

Ashbrook Centre

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6110
Unique Reference Number	130979
Inspection number	333838
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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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, the purpose of which is 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

The Ashbrook Centre is an independent day school. It is located in a semi-detached house on a residential estate in Broadstairs. The school is owned by St Nicholas Lodge Ltd and provides education for up to six male and female students aged 11 to 16 who are accommodated in the company's children's homes. The school was owned by a different organisation when it was registered in July 2006, and this is its first full inspection since then. St Nicholas Lodge has owned the school since January 2008.

There are currently six students on roll aged 13-16 years. The students have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and have experienced significant problems in their previous schools due to their challenging, disruptive behaviour. Their needs are very extreme and all but one has a statement of special educational needs. Most students have had several school placements in the past, including residential special schools and secure units, and have missed extensive periods of education.

The school aims to 'provide access to education and to form individual programmes that meet the young person's initial needs and ability to engage'.

Evaluation of the school

The Ashbrooke Centre's educational provision and the progress students make are inadequate. It makes satisfactory provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and some aspects of their personal development are satisfactory. Behaviour and attendance are unsatisfactory overall, although for a small number of students, both are good. Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students is inadequate. The school has declined since the last inspection and now fails to meet a considerable number of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is inadequate and does not support students' progress or prepare them for adult life sufficiently well. The curriculum policy does not reflect the school's provision.

A few subjects such as English, mathematics and history have short-term schemes of work for each individual, but there are none that plan sufficiently to build up students' skills, knowledge and understanding systematically over the longer term. The school has recently introduced GCSE English, mathematics and history for students in Years 10 and 11. These courses have provided a suitable structure for teaching. However, learning is not always well enough supported by adaptation of the content to suit individuals' needs, and students' statements of special educational needs are not sufficiently considered when planning their learning programmes. The curriculum does not have regard to the seven required areas of learning and is limited by a lack of practical facilities. Students have no real experience in the social and technological areas, and too limited experience in the scientific, aesthetic and creative areas. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not taught as a subject, although students each have their own computer for everyday work. There is no programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) which limits the positive effect the school staff have on the students' personal development through their everyday work. There is no programme of careers education. However, staff liaise well with external agencies such as Connexions and the local college to support students' post-16 options. College courses give students good 'taster' experiences in vocational education, such as food preparation and plastering. An externally provided art workshop provides a very enjoyable experience in which students work well.

The quality of teaching and assessment is inadequate. This is mainly because the staff do not have suitable curriculum and teaching plans to work from, so that students do not learn and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding as well as they could. Resources for teaching and learning are too limited, particularly for lower attaining students. ICT is insufficiently used to support teaching, although it is often used by students for writing and internet research. Teaching in individual lessons is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. This is because staff have good relationships with the students and are skilful at helping them to conform and apply themselves to their work. In the most effective lessons, individuals can be very productive, for example in GCSE mathematics and when researching topics that interest them on the internet. Staff understand each student's aptitudes and needs. This helps them to provide work that engages the students, when they are willing, and although usually unplanned, supports the development of some key skills.

Staff, students, parents and others say that students make progress in the core skills of literacy and numeracy. However, the school has no formal means of demonstrating this because there is no framework for assessing progress or systematically tracking students' attainment over time. This prevents clear learning targets being set in lessons and on students' individual education plans which limits the progress they make. Students who attend regularly and conform make progress in some subjects including English and mathematics. However, the lack of a suitable curriculum to support systematic teaching that is adapted to meet students' individual needs means that students make inadequate progress overall.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

This provision for students' personal development is satisfactory and is supported effectively by the everyday work of the school and students' strong relationships with staff. However, the scope of provision is hindered by the lack of a PSHCE programme. This particularly affects the students' cultural development which is insufficiently well addressed. Nevertheless, each individual's personal development is supported by clear behaviour management and the staff's considerable patience and support. The staff are committed to preparing students for a safer and more productive adult life than they would otherwise have had. The great majority of students, parents and local authorities who completed the pre-inspection questionnaires say that the students enjoy school and benefit from attending. One student wrote 'The staff at Ashbrook Centre are nice to spend time with and always help me with my problems. I couldn't have any better teachers than them'.

Students' attitudes to school, behaviour and attendance vary considerably between individuals, but are inadequate overall. This is mainly a result of their extreme difficulties. A small number have virtually 100% attendance, while others refuse to attend at all or are too disturbed to be taught in school. Non-attenders are taught off-site wherever possible. The behaviour of a few is excellent at times, although severely challenging and anti-social behaviours often disrupt the learning and safety of others. Nevertheless, over time, most students' self-esteem and confidence improve, and they recognise the value of education and qualifications as a key to their future well-being. The students' moral and social development improves as they are supported through particular personal issues and are encouraged to work and behave productively in community situations, such as the art workshop, college and in work experience placements. Staff continually reinforce the difference between right and wrong. Bullying and racism are addressed appropriately if they occur. This contributes to students' social, moral and cultural development. A suitable programme of off-site activities and students' own experiences support their understanding of public institutions and services. A local authority questionnaire response notes that the staff do their utmost to engage the students and provide a programme that enables them to 'start to look at the future in a positive way and begin to achieve some of their potential'.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of students is inadequate. The school holds copies of all the policies required by the regulations, but the overwhelming majority have not been reviewed for three years. They do not apply to the Ashbrook Centre as it is today, and do not have regard to the required national guidance. Consequently the policies are not referred to or implemented, and do not underpin practice, which is weak in many areas. This applies, for example, to policies on bullying, health and safety on visits, first aid and child protection.

Staff have recently been trained in first aid and physical intervention, but other required training, such as in fire safety, has not taken place. No staff, including the designated person responsible, have been trained in child protection. Fire safety is not properly addressed. The admission and attendance registers are not fully completed and suitable records of sanctions given, including fixed term exclusions, are not kept. Two points that were noted in the previous inspection have not been addressed. The school does not have a disability access plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and it has not yet made the upstairs windows safe. This means that students can climb out of windows and gain access to other rooms or onto the roof. This happened during the inspection.

Nevertheless, staff are keen to support students' well-being and students say they feel safe and well supported in school. The school encourages healthy eating and opportunities for physical activity are built into the timetable, which most students enjoy. Staff work in conjunction with multi-disciplinary teams, including mental health workers and therapists to support individuals, and teach students to recognise their own stress levels and take 'time out' to calm down. However, helping students learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy is not reinforced by a PSHCE programme.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have had an enhanced check with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people. A range of other checks are carried out prior to staff appointments being confirmed, although the necessary checks on medical fitness have not been included. The staff checks are not kept in a single central register as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The school has improved the accommodation considerably since the last inspection. It is now clean and tidy and has suitable storage for resources and equipment. The students' toilet facilities have been improved. However, they still do not meet regulations as boys and girls share them, although they have designated cubicles. The school is in good decorative order with appropriate flooring, and classrooms are of a suitable size to allow students to be taught effectively. The school has no specialist subject facilities, which severely limits practical activities. However, appropriate arrangements have been made with local providers, such as an art workshop and local cricket club, to compensate in part for this.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has an attractive, well-written prospectus but this is considerably out of date and does not now reflect the school. Parents and carers are not informed, as required, that further information is available on request.

Reports are written on each student's progress and are appropriately used as the basis for the annual review of their statements. However, the school does not provide local authorities with an account of income and expenditure for each student as it should do.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints procedure which outlines how parents, carers, students and staff can complain. However, the procedure does not meet those regulations which relate to the provision of timescales for the complaint's management, and the membership of any panel set up to hear a complaint, if it proceeds to this stage.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

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

- develop a curriculum policy that is set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement it effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that the curriculum gives students experience in the following areas of learning: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- ensure the subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of students, including those with a statement of special educational need (paragraph 1(2)(b))
- where students have a statement of special educational need, ensure the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 1(2)(e))
- provide personal, social and health education that reflects the school's aims and ethos (paragraph 1(2)(f))
- provide appropriate careers guidance (paragraph 1(2)(g))
- ensure that the curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i))

- prepare students adequately for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 1(2)(j))
- ensure teaching enables students to 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))
- ensure lessons are well planned, effective teaching methods and suitable activities are used and class time is managed wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, and that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- improve classroom resources so they are of adequate quality, quantity and range and are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f))
- develop a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from such assessment to plan teaching so that students can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g))
- put into place a framework by which students' 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 students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve students' appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

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

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the DCSF guidance *Safe to Learn: Embedding Anti-Bullying Work in Schools* (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of students in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside the school which has regard to DCSF guidance

Health and safety of pupils on educational visits (reference HSPV2) (paragraph 3(2)(c))

- have regard to the DCSF guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers* (DCSF 0803/2001) (paragraph 3(4))
- maintain a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by a risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and any report from the Fire Authority (paragraph 3(5))
- prepare and implement a satisfactory written policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6))
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon students for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8))
- maintain an admission register and an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, make appropriate checks to confirm their medical fitness and take this information into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- the proprietor should keep a register which shows, in relation to each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, checks made (and certificates obtained where relevant) of: his/her identity; qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB was obtained, or where appropriate, that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99); the right to work in the UK and, where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK, suitability to work in a school. The register should include the date on which each such check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(2 and 3))
- for each person named as the proprietor in post on or after 1 August 2007, on the register should show whether a check was made of: his/her identity; right to work in the United Kingdom; and whether an enhanced CRB check was carried out and certificate obtained, or where appropriate, confirmation that he/she is not barred from working in school under section 142 of the Education Act 2002. The register should include the date on which any check was completed or certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(6 and 7))

- if the register is kept in electronic form, provide that the information so recorded is capable of being reproduced in legible form (paragraph 4C(9)).

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

- provide washrooms for staff and students, including facilities for students with special needs, which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k)).

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 educational and welfare provision for students with statements of special educational needs (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of students misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- ensure that parents are aware that they can request particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i))
- provide an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each student to their funding local authorities and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 6(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- set out clear timescales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c))
- ensure that when parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, a panel is appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f))
- ensure that when there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended (DDA) the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education				✓
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students				✓
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs				✓
How well students make progress in their learning				✓

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of students				✓

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students				✓
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School details

Name of school	The Ashbrook Centre		
DCSF number	886/6110		
Unique reference number	130979		
Type of school	Special school for students with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	July 2006		
Age range of students	11 - 18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 5	Girls: 0	Total: 5
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Annual fees	£		
Address of school	8 Almond Close Broadstairs Kent CT10 2NQ		
Telephone number	01843 869240		
Fax number	01843 869240		
Email address	theashbrookcentre@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Troop		
Proprietor	Mr Stephen Payne		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	17–18 June 2009		