pupils mostly make satisfactory progress in their learning. Progress is strongest in English and physical education, including outdoor pursuits, due to the impact of specialist teaching. Questionnaire returns from pupils' local authorities and carers indicate positive views of the amount of progress being made by pupils in the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality and effectiveness of the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. The school works hard to instil a sense of working with, and for, others. For example, an animal centre is used as a work experience placement and it is visited by pupils with severe learning difficulties. This aspect is highly valued by the pupil who appreciates the chance to help others less fortunate. Furthermore, all pupils get the chance to visit the local Royal National Lifeboat Institution station where one of their teachers serves. In these ways, they are strongly encouraged to make a positive contribution to the community. Fundraising for charities and courses in life saving also encourage an appreciation of how the pupils can help others and consequently develop their self-esteem. Staff regularly praise pupils' achievements and this does much to build their confidence.

The pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. The school has demonstrated from its monitoring that behaviour improves over time. Within the past month, the number on roll has more than doubled and some occasionally exhibit challenging behaviour, such as gratuitous swearing and refusal to work as requested. Typically, the pupils respond well to the calm approach adopted by staff and resume their studies. One pupil commented, 'The staff here are really chilled out, they understand me and this is the first school where I've done well.' However, another noted, 'Sometimes I get annoyed because some lessons are boring and all we do is writing.' This comment has some justification where lessons do not provide a range of learning activities. The school's close links with carers also promote the pupils' good attendance levels. Cultural and spiritual development and learning about British public institutions are suitably promoted through the curriculum and educational visits to, and visitors from, places including the police, health centre staff, places of worship, museums and galleries.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The arrangements for pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. All the required policies and the vast majority of procedures are informed by recent guidance to satisfy the independent school regulations. Staff are fully trained in first aid, procedures for child protection and in the correct approaches for physical restraint. All staff are recruited correctly according to the latest guidance. The school carries out thorough risk assessments including fire safety checks and in preparation for off-site visits. Individual risk assessments are detailed and staff show high levels of vigilance in their supervision of pupils. Pupils say they feel safe and are looked after well by the staff. The behaviour policy meets requirements and details sanctions and behaviour codes which are regularly reported to carers. Occasionally, a sanction may involve a pupil being sent home to 'cool off' and this is not recorded in the attendance register. In all other respects, the register is well maintained as is the admissions register. Healthy living is promoted through the PSHCE timetable where the pupils study healthy food options. There are also regular and varied opportunities for physical exercise. External specialist staff visit to inform the pupils about harmful substances, including the damage done by smoking. Despite this support, some pupils continue to smoke.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the checks to confirm the suitability of the proprietors, staff and others are rigorously carried out and recorded appropriately on a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's new premises had been open for only two weeks at the time of this inspection. The accommodation has an adequate number of classrooms for the number of pupils on roll. A large kitchen provides well for food technology and one other room is designated for information and communication technology. Outdoor space is very limited on site, although this is mitigated by regular and extensive use of nearby open spaces, a local college of further education and nearby community facilities.

Provision of information

The school's prospectus provides all the required information for parents, carers and others and makes it clear that further information is available on request. However, since the recent relocation, the contact information has not been updated to reflect the new site. The school does not send the required financial information to local authorities who fund pupils' placements.

The majority of views expressed in interviews and questionnaires by carers, staff and placing authorities were supportive of the school's work, although several thought that the pupils' behaviour required improvement. Termly reports are satisfactory and all requirements for reviews of statements of special educational needs and looked

after children are met. Daily contact sheets, listing achievements and any matters arising, are valued by carers.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy and procedures meet requirements.

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:

- provide a curriculum policy set out in writing which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and ensure it is implemented effectively (paragraph 2.1)
- ensure that the teaching involves well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and appropriate management of class time (paragraph 3(c))
- ensure classroom resources are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and that they are used effectively (paragraph 3(f)).

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

- ensure there is an admission and attendance register which is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006⁴ (paragraph 17).

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

- provide details of the school's new address, telephone number and name of the headteacher (paragraph 24(1)(a))
- provide to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of any pupil placed by a local authority (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

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

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/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	Special (SEBD)		
Date school opened	July 2006		
Age range of pupils	11–18 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 3	Total: 10
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 3	Total: 10
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,800		
Address of school	3–4 Zion Place, Margate KENT CT9 1RP		
Telephone number	01843 482043		
Email address	school.staff@acornhomes.eu		
Headteacher	Gareth Craddock		
Proprietor	Andrew Warrilow (Acorn Homes)		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

October 8 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of The Ashbrook Centre, Margate, Kent CT9 1RP

You may remember my recent visit to your school and I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave me. Thank you also for sharing your thoughts about the school and allowing me to look at your work. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Here are some of the things that I observed.

- Even though many of you are new to the school and all of you are just getting used to the new building, the staff are working hard to get to know you. Your lessons are helping you to improve your literacy and numeracy skills. Those of you who are older also have the chance to achieve qualifications that will help you when you leave. Going on work experience and attending college also prepare you well for the future.
- All the staff work with you to improve your behaviour and attitudes to lessons. I saw some of you working really well when studying a poem. I enjoyed hearing you read and listening respectfully to the views of other pupils. It is very clear that you enjoy lessons most when you have lots to do, especially when you do practical things. I am asking the school to provide you with more equipment so that you can enjoy science experiments and making things. Some of you complained that some lessons did not interest you very much because there was so much writing. Writing is an important part of your education, but I am asking the staff to use fewer worksheets.
- You told me that you feel safe in school and appreciate what the staff do for you. You can all play your part by trying to ensure that you show respect to staff and other pupils all of the time. I have seen that you all can behave very well and are making good progress with your behaviour. The staff are also trying to help you to stop smoking and you will improve your health greatly if you succeed.

I wish you all the very best for the future in your new school.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell
Lead inspector