

Inspection report

Centre for Values Education for Life

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 330/6101

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 9 – 12 October 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

The centre provides education for pupils from 14 – 17 who have experienced difficulties in other settings; most have previously been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, usually as a result of aggressive or violent behaviour. A significant number have been the subject of court orders.

Most of the 16 pupils currently on the school's roll attend full-time, but a few attend part-time in what the school calls the GAP class. This provides a gradual transition to full-time attendance. Pupils are referred to the school by officers of Birmingham Local Education Authority (LEA). There are six pupils with statements of special educational need for emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.

The school's central aim is to promote pupils' individual development within a community setting which emphasises the democratic process. Pupils play a full part in the running and development of the school, as equal members of the school community. This is achieved mainly through weekly meetings of the whole school, when all members may raise concerns, complaints or issues. There is also a Fairness Committee, which acts as an intermediary between members of the community who may have a complaint or feel that they have been treated unfairly in some way. Through such structures and processes, the school strives to develop in pupils a sense of personal responsibility within a framework of collective and community awareness.

Summary of main findings

The centre is most effective in achieving its central aim. Pupils develop well as young people whilst they are at the centre and dramatically improve their attendance, attitudes and behaviour. Although the centre has tried to recruit qualified teachers, it has not been successful. Most lessons are taught by tutors, and teaching is satisfactory, with some good features. Many pupils benefit from the close support of volunteers who act as their mentors. Pupils' interest in learning is re-kindled and they make steady progress in a good range of examination courses. As a result, they leave with personal qualities and qualifications that considerably improve their life chances; most go on to further education or training. The school has had difficulty finding an organisation that will carry out the necessary checks on recently appointed staff. Appropriate arrangements have been put in place where the results of these checks are awaited. Although the accommodation has been improved considerably since the last inspection, including the installation of a lift, the school does not meet the requirement to have a three-year plan showing how access will be further improved.

What the school does well:

- there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere, and excellent relationships between all members of the school community;
- the democratic principles upon which the school is run give pupils ownership and a sense of personal and community responsibility;
- pupils particularly appreciate the small teaching groups and the way they are treated fairly and with respect;
- parents find staff approachable and are very positive about the difference the school makes;
- the accommodation has improved since the last inspection and is now good; and
- the range of learning experiences is much better than it was at the time of the last inspection.

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

- ensure that all staff at the school have been checked to confirm their suitability to work with children.

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

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.

Next Steps

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

- use a wider range of teaching strategies, particularly practical approaches and the use of new technology;
- increase the number of pupils who take part in work experience; and
- increase the opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Since the last inspection, the school has developed a clear curriculum policy and there are statements for each subject or course provided. The centre has improved the curriculum considerably since the last inspection, and it is now good. There is a wide range of courses leading to external accreditation at either Entry Level or General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The range of subjects exceeds National Curriculum requirements at Key Stage 4. Improvements to the school's accommodation have made it possible to extend the range of subjects on offer. There are now dedicated rooms for teaching art, information and communication technology (ICT), science and design and technology. The teaching of pupils individually when they arrive works well; it enables them to settle and gradually integrate into main school classes and greatly assists their successful transition into the school community.

There has also been a significant improvement in the planning of the curriculum. Clear plans show what should be taught and when, and their correct implementation ensures that pupils do not miss out topics or repeat work unnecessarily.

Learning experiences are brought to life and extended through a range of visits, to art galleries, museums, and the Sealife centre for example. Visitors and an annual residential school journey add interest and enjoyment.

For those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the curriculum reflects that prescribed in their statements. The curriculum is highly relevant to all pupils' needs, as there is a strong emphasis on personal development. A comprehensive accredited programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught, including careers education, as well as one that deals specifically with preparation for working life. These are complemented well by lessons in values education and elements of other subjects. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about personal safety and healthy lifestyles. School meetings and committees enable pupils to contribute strongly to the centre's community. At present, there are limited opportunities for pupils to contribute to the wider community and to take part in work experience. Pupils are well prepared for the next step, and of the 19 that left the school last summer, most went on to further education or training. A small number went into employment.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with some good features. As a result, pupils make steady academic progress in their time at the school. Last summer, for instance, 19 pupils were entered for examinations in 11 subjects or courses. All of these obtained a GCSE pass in art, and almost all were successful in GCSE English, English literature, mathematics and Preparation for Working Life, although most had been at the centre for no more than nine months. In addition, many achieved Entry

Level passes in science, design and technology, information and communication technology, history, geography and PSHE.

A particularly strong feature of teaching is the way in which it encourages pupils to reflect on their learning behaviour and evaluate this at the end of each lesson. A well understood system of 'colours', which has clear criteria associated with the green, yellow and red levels, enables staff and pupils to evaluate together how well pupils have participated in lessons. This is strengthened further by those teachers who link the evaluation to stated objectives for the lesson, and encourage pupils to recognise their learning and progress made in the lesson. This is not a consistent feature of all lessons.

Because groups are small, and there are often as many adults as pupils in a lesson, pupils feel well supported. As a result they are cooperative and productive throughout. They find lessons 'quite interesting' but, in general, there is a narrow range of teaching strategies and little use is made of practical approaches or the full range of media, such as video and ICT. There is limited investigative work in mathematics. In science, each unit features an investigation, and good use of role-play was seen in a careers lesson where pupils explored relationships in the workplace.

Although most teachers are unqualified, they are guided well in preparing lessons by comprehensive plans that have been written for each subject. Tasks in lessons are pitched at a level that ensures that pupils experience success, which keeps their motivation high, but occasionally teachers miss opportunities to extend the knowledge and understanding of the most able pupils.

Assessment is satisfactory. When they arrive, pupils are assessed for social and emotional maturity but not routinely assessed for the level of their literacy and numeracy skills, so it takes a while for teachers to get the measure of them. Following assessment, and based on pupils' statements of special educational needs where these exist, the school draws up an individual programme of development. This is reviewed every 13 weeks, when progress and 'next steps' are identified. Teachers maintain good records showing pupils' progress through the units of accredited courses, and examination results provide the school with a suitable means of evaluating the success of provision.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school successfully develops pupils' ability to reflect upon the important issues of life. They are encouraged to think about deeper values such as respect and truth. Self-esteem is promoted effectively by helping them to re-engage in learning and experience success by achieving nationally recognised qualifications. Pupils' own faith is recognised and celebrated and issues of faith and unbelief are discussed in meetings. The school provides a very supportive environment, where staff and pupils

recognise the positive attributes of each other. Pupils' academic and personal achievements are celebrated publicly in the community meetings and they gain certificates for a wide range of achievements, enabling them to grow in self-confidence.

Morality has a high profile and staff encourage students to reflect on the causes and consequences of their actions. They are encouraged to empathise with how other people may feel as a result of their actions. For example, if they disrupt a lesson, they consider how this may adversely affect the other students in the class. The Fairness and Discipline Committees are powerful forums for resolving difficulties and pupils readily accept the decisions made.

Pupils contribute very well to the school community through participation in the whole school meetings and in the committees. However, there are limited opportunities for them to make a contribution to the wider community. An environmental committee has been recently established which is considering how the school might set about recycling.

Pupils gain an understanding of democracy and how it works through participation in the school's weekly meeting and the various committees: they develop a strong sense of fairness. Through careers education, pupils develop self-awareness, career preferences and an understanding of the opportunities available post-16. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to gain first hand experience of the world of work. Nonetheless, the school prepares pupils well for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of further education, which is the next step for most. There is a good level of acceptance of other cultures and beliefs. Tolerance and mutual respect are strong features of the school which add to its harmonious atmosphere.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

There is a good range of policies to assure the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The procedures to ensure that pupils are protected are satisfactory. The designated child protection officer receives regular training and ensures that other staff are kept well informed of procedures. Issues of bullying are taken seriously and can be addressed through the community meeting. The PSHE programme tackles relevant issues such as peer pressure and the law, and pupils learn how to be safe. Pupils have named the school as 'The Safe School' reflecting the 'security and continuity' provided for them.

The positive behaviour of pupils is promoted through the earning of credits, which can be cashed in for vouchers. Credits are achieved through good levels of attendance, punctuality and achievement of goals. Sanctions are administered by the Fairness Committee, which is made up of a pupil, teacher and support staff. It offers help and support to students who have a difficulty with behaviour and negative attitudes. Sanctions such as monitoring or mediation are agreed by all involved in

the problem. The emphasis is on resolving the conflict peacefully and fairly. This approach is very effective in promoting good behaviour and attitudes. At the outset, pupils sign an agreement, in which they agree to attend the school, be punctual, and respect people and property and to participate in the programmes with endeavour.

Pupils are taught about healthy eating through food technology lessons and healthy options are provided at lunchtime. However, pupils have not widely adopted healthy eating, for example in lessons some pupils eat sweets and chocolate and some have narrow dietary choices. They participate in exercise on a weekly basis at a local leisure centre. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and they are very well supervised, with many having mentors assigned to them.

Pupils' safety is assured through good health and safety procedures and careful risk assessments. Pupils' attendance ranges from 60% - 80%. This represents a vast improvement for many pupils, some of whom have been out of school for considerable periods of time. The school follows up non-attendance with telephone calls and letters to parents. Currently the school does not have a 3-year action plan to indicate how it will meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

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

Since the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) removed the centre from its register, the proprietors have had to turn to an agency to process checks of staff. The school has put in place appropriate arrangements where staff are awaiting the results of these checks. Other required checks are carried out correctly.

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:

- *ensure that, prior to the confirmation of their appointment, staff at the school 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

The school is housed in a two-storey Grade 2 listed building, adjacent to the busy Hockley flyover. There is a good range of rooms, which provides flexibility for both group and individual work. There is one large room, which is used for whole school gatherings. There is a reasonable sized kitchen and large dining room. The new extension, which was recently opened, has improved the premises considerably, to enhance the overall facilities. Classrooms are bright and welcoming. There is a dedicated information and technology suite. Dedicated rooms are also suitable for practical work such as art, design technology and simple science work, although there are no laboratory facilities. A separate medical inspection room is now provided. The school has good security arrangements. There is a small external concrete play area, which was the former car park for staff. However, pupils do not use this area much as it is rather bleak and has no equipment to encourage physical activity.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

Comprehensive general information about the school for parents and other parties is provided in three booklets, a prospectus, a booklet specially written for parents and an annual report. Between them, these provide all the information that they should.

In addition, parents receive good quality reports on pupils' progress each time this is reviewed as well as an annual report which gives grades for punctuality, behaviour and attitudes; it also charts pupils' progress through the units that make up accredited courses. For pupils with statements, the school sends information to all that it should prior to annual reviews, and circulates the resulting report to those that require it. The local authority is sent information about income received and expenditure incurred by pupils each year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

There is a suitable complaints procedure for staff, volunteers, students and parents. It is made available to all relevant parties through the initial induction information given to them. The board of trustees constitutes a panel for hearing complaints and there is one person who is independent of the management and running of the school. There have been no complaints received in the last 12 months.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Centre for Values Education for Life
DfES Number:	3306101
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	14 – 17 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 9 Girls: 6 Total: 15
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 1 Girls: 0 Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 4 Girls: 2 Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils):	£9828 or £15600 for statemented pupils
Address of school:	College House Albion Place Hockley Hill Birmingham B18 5AQ
Telephone number:	0121 523 0222
Fax number:	0121 523 5111
Email address:	David.rowse@vefl.org.uk
Headteacher:	Shared responsibilities by the Proprietors
Proprietors:	David Rowse, John Eyre, Val Russell-Baker
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Sue Aldridge
Date of inspection:	9 – 12 October 2006

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