

Inspection report

Knowl Hill School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 936/6554

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 15 - 18 May 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Knowl Hill is a co-educational school for children between the ages of 7 and 16 years. It was founded in 1984 to teach children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Pupils who attend the school may also have associated problems such as dyspraxia, communication difficulties, attention deficit disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. The school is owned by the Knowl Hill Foundation, a registered charity.

Pupils' self-esteem and academic skills have often suffered as a result of their failure to thrive in mainstream education. As a consequence, when they enter the school, most of the pupils are attaining levels well below those expected for pupils of the same age, although very occasionally a pupil is admitted who is performing at an average level. Most pupils are placed in the school by their local authorities and nearly three quarters of them have statements of special educational need.

The school is situated on the outskirts of the village of Pirbright. The original Victorian building has been carefully adapted and extended to the specifications of the school. There are modern fully-equipped areas for science, art, pottery, music and drama, design and technology and several specialist rooms for individual or small group sessions with teachers and therapy staff.

Summary of main findings

Knowl Hill is a good school where pupils develop positive attitudes about themselves and towards learning. Teaching is good, and sometimes outstanding. Learning takes place in high-quality specialist teaching areas with a good range of resources.

The school is still developing its curriculum and teaching practice. The curriculum nonetheless provides well for pupils' reading, literacy, speaking, listening, mathematical and personal development. Pupils make good progress in these areas. As well as being effectively prepared for their future lives, pupils are encouraged to demonstrate what they can do best. This is clearly demonstrated in the high quality of art work celebrated around the school and the use of examinations that reflect their high standards in speaking and presentation techniques. Pupils are rightly proud of their results and also appreciate the school's own awards and celebrations for effort and attainment.

Assessment procedures are good and pupils' progress in the areas most important to their academic achievement is underpinned by high quality individual education plans (IEPs).

However, there are a few areas where the school does not meet the regulations. These include an important aspect which the school is aware it must address as a matter of urgency.

What the school does well:

- its pupils' individual special educational needs are very well supported by the teamwork of the teaching and therapy staff, and by the effort put into writing and reviewing their IEPs;
- it provides very effective support for pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and as a result their personal development and behaviour are good;
- good relationships exist throughout the school community and this helps pupils to enjoy learning; and
- it enables pupils to make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- ensure that the procedures for prospective staff to be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) prior to their appointment are always fully finalised;
- make sure that parents and other interested parties know the contact address and telephone numbers of the chair of governors; and
- review the existing complaints procedure as detailed in section 7.

Next Steps

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

- continue to develop the curriculum so that it incorporates more opportunities to reinforce a broad general knowledge of institutions and services in England; and
- ensure that all lesson planning is of an equally high standard.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good and includes a wide range of subjects. It follows, where appropriate, the National Curriculum, and it enables all pupils to learn and make good progress. It gives a strong emphasis to literacy, speaking, listening, mathematics and pupils' personal development, and pupils' achievements in these areas are good as a result. It also allows pupils to demonstrate their strengths most effectively, such as in art where standards are high and through the use of examinations for pupils to demonstrate their speaking and presentation skills. Good use is made of commercial schemes and lesson plans to provide the content of lessons, but staff fully acknowledge that the curriculum is still being developed in certain subjects.

Most subjects are taught in specialist rooms and all are well resourced. There is a social and health education course with aspects that are interwoven into other subjects such as science. The school makes good use of partnerships and is very outward-looking. For example, the lack of a field space for physical education does not inhibit the range of sports activities, as very good use is made of the facilities in the neighbouring primary school. Pupils are well supported by the Connexions Service which helps the school to provide careers advice.

The school has not adopted a consistent format for planning series of lessons in each subject. The best subject plans include clear learning objectives that relate to a sequence of lessons. This helps staff to adapt teaching plans for the following lesson and contributes effectively to written reports of progress. IEPs are very well written.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The overall quality of teaching throughout the school is good. Some teaching is outstanding. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the best lessons, teachers plan so that pupils are presented with a variety of activities or tasks which are well matched to their needs. Consequently they have no time in which to become restless or bored and achieve very well. Behaviour is good, with all pupils willing to learn and keen to succeed in their work. Pupils are proud of the work that they produce and appreciate the school's own awards for effort and achievement.

Teachers, therapists and support staff all know each pupil very well. This helps them plan to meet the pupils' needs and to support their progress effectively. A particular strength is the collaborative teamwork between staff members.

Where teaching is at its best, the staff ignite enthusiasm as well as making the lessons relevant to the pupils' needs and interests. In an outstanding lesson the tasks to be undertaken by the pupils were cleverly hidden behind images of sporting equipment on the interactive white-board. This immediately focussed the pupils'

attention and all were keen to participate in uncovering the various tasks and explaining to their peers how these were to be executed.

Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are very good. This gives the pupils the security and confidence to succeed and to come to understand that they can learn from making mistakes. Pupil assessments are used well to contribute to the reviews of Individual Education Plans and statements of special educational need.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. It is very successfully promoted through the good relationships they have with staff and the interactions they have with each other. Pupils' self-knowledge, confidence and self-esteem improve rapidly once they start attending the school. Parents value the work that the school does. One parent said *'He has gone from a school-hating child with no friends and an introspective personality to a normal outgoing boy with friends, who is happy to go to school and to learn'*.

Pupils learn to enjoy school and to recognise and celebrate their own achievement. They learn what is right and wrong about their behaviour through discussion and implementation of the school's code of conduct and its associated rewards and sanctions. They quickly become proud of how well they do and appreciate the school's awards for effort, such as art boxes, pencils and vouchers.

The pupils learn to have concern for those less fortunate than themselves by supporting charities, and through work such as considering how people in other countries live. They develop cultural awareness, for example by visiting places of educational interest and through learning about African and Celtic art. Whilst pupils do have a broad general knowledge of institutions and services in England through study in various subjects it is an area of knowledge that is underdeveloped.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school effectively promotes the welfare of all its pupils. It has a full range of policies and practices that minimise the health and safety risks to pupils. Pupils are carefully supervised at all times and are safeguarded around the school and on educational trips and visits.

Fire drills and checks on fire-fighting equipment are regularly carried out. Suitable health and safety policies and practices are in place and these have due regard to relevant guidance. Admission and attendance registers are adequately kept.

The school is conscious of its responsibilities to provide access to the school and to the curriculum for pupils who have disabilities, and much is already in place to help the school meet those responsibilities. This includes a development plan for the accessibility of the building and a newly-built teaching block with a lift and disabled toilet facilities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has a qualified headteacher and a generous number of well-qualified teaching, therapy and support staff.

Applications to the CRB have been made for all staff to check their suitability for working with children. The school has confirmed the appointments of three members of staff without CRB clearance. All other appropriate checks are in order.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *prior to the confirmation of their appointment, ensure that staff have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

Accommodation is of a very high standard. Education is provided in two buildings. The premises are very well maintained and in very good decorative order. Classrooms are appropriate in size for the activities which take place in them. The school has specialist teaching areas for most subjects including those for science, art, pottery, music and drama, design and technology and several specialist rooms for individual or small group sessions with teachers and therapy staff. They are safe, hygienic, and well lit, heated and ventilated. There is good access to the buildings for those with disabilities. The site includes reasonably-sized hard play areas. The limited grassy play areas are supplemented by the use of facilities in the local primary school for lessons and club activities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school makes a wide range of information available to parents and meets all but one of the regulations.

An attractive printed prospectus outlines the school's aims and curricular provision. It is supplemented by additional documents, such as staff lists which are retained in a flap at the back.

Information for parents or carers is regular and informative. Half-termly reports indicate the development of pupils' study habits and social skills along with start-of-year assessments in English and mathematics. A brief report covering progress, behaviour, class work, homework and predicted examination grades for all subjects is sent at the end of the autumn term. This is followed by a full and detailed report at the end of the year. Written reports are supplemented by well-attended parent evenings.

The school holds regular review meetings to which all interested parties and professionals involved are invited and to which they may contribute. Detailed IEP review reports on pupils' progress are prepared for parents each term. These clearly show what pupils have learned and what they should learn next. Parents can add to the targets set for the pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements

What does the school need to do to comply fully with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *make sure that a contact address and telephone number for the Chair of Governors is known to parents, prospective parents, and other interested parties (paragraph 6(2)(c)).*

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a written policy for complaints, which is made available to parents. In response to the questionnaire, the majority of parents felt that they understood the school's procedure for dealing with complaints. However, the current complaints procedure does not meet the regulations in a number of aspects.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *set out clear timescales for the management of a complaint (paragraph 7(c));*
- *provide for a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people not previously involved in the complaint for parents who are not satisfied with the previous response (paragraph 7(f));*
- *make certain that one person on such a panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));*
- *stipulate that the findings and recommendations of the panel are circulated to the complainant, proprietors and headteacher, and where relevant, the person complained about (paragraph 7(i));*
- *ensure that written records of complaints are kept including the stage at which they were resolved (paragraph 7(j); and*
- *make explicit that all correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Knowl Hill Special School		
DfES Number:	936/6554		
Type of school:	Special school		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	7 to 16 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 33	Girls: 15	Total: 48
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 28	Girls: 7	Total: 35
Annual fees (day pupils):	£4,675		
Address of school:	School Lane Pirbright Surrey GU24 OJN		
Telephone number:	01483 797 032		
Fax number:	01483 797 641		
Email address:	info@knowlhill.org.uk		
Headteacher:	Mr James Dow-Grant		
Proprietor:	Knowl Hill Foundation		
Reporting Inspector:	Steffi Penny HMI		
Date of inspection:	15 - 18 May 2006		

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