

Inspection report

Chelfham Mill School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 878/6024

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 3 - 6 July 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

Chelfham Mill School is an independent, residential and day special school for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. The school was approved by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 1984. It provides for up to 47 boys aged from 7 to 13 years. Ten places are available for day pupils. There are 34 pupils on roll; each has a statement of special educational need (SEN). Their home authority funds most pupils, but a minority are funded privately. Approval has been granted by the DfES for the school to accept pupils in the age range 9 to 16 years. There were no older pupils at the time of this inspection. Prior to their admission all pupils have experienced considerable disruption to their education; their attainment levels are in the average and low average range.

The school is a therapeutic community and aims to provide a 24-hour curriculum, which addresses pupils' academic, social, behavioural and emotional needs. It involves the use of cognitive behavioural therapy, token economies, individual behaviour programmes and contracts. These are complemented by the provision of psychotherapy, art and play therapy and anger management training. There is a strong focus on the enhancement of self-esteem and the development of accepting responsibility for behaviour and making correct decisions.

Summary of main findings

Chelfham Mill School is successful in its stated aim to address pupils' emotional, social and behavioural needs. The quality of teaching varies; some is good and even outstanding, but generally it is satisfactory. Pupils successfully re-engage in learning and make satisfactory progress. The curriculum is planned effectively and its outcomes are monitored appropriately. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum, which it successfully coordinates through use of personal, educational, care and therapy (PECT) plans. The provision for pupils' personal development is outstanding. Personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is a particular strength. Pupils' progress is monitored carefully using suitable assessment procedures. Although the number of physical restraints is very high, the procedures to record these are meticulous. The monitoring of pupils' behaviour is also rigorous and most pupils know what they need to do in order to improve. However, little is done with monitoring information to improve teaching, raise pupils' achievement or effect change in behaviour management.

What the school does well:

- it offers outstanding provision for the development of pupils' cultural and multi-cultural understanding;
- it gives pupils many opportunities to develop social interests and gain self-confidence through a wide range of leisure activities;
- it supports the emotional health of pupils through a good range of appropriate therapies;
- it offers staff clear guidance, through its systems and policies, which helps bring consistency to the provision;
- it strikes a good balance in its provision for pupils' emotional and academic needs; and
- it monitors closely pupils' well-being and encourages them to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

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

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

What the school must do in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

Next Steps

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

- ensure that teachers further improve their teaching by giving pupils more relevant and challenging activities which capture their interest and extend their achievements;
- make more effective use of low key behaviour management techniques in order to reduce the number of physical restraint incidents; and
- extend the opportunities for day pupils' personal development by involving them in evening activities more frequently.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides for pupils in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. They are taught in groups of up to 6. This enables teachers to provide appropriate support throughout lessons. The curriculum, including its residential aspects, is good. The taught curriculum follows the requirements of the National Curriculum. The full range of subjects, appropriate to the ages of pupils, is taught. French is taught only to pupils in Years 7 and 8. Pupils generally attain at levels in the average to low average range, although a few individuals attain much higher than this in individual subjects. All pupils have statements of SEN and the requirements of these are provided in full.

The school has responded well to issues raised in the inspection report of 2001. It has worked hard to put in place effective schemes of work. These now cover all subjects and provide a good platform to direct the learning undertaken by pupils. The continuity of learning is now clear and this is consolidated further by staff taking lead roles in subject development. The school management also undertakes regular audits of the provision so that it can identify issues before they become problems. This results in each subject having an effective development plan. The provision for PSHCE is particularly good. There are aspects of PSHCE which are outstanding, principally those which encourage pupils' personal development. For example, in lessons pupils are challenged to confront their views about a wide range of subjects.

Generally, the curriculum is implemented successfully and it provides a sound basis on which pupils can make progress. Although some aspects of the academic curriculum are taught too inflexibly, the majority is adapted successfully to meet the needs of pupils. Subjects such as English and mathematics are taught at appropriate levels and in ways which take account of pupils' different attainments.

The provision for pupils' understanding in literacy is good. The subject coordinator is alert to the many and varied opportunities which support pupils' skills. These include visits to the school by children's authors, visits to the theatre, participation in World Book Day and school drama performances. The latter includes those at Christmas as well as a re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings for a school assembly. Public speaking is a common feature of pupils' experiences and most pupils also willingly read texts within lessons.

The school provides an effective 24-hour curriculum. The range of activities available to pupils is very rich. However, the main beneficiaries of this are those pupils who are resident. The school also includes day pupils within this provision for two hours each week, as well as in occasional activity weeks. The feelings of those day pupils who state they do not enjoy the same opportunities as resident pupils are understandable.

The 24-hour curriculum assists pupils' development through the use of PECT plans. These plans successfully coordinate the provision so that opportunities for personal development and continuing education are provided in both the residential and

educational settings. Where these plans are implemented assiduously the outcomes are more effective; for example, residential staff support any homework provided by teachers. This curriculum also encourages pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle because there is an appropriate focus on physical activity and healthy eating.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although there are also good and outstanding lessons.

When pupils are first admitted to the school they have negative views of learning and for many their education has been severely disrupted. The strongest feature of the provision is that it successfully re-engages pupils in the process of learning. Progress is generally satisfactory.

The best lessons occur where teachers take full account of all the opportunities available to them. These include using a wide range of resources as well as identifying opportunities for use of information and communication technology (ICT). Most of these lessons are also planned very well and show a clear understanding of pupils' prior attainments. At its best the planning includes tasks which are appropriate to the understanding of the pupil yet, at the same time, support the central aim of the lesson. Pupils are encouraged to develop their own understanding and become wholly responsible for their learning.

The most successful lessons have a consistent format. These re-visit what was accomplished in the previous lesson, provide clear explanations of what will be learned, and have a regular review of this learning as the lesson proceeds. They also include good summaries which allow the pupils to demonstrate their new knowledge or skill. These lessons are also enhanced by the imaginative use of resources. For example, in a PSHCE lesson the teacher used a range of strategies, including video and role play, which maintained pupils' interest at a high level. The impact of this was that pupils became fully involved and felt able to express their feelings and views about the effects which peer pressure may have on them. Pupils felt that the lesson time passed very quickly and the benefits of such stimulating teaching were considerable.

In lessons which provide purposeful activities the impact on pupils' understanding is significantly better. A good example of this was a science lesson which investigated the melting and freezing points of different substances. The teacher used a high quality computer programme which enabled pupils to undertake the experiments in total safety. This supported pupils' learning very effectively. They became totally absorbed in the activity and by the end of the lesson they had a clear understanding of the concept that substances as diverse as rock, chocolate and water have different melting and freezing points.

Less successful lessons are those where the levels of challenge and expectations of pupils are too low. In these, behaviour management becomes a central issue and too much time is spent trying to establish order. Relationships between pupils and staff become fragile. In a numeracy lesson about multiplication it was very evident that the promise of rewards through the merit system was more motivating than

learning the skills. Pupils showed clearly that they were uninterested in learning. The difficulties in some of these lessons are exacerbated by the failure of teachers to involve pupils in evaluations of their own learning. The work itself is not always interesting or relevant enough to keep their attention.

Planning of lessons is generally good but where problems occur these are sometimes linked to a failure to plan and take account of a range of opportunities for teaching and learning. Resources are plentiful and of good quality. However, many of the lessons seen did not use these effectively. Where stimulating resources are used to challenge and extend pupils' imaginations, the impact on their learning is better.

Assessment of learning is generally effective and this provides good evidence of pupils' achievements. However, further use should be made of this in planning further provision for individual pupils. Taking into consideration the wide range of information which the school collects about pupils' behaviour and learning, the school is rich in data but relatively poor in the use of the information it derives from this.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has an outstanding range of strategies which develop pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. These include certificates which reward effort and achievement, praise in assemblies and individual behaviour programmes which provide support and guidance. The school has also developed a 'BE SMART' programme (behavioural enhancement through social mastery and recreational training), which includes leisure and social skills.

The provision for PSHCE has outstanding features which develop the pupils' abilities to recognise between right and wrong and choose accordingly. A strength is the way that it encourages pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and contribute to community life. The school is very much a therapeutic and educational community. Most pupils are boarders and the school is registered as a children's home for 52 weeks of the year. Group meetings, the school council and the family groups in which the pupils live, looked after by care staff, develop a sense of communal values and responsibilities.

The PSHCE programme gives pupils a broad knowledge of the public institutions and services in England while other parts of the curriculum include teaching of the cultures and traditions of other countries. The school is fully aware of the need to educate pupils to take their place in a multi-cultural society and there is a strong racial awareness policy, as well as outstanding practice in encouraging pupils to take part in cultural events and celebrations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school safeguards all its pupils carefully and promotes their welfare consistently. It has a full range of policies and practices that minimise health and safety risks to pupils. These policies are well established and set out in a comprehensive staff handbook. A good induction process ensures that new staff understand the correct procedures and play their part in the established routines. Responses for dealing with First Aid, medicines and accidents are secure and staff are trained and confident in the procedures they need to follow.

The headteacher has the nominated responsibility for child protection. All staff are trained in measures for this at the beginning of each academic year and are aware of what to look for and how to respond should they have concerns about any pupil's well-being.

The anti-bullying policy is underpinned by schemes of work that cover relationships and all forms of discrimination. The behaviour policy is comprehensive and complemented by the PSHCE lessons which focus on relationships, rules and conduct. Pupils are clear about the sanctions brought about by inappropriate behaviour, as well as the rewards available for good behaviour.

Pupils are helped to make appropriate choices. They are taught to understand and resist peer pressure. They appreciate the fair ways in which they are treated by most staff. Pupils, in their turn, learn to be respectful and considerate. There is, however, a very high number of occasions where pupils are physically restrained. These occur at all phases of the day but are most pronounced during the school hours. In the last academic year the number of these incidents showed a rising trend. All staff are trained in restraint techniques and it is rare that an incident leads to physical injury. The incidents are recorded meticulously and all relevant requirements are met fully. However, there is insufficient analysis and evaluation of these incidents to enable the school to identify patterns and bring about changes in practice. The headteacher has recognised that staff need more training on alternative techniques of pupil management.

Regular maintenance checks are carried out on the buildings, emergency lighting and fire alarm system. Electrical appliances are checked regularly for safety. The latest Fire Officer's report and environmental health checks were positive and the few recommendations they contained have already been carried out.

The school does not yet have a three-year plan that addresses the requirements of the DDA.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are thorough and effective procedures to ensure that all staff are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) for their suitability to work with children. Everyone who works with pupils at the school is subject to an enhanced check with the CRB. Professional and personal references are checked and medical information obtained, prior to staff taking up their appointment.

Staff are appropriately qualified, and have a good range of experience and specialist knowledge. Learning support assistants are trained and make a satisfactory contribution to the pupils' learning.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is located in a former working mill and comprises several buildings that have been converted appropriately. Classrooms are generally of adequate size and there are some specialist rooms, such as those for science, ICT, food technology and craft and design. A small activity hall extends the range of the physical education curriculum. Some of these facilities, such as that for craft and design, are small and restrict the range of teaching which can be undertaken. The school has a stated intention to remedy this. The grounds are extensive and staff make very good use of these to broaden the range of curricular and leisure experiences for pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The quality of information provided to parents and other partners is good and meets all requirements. The school produces an informative brochure which it updates annually. The most recent brochure is a detailed and parent-friendly information pack that also contains instructions on how other information can be obtained. Parental responses within the inspection questionnaire were broadly positive and included comments such as: *'We feel that his three years at the school are the best three years he has had so far during his school life'*.

Twice each year the school publishes the *'Chelfham Gazette'*. This well-produced magazine is sent to parents and the school's partners. It keeps them up-to-date with events and all other news. Parents receive annual reports about their children's educational progress. These are informative and report effectively on their achievements. They also include targets for further improvement. Every term parents receive a copy of their child's current PECT plan. Annual reviews of statements of SEN are carried out appropriately and thoroughly. The required financial information about income and expenditure is provided to local authorities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school's complaints policy and procedures meet all requirements. The policy sets out plainly the school's course of action for any complaints and also identifies a clearly defined time-scale used in response. However, in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, one in five parents indicates they do not understand the procedures. The school has not received any formal complaints within the last academic year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Chelfham Mill School
DfES Number:	878/6024
Type of school:	Residential special school for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	7 - 13 years
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	34
Number of boarders:	25
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	34
Annual fees (day pupils):	£24,900
Annual fees (boarders):	£41,955
Address of school:	Chelfham Mill School Barnstaple North Devon EX32 7LA
Telephone number:	01271 850448
Fax number:	01271 850235
Email address:	enquiries@chelfhammillschool.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Katy Roberts
Proprietors:	Dr Roger Burland & Mrs Katy Roberts
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Tom Smith
Date of inspection:	3 - 6 July 2006

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