

Aethelstan College

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 933/6216
Unique reference number 135673
[URN for registered
childcare and social care](#) N/A
Inspection number 341990
Inspection dates 20–21 October 2009
Reporting inspector Mick Megee
[Social care inspector](#) N/A

Age group: 11–16

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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

Aethelstan College is an independent day special school located in a rural setting near Bridgwater in Somerset. It provides education for up to 25 students, aged between 11 and 16 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is the school's first inspection and there are currently four students on the school's roll. All have a statement of special educational needs and are looked after by the local authority. Most students come with a history of fragmented schooling. They come to the school from all parts of England. The school, which opened in August 2008, is owned by SICS Ltd, a company that offers residential care and similar educational provision in the south of England. The school aims to provide 'a quality educational facility that will nurture and develop each child individually in order for them to achieve to their full potential'.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides students with a satisfactory education, which is supported by good levels of care and, as a result, students make satisfactory progress in their learning. The school offers a sound curriculum, although it does not yet offer all the subjects to which the students are entitled. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory but improving as staff gain experience in managing the learning of students who have had a difficult experience of education so far. Students are very well looked after so that they feel safe and happy; their behaviour and attendance improve significantly, and their attitudes to learning are very positive. Carers express a high degree of satisfaction with the school, and typically say, 'I would tick the "strongly agree" box on everything here. It's brilliant.' The school fully meets all safeguarding requirements, and almost all of the regulations.

Quality of education

Aethelstan College provides its students with a satisfactory curriculum. There is a very clear focus within the curriculum on helping the students to develop the

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

essential skills that they will need for a successful future. These skills include literacy and numeracy as well as the ability to cooperate and to be sensitive to the needs of others. The school's planning ensures that the students work within a structured routine that successfully supports them as individuals to develop their self-confidence and regain their enjoyment in learning. Many of the activities on offer are relevant and exciting, such as painting and decorating, playing tennis and golf, or cooking food on an open fire at an outdoor education centre. The staff provide good opportunities for learning related to the world of work, for example through the school's gardening project in which the students have made raised vegetable beds and compost bins. Students' achievements are accredited through various suitable schemes such as the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Unit Award Schemes, Entry Level and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Throughout the day, there is a good emphasis on practical activities that the students enjoy, such as examining onion skins under a microscope. Students receive good careers guidance through the local Connexions service. There are good links with the local further education college, where the students undertake taster courses. The staff have written well-adapted schemes of work for the subjects that are taught, mainly based on appropriate published curriculum guidance for students with similar requirements. These schemes are supported effectively by good medium- and short-term planning. All students have a statement of special educational needs, many of which require full access to the National Curriculum, but too little time is currently allocated to the teaching of a modern foreign language or music. As a result, students' achievement is held back in these subjects. Students say that they would very much like to have opportunities to achieve in these areas.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. When students join the school, staff undertake good baseline testing in reading, spelling and numeracy as a yardstick for measuring progress. There is regular, accurate assessment of students' improving standards in the school's core areas of learning, such as numeracy and literacy, and for personal development, but it is less strong in other subject areas. The school recognises this and plans to introduce this year a nationally recognised assessment system for all subjects. Within lessons, teachers have very good relationships with the students, and they work hard to ensure that activities are enjoyable. There is constant encouragement and positive feedback. Teachers cope very well when students become upset or are unable to maintain self control. They are able to restore calm quickly and the students are able to return to productive learning. Good use is made of new technology such as computer programmes to provide for different learning styles. Not all teachers are yet sufficiently skilled in ensuring that work is at the right level for every student, and some students have work that is too difficult for them while for others the work is not always sufficiently challenging. There are good indications, for example through the headteacher's regular observations, that teachers are improving their performance quite rapidly as they take on board the good professional guidance, training and support they receive

Taking into account the ability and history of the students when they join the school, the students make sound progress in their learning. Staff work hard to build success

where possible so that most students will be able to leave school having gained accreditation in a good number of subjects. Students make satisfactory progress against their individual learning targets, although some students do not have a clear understanding of what their targets are or what they have to do next in order to improve.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good, often from a very low starting point. Attendance is good and students demonstrate good self-awareness when they speak of the affirmative impact that the school has had on their lives. One student said, 'The first day I was here they had to keep hold of me almost all day so I wouldn't harm myself. I was so naughty. They've helped me to improve such a lot. They've made such a big difference to me.' The staff successfully foster harmonious teamwork by the way in which they model and promote positive relationships and make good use of appropriate behaviour management strategies. As a result, students develop a good attitude to learning, become calmer and their behaviour becomes good. Students say that there is no bullying, and there are very few disruptions to lessons through poor behaviour. When the inspector asked if the school was always calm, one student said, 'It's always like this. It's pretty peaceful.' The reward scheme is particularly effective in helping the students to develop a sense of remorse and responsibility and they often volunteer an apology if they have made an insensitive comment. Students learn about the lives, faiths and cultures of others through a good range of educational visits and through activities such as Black History Week and the fortnightly cultural breakfast club. At an Irish breakfast club during the inspection, the students enjoyed eating black pudding and taking part in a quiz competition about Irish people and places. Parents, teachers and students themselves report that they are very happy to come to the centre every day and enjoy the company of the people and the activities. Students prepare well for their future economic well-being through their good social development, especially in their increasingly positive interactions with others. Students make an increasing contribution to the school community, for example by the daily domestic tasks they perform. Although there are few opportunities to develop their musical skills and understanding, students enjoy developing other creative skills, especially in art, that often they did not know they had.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for safeguarding, monitoring and promoting the welfare of its students. One typical comment from a student was, 'The staff care a lot for us. You can tell. They never shout, and they're all really lovely.' The school has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place to safeguard students' safety and welfare, including the required amount of training on child protection. Procedures for tackling incidents are robust, including those involving bullying. Staff are effective and well trained in dealing with incidents appropriately.

The school ensures that students are kept safe by good supervision and constant vigilance. The students say they trust the staff to keep them safe, and that there are many people on the staff to whom they would turn if they had a problem. There are good opportunities for students to take part in outdoor exercise, both on the site as well as at the local leisure centre and golf driving range. Staff and students relax and eat together at lunch times and breakfasts and this provides staff with a good opportunity to steer the students towards a healthy and balanced diet. Smoking is an issue for some students, although all the students have a good understanding of how this is harmful. Fire procedures and risk assessments for educational visits are employed well. The school meets all the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and has in place a three-year plan to improve access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school carries out all necessary checks on prospective employees and volunteers to make sure that there is no reason why they should not be employed to work with young people. The school maintains all the required information on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides the students with very pleasant accommodation in a peaceful, rural setting that enables the students to learn effectively and safely. Classrooms are of good size, well equipped, well decorated and allow the students to have one-to-one teaching whenever this is necessary. There are specialist areas for food technology, information and communication technology and for practical science. The school plans to develop the outbuildings to provide students with workshops for carpentry and motor vehicle maintenance. The school has a large outside hard-court area where students can play football, and a grassed area for, as one student put it, 'chillaxing'.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The organisation provides an informative prospectus, although this does not currently contain information about the availability of: the school's arrangements for discipline or exclusions; the curriculum policy; the health and safety policy; and, information about the number of staff employed at the school along with a summary of their qualifications.

The school does not provide parents of students with a copy of their safeguarding children policy.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a written complaints policy but the policy does not ensure that there is an independent person on the complaints panel when a formal hearing is established.

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:

- provide teaching in the full range of National Curriculum subjects in order to fulfil the requirements of the students' statements of special educational needs (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

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

- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(3)(a))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of the school's curriculum policy (paragraph 6(3)(c))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of the school's policy relating to health and safety (paragraph 6(3)(d))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(3)(g))
- send to parents of students (and of prospective parents on request) a copy of their safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4)).

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

- ensure that where there is a panel hearing of a complaint there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure that lesson activities and teaching resources are closely matched to the needs and capabilities of every student in the class.
- Ensure that all students have a good understanding of their learning targets and what they need to do in order to reach them quickly.

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 pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

Name of school	Aethelstan College		
DCSF number	933/6216		
Unique reference number	135673		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	20 August 2008		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Number of pupils aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,000		
Annual fees (childcare)	£		
Annual fees (boarders)	£		
Address of school	Newton Road North Petherton Somerset TA6 6NA		
Telephone number	01278 662377		
Fax number	01278 662377		
Email address	roz.hagley@sics.ltd.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Rosalind Hagley		
Proprietor	SICS Ltd.		
Reporting inspector	Mr Mick Megee		
Dates of inspection	20–21 October 2009		