

Farrow House School Northampton

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	928/6067
Unique Reference Number	131802
Inspection number	316903
Inspection dates	7-8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Farrow House School is an independent special school acquired by the Continuum Group in March 2005, previously having been known as Degra House School. Provision is made for pupils with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties between the ages of 11-16. The school is situated on a main road near to the centre of Northampton and presently takes day pupils placed by Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire local education authorities. At the time of the inspection there were four full time pupils and six part time pupils. Six have statements of special educational need and four are looked after children. Most pupils are White British but a small number are of White/Afro-Caribbean backgrounds.

Evaluation of the school

Farrow House School is currently providing an inadequate quality of education, caused in part by a history of difficulties in staffing and organisation, and partly by the current levels of disruption caused by personal conflicts between pupils which pre-dates their placement at the school.

At the time of the last Record of Monitoring Evidence advice presented to the then Department for Education and Skills following a visit by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in September 2004 there was cautious optimism that the difficulties experienced to that point were in the past. However, in the three years since then there have been four headteachers and by the end of the 2005-06 school year there was only one full and one part time pupil on roll. The situation did seem to have been stabilised and improving following the appointment of the current substantive and acting headteachers in September 2006. Local authorities started to confirm rising standards by placing new pupils at the school, whereas they had previously been withdrawing them because of dissatisfaction. Staff speak of the dramatic improvements in the quality of education and the rise in morale during the last school year, but physical illness during the latter part of the school year and during the summer meant that the headteacher has been forced to take a period of absence, during which time an acting headteacher has been appointed. Despite having no previous senior management experience, nor being provided with any additional support since taking up her post, she has proved an able school leader. Unfortunately this appointment coincided with the acceptance of the three local pupils whose behaviour has been a very serious renewed challenge to the school.

The level of disruption they are causing has, in effect, stopped the provision of effective education in Key Stage 3.

There have also been serious problems in teaching the curriculum. The school's schemes of work have been mislaid during the period of staff change. Consequently, newly appointed staff are having to formulate new schemes of work as the year progresses. In addition the teaching of the curriculum is seriously compromised by the high level of disruption. Only two of the staff have qualified teacher status for the age range in the school and staff have received little professional development in terms of planning, delivery and assessment. However, because of the efforts of teachers to engage the pupils in work at different levels the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

The difficulties encountered by the school results in its failure to comply with a considerable number of the regulations, particularly those concerned with the curriculum, teaching and assessment. There are also concerns around issues of health and safety and child protection which lead to a failure to comply with relevant regulations.

However, despite these difficulties, the staff now in post are committed to the school and to making it successful. Leadership is effective and teachers show empathy and a willingness to try to teach effectively. There is evidence that when pupils concentrate on learning they are capable of doing so effectively. The school has clear potential for improvement once the current issues around the behaviour of specific pupils have been resolved.

Quality of education

The quality of teaching, assessment and level of pupil progress are inadequate. Overall, the quality of education is therefore inadequate. While there is a satisfactory curriculum policy set out in writing it is not yet supported by effective schemes of work in all areas. While teachers are currently working on schemes of work, they have not yet been completed. In Key Stage 3 the behaviour of pupils is so disruptive that the curriculum cannot be taught effectively. This prevents the acquisition of suitable skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy, though at Key Stage 4 the two current pupils are much more settled and are gaining experiences from a broad and balanced curriculum. They can respond positively, as was seen during an English lesson in which their response to questions and general comments reflected good understanding and learning. Overall, however, the curriculum does not provide all pupils with opportunities to learn and make progress. Similarly, opportunities to prepare them for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life are lost. The time allocation given to specific subject areas represents a broad and well balanced curriculum with clear time allocations – the issue remains one of delivery, rather than content. There have been very recent developments in the facilities and resources for the delivery of vocational education and links with local schools are being developed in order to maximise the potential for these facilities.

In recent years there has been no history of entry for external examinations, or National Curriculum assessments. However, the plans being developed by the current leadership will see pupils participating in Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Entry Level courses which will allow pupils to gain externally accredited qualifications for the first time. The acting headteacher has undertaken ASDAN training and the school is an approved exam centre for the AQA examination. This is an example of the positive thinking that pervades the school despite its difficulties. However, there is a lack of resources resulting from financial restraint across the school. Sometimes there are not sufficient books, despite the small class sizes, and at other times pupils have to use old resources that are not in good condition.

Pupil progress is currently monitored at an almost anecdotal level. Teachers have received no professional development in monitoring pupil progress through effective assessment. They do not therefore have any form of objective measure of progress made by individual pupils or of groups. Teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes and needs, showing empathy with the social and emotional difficulties faced by their pupils, but no effective use is made of prior knowledge as a starting base for examining objective progress as the year progresses. Teaching also encourages positive behaviour and where it is allowed to this brings positive results. At Key Stage 3 the difficulties caused by the long standing and serious antagonism between pupils, who all live in the same vicinity in Northampton, has limited any impact that teachers might have in this regard. Throughout the school there has been a shortage of staff development, particularly looking at planning, delivery, assessment and the measurement of progress.

The commitment of the school leadership and staff is clear and despite the severity of the problems they face they remain keen to support the learning of the pupils. They work hard, planning lessons even when these cannot be fully taught and using their subject knowledge to good effect. Personal, social and health education feature well in both the formal and informal curriculums and opportunities are taken whenever possible to engage the pupils in discussions and reflection on important issues relevant to their lives.

The school has developed links with the local Connexions service. They work together to promote meaningful destinations for pupils when they leave the school, which includes developing an awareness of suitable courses being offered at local colleges. This work is being strengthened as the school plans to offer more effective teaching that will enable pupils to remain until the end of Key Stage 4, during which time they will be able to benefit from work experience.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is satisfactory and the school works hard to strengthen this aspect of school life. The

teachers work hard to provide relevant and supportive information, though pupil participation is again limited by the extent to which individuals wish to participate. The current behaviour of too many pupils is poor. This means that levels of discussion between teachers and pupils is often satisfactory, even though little written work is undertaken or assessed. Pupils were certainly able to talk about public institutions and services at an appropriate level during the inspection.

Many of the pupils lack self-confidence and belief in themselves and staff work hard to build their morale and self belief. Opportunity for discussion in the daily timetabled period for pastoral work is used by teachers to strengthen this. Being able to distinguish right from wrong forms a particular focus for work with pupils. It is reinforced through the rewards system which seeks to promote positive behaviour, never withdrawing incentives previously earned as a result of subsequent poor behaviour. This helps reinforce the immediacy of rewarding the positive, which underpins attempts to promote positive behaviours, with varying levels of success.

Pupils have made a positive contribution to school and society in various ways. In the past they have contributed to charity appeals and have produced a pantomime alongside staff to which members of the local community have been invited. Respect for other cultures is fostered through a study of some their celebrations. For example, there is a photographic display of the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The high level of disruptive behaviour not only creates barriers to learning, but sometimes puts pupils and staff at physical risk. Much of the disruption is caused by a very small group, but in a school with so few pupils present at any one time, bearing in mind that a majority attend only on a part time basis, they come to dominate the building by being out of lessons and in the hallway. The physical damage done to the fittings of the school is apparent from the broken door frames, the result of pupils forcing their way into classrooms. Staff deployment is sometimes not sufficient to prevent the outbreak of disruption. The company that owns the school has an approved system of physical restraint. However, one new member of staff has not received any training in this. The time since other staff had received their last training was such that their period when they were allowed to use restraint had expired. The company responded promptly to resolve this shortcoming when it was pointed out and arranged for training to be arranged almost immediately. While incidents that occur at the school are logged, there is not a specific record of sanctions that have been imposed for serious disciplinary offences.

At the time of the inspection there was no child protection coordinator in post, since the designated officer is the substantive headteacher. However, even before the end of the inspection, again when this had been pointed out, steps had been taken to ensure that training was organised for the acting headteacher in order to rectify this situation. However, there is full compliance with other regulations in the area of child

protection, including the requirement to maintain a central register of all staff and the checks that have been undertaken to ensure their suitability to work with children and young people.

Healthy living is encouraged through physical education lessons. Even though the school has no facilities of its own it utilises the large and attractive public park directly across the road. Lessons in food technology have encouraged pupils to think about their diet and to make healthy choices in eating, although this has not been a major focus.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The Continuum group have ensured that all staff have gone through the necessary checks with the Criminal Record Bureau before they are allowed to start work at the school. Their own procedures ensure checks are made on identity, qualifications, medical fitness, previous employment and the right of applicants to work in the United Kingdom. Central staff, including the chief executive, have also undergone these checks. A central register is maintained at the company's head office, though relevant information was made available for the purposes of the inspection to show that it can be produced in hard copy.

School's premises and accommodation

While the premises are generally maintained in good condition and the necessary checks are made on equipment, there is an issue around health and safety caused by the level of disruption. This means that some classrooms and hallways have potential health and safety concerns caused by the consequences of unsatisfactory behaviour. Some rooms are made untidy as a result of pupils sometimes destroying their own, or other's, work. Some fittings are also inadequate in that several of the door frames to classrooms have been badly damaged by locked doors being violently forced open.

The staff area, and the headteacher's office in particular, suffer from poor ventilation and can become very hot. This creates a difficult working environment when staff are using these facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school's brochure is currently being updated. In its present state it fails to meet the regulations by not giving details of the name, address and telephone number of the owner, or of providing details of policies for admissions, discipline and exclusions. In addition, there are no details of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of special educational need or who speak English as an additional language.

The school is currently not able to provide details of previous academic performance. In reality since pupils joined the school late in the year, after virtually all had been

removed during the previous year, none were entered for any qualifications or national curriculum assessments. This means the school has had no information to report.

Procedures for handling complaints

The company's complaints procedure meets all the requirements. Last year no complaints were received.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a curriculum policy that is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement it effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that the policy creates opportunities to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy (paragraph 1(2)(c))
- provide the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i))
- ensure that there is adequate preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 1(2)(j))
- improve teaching to ensure that pupils acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability, so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 1(3)(a))
- encourage pupils to apply intellectual, physical or creative efforts and to show interest in their work, and to think and learn for themselves (paragraph 1(3)(b))
- ensure that lessons are well planned, using effective teaching methods and suitable activities, and managing class time wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure that classroom resources are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f))
- create a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and to use the information from such assessments to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g))
- develop a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).

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

- implement the written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- maintain the deployment of staff in a way that ensures the proper supervision of pupils (paragraph 3(7))
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that all areas of the school do not compromise health and safety (paragraph 5(j))
- ensure that all classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 5(n))
- improve ventilation in the staff area of the premises in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(p))
- ensure that all fittings are appropriately designed for the age and needs (including any special needs) of all pupils registered in the school (paragraph 5(r)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the name, address and telephone number for correspondence during both term time and holidays (paragraph 6(2)(b))
- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- give particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of SEN and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- if requested, must give particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Address the current unacceptable levels of disruption immediately.

- Access professional support to address needs around the delivery of effective pedagogy, planning and assessment.
- Access professional support for the acting head teacher in order that she can further develop her management skills.

School details

Name of school	Farrow House School Northampton		
DCSF number	928/6067		
Unique reference number	131802		
Type of school	S		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	March 2005 (as Farrow House)		
Age range of pupils	11 - 16		
Gender of pupils	MI		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of boarders	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 6	Girls: 0	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,824		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ n/a		
Address of school	n/a		
Telephone number	01604719711		
Fax number	01604719711		
Email address	Marycke.grinsted@farrowhouse.co.uk		
Acting Headteacher	Mrs Marycke Grinsted		
Proprietor	Mr Bob Hall (The Continuum Group)		
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt AI		
Dates of inspection	7-8 November 2007		