

Inspection report

Sunfield School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 885/6024

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 2 – 5 October 2006

Introduction

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 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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

Sunfield School is an independent, co-educational, residential special school for up to 75 pupils aged from 6 to 19 years who have severe and complex learning needs. It was registered by the Department for Education and Skills in 1992. A majority of the 70 pupils, presently on roll, are in public care and may board at the school throughout the year. Boys outnumber girls by approximately 4:1. All pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN). The pupils are funded by 41 local authorities. The school aims '*to develop each individual child's abilities so that they may come to experience life as worthwhile*'.

Overall evaluation of the school

Sunfield School is an excellent school. It provides an outstanding quality of education which meets all the required regulations and which enables the pupils to make excellent progress in learning. Care for pupils is outstanding and this helps secure their self-esteem and confidence. The school is highly effective in opening up the world for its pupils and enabling them to develop their skills of communication.

The curriculum is outstanding. It is broad in range but specifically targeted at the individual needs of each pupil. It is a genuine 24-hour curriculum in which pupils flourish because it is meticulously planned and implemented by dedicated teams of staff, both in residences and the school. Skills in literacy and numeracy are incorporated very well into all subjects of the curriculum. There is a pronounced emphasis on the development of pupils' skills of communication. Augmentative communication systems are used consistently and effectively so that the whole school is a communication rich environment. Individual education and care plans (IECP) are constructed through a careful analysis of each pupil's statement of SEN. The learning targets, which each IECP contains, are regularly reviewed and revised. The school is reviewing its present curriculum with the intention to modify it, so that it will more closely match the recommendations of the Every Child Matters initiative. The holistic nature of the curriculum includes other provisions, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and music therapy as well as psychological support. These complementary supports enable pupils to grow in confidence and make excellent progress in learning. The encompassing nature of the provision extends to challenging outdoor activities, as well as working on the school farm. The wider provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and citizenship is outstanding.

The curriculum for older pupils is further enhanced through links with local colleges. Pupils are supported in these placements and the impact on their social development is significant. These pupils also have work experience opportunities on the school campus. Some work on the school farm and horticulture department, whilst others develop skills in retail through working in the school shop. This is an outstanding provision, which enables pupils to consolidate and rehearse skills they have learned in the classroom. The greatest strength of the curriculum is that its provision and planning are totally enmeshed. All elements are mutually supportive of each other and the impact of these is rigorously monitored.

The curriculum assists pupils very well to develop healthy lifestyles. There are many good opportunities for swimming, games and cross-country running, while the healthy eating programme is well backed up in lessons, for instance using a fruit number line in early numeracy work. Healthy snacks, such as fruit, are also available during break times.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding and enables pupils to make excellent progress in their learning. In some lessons the targets for a few pupils could be more demanding. A majority of lessons observed were outstanding while the remainder were at least good. The quality of the teamwork between learning support assistants (LSA) and the teacher is of the highest order. LSA provide excellent and professional support to individual pupils. This is because they have access to high quality training provided by the school. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and their energy contributes to the outstanding progress they make. Links between lessons are seamless even though the subject matter may change.

In a few lessons the resources used were not always age appropriate. This is particularly the case for older pupils. However, it is evident that pupils use knowledge gained in previous lessons as well as employ new skills in other sessions. This is the result of high quality lesson plans, which itemise the learning to be undertaken for every pupil. The plans are allied very closely to the requirements of the IECF's and methods used are imaginative and challenging. The teaching of communication skills is prominent and very effective in all lessons. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will do as much for themselves as possible. This makes pupils feel genuinely proud of their achievements. Their progress is assessed regularly and in detail. The outcomes to this are used to plan next steps in learning. In many lessons pupils were encouraged and able to reflect on what they had achieved during the lesson.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They respond well to instructions from staff and are respectful to their peers. Individual pupil's behaviour is, occasionally, very challenging. Where this occurs staff respond calmly and their training and teamwork comes to the fore. Pupils emerge from such episodes with their dignity fully intact and feel able to resume their learning.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' personal development is at the heart of the school's work and it is something

at which it is very successful. By the time they leave pupils become confident young adults. They clearly know the difference between right and wrong. The examples set by the adults around them promote tolerance and understanding of others. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in community activities, such as fund raising for charity. They find their own limits of courage and self-confidence in the wide range of activities provided for them; these include sailing holidays and other adventure activities. Pupils are also given a secure awareness and understanding of other cultures. Whenever possible staff enable pupils to play a full part in decision-making and so develop personal skills they will need in later life. The student council provides opportunities for pupils to have a voice in school affairs and is a demonstration of the advocacy skills that pupils develop. One pupil ruefully reported that it was *'more difficult to get things provided when they cost money'*.

Attention to pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school is a safe and friendly haven for pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary. All adults show very good knowledge and understanding of pupils and familiarity with their *'personalised learning pathways'* (plans which identify the different ways in which individual pupils learn). In particular, staff are very aware of when and why pupils become distressed. This assists them to plan and respond effectively which, in turn, contributes well to the excellent progress made by all pupils. When necessary, pupils have access to the school's counsellor. The links between residential and education provision are secure and used consistently. These ensure continuity of learning in all aspects of each pupil's daily life.

The school has an outstanding range of policies, which deal effectively with health and safety and risk assessments. As a result, pupils say they feel safe from possible bullying and are supported well by staff. In particular the procedures that teach pupils to stay safe are excellent. Pupils also appreciate the wide range of activities available to them within both educational and residential settings. Staff are seen as *'friends who help me do work and jobs'*. High personal standards are maintained through a very good behaviour policy that is clearly explained to and understood by pupils. Procedures for recording accidents and dispensing medication are rigorous. The supportive involvement of therapists and psychologists in many aspects of a pupil's life is excellent. This further contributes to the health and personal development of pupils. Arrangements to ensure child protection are implemented rigorously and the procedures for the appointment of staff are without fault.

The accommodation, parts of which are ageing, is very well maintained and set in acres of parkland used to provide extensive learning opportunities for pupils. The tranquillity of the setting belies the intensive work undertaken by staff on the pupils' behalf. The trustees and management have recognised the shortcomings of the school facilities, particularly the size of some classrooms, and have immediate intentions to rebuild most of the school. The school fully complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and has a detailed plan in place, which it will implement over the next three years.

Parents are justifiably proud and supportive of the school. The quality of this provision for families is exemplary. Many parents have active links with the school. This is as a result of the work undertaken by all staff as well as those within the

family services department. The school is responsive to the comments of parents. The complaints policy is written clearly and easily understood. If parents live a long distance from the school they can use accommodation which the school provides. This can also be used for visits lasting a day or even for hours. Support groups for parents, as well as for the siblings of pupils, are also provided. The quality of information available to parents and others is outstanding. Responses by local authorities confirm this. The information includes detailed and informative reports, newsletters and e-mails.

An outstanding element of the provision is the links, which the school has with national and international bodies. It is a significant contributor, through professional journals, to the debate about autism. The impact of this is evident in the meticulous provision made for pupils. The school is recognised as part of Worcester University and, through its professional development centre, provides degree level courses and training for its own staff and those from other establishments. The school also funds a research department, which contributes papers for presentation at international conferences. Currently, one aspect of the school's collaborative research is concerned with clarifying the importance of good design practice in the teaching and learning environment for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The impact of this will be seen in the new school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- raise the quality of teaching and learning even further by identifying more demanding targets relating to pupils' achievements; and
- increase the range of resources, particularly for older pupils, which are appropriate to their age and interests.

School details

Name of school:	Sunfield School
DfES Number:	885/6024
Type of school:	Residential special for pupils with severe and complex learning needs
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1930
Age range of pupils:	6 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 57 Girls: 13 Total: 70
Number of boarders:	Boys: 51 Girls: 13 Total: 64
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 57 Girls: 13 Total: 70
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 50 Girls: 11 Total: 61
Annual fees (day pupils):	£46,263
Annual fees (boarders):	£175,000 (52 weeks)
Address of school:	Sunfield Clent Grove Stourbridge DY9 9PB
Telephone number:	01562 882253
Fax number:	01562 883856
Email address:	Sunfield@sunfield.worcs.sch.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Lesley Gaukroger
Proprietor:	Sunfield Children's Homes Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Tom Smith
Dates of inspection:	2 – 5 October 2006

© Crown copyright 2006. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

School inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The website lists Ofsted independent school inspection reports, together with information on the work Ofsted does in the independent sector.