

Inspection report

Underley Garden School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 909/6044

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 16 – 19 January 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

Underley Garden School is a residential independent special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, severe and complex learning needs and challenging behaviour. It has 'Approval' status from the Secretary of State. It is situated near Kirkby Lonsdale in Cumbria and takes pupils from all over the United Kingdom. There are 20 boys and 31 girls on roll, aged between 9 and 19 years, and all are residential for either 39 or 52 weeks per year. Forty-eight pupils have a statement of special educational needs. None has English as an additional language. Over half of the pupils are in public care. The school opened a new site, Orchard site, in 2004 and extended the age of its pupils to 19 years in 2005. Orchard site makes provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, complex needs and challenging behaviour. It is continuing with its provision for pupils with extreme emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, but is carefully planning to reduce such provision at its Underley Garden School and focus it at the sister school, Underley Hall School, which is situated on the same estate. Both schools are under common ownership and governance, but registered separately as schools with the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) and as children's homes with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

Summary of main findings

Underley Garden School provides a high standard of care for its pupils. The relationships between staff and pupils are good and contribute very effectively to the pupils' good personal development and well-being. The school has experienced a period of instability and is recovering quickly. Under the outstanding leadership of the recently appointed headteacher, the school has accurately identified its weaknesses and has put into place a series of measures which are bringing about rapid improvements in its provision.

The proprietors and their advisory board recruit and develop a good range of specialist expertise which supports pupils' learning and personal development very well. The pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning and good progress in their personal and social development. Behaviour is managed consistently and very effectively across both the residential and school settings. The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and is relevant to the pupils' needs and abilities, although the opportunities for some pupils to develop as independent learners are too limited. The quality of teaching is good with some very good features which are worthy of sharing across the school. More rigour has been introduced into assessment procedures and this is helping the staff to recognise that the more able pupils could be challenged further to achieve higher standards. Whilst the pupils are very aware

of their targets for improving their personal and social skills, they are not sufficiently involved in setting their targets for learning and reviewing the progress they are making. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is underdeveloped. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

What school does well:

- it provides high standards of care and supervision for pupils;
- the pupils make good progress in their personal and social development;
- behaviour is managed consistently and effectively across both the education and care settings;
- it recruits and develops a good range of staff expertise which supports the curriculum and meets individual needs;
- it has very good systems for monitoring and evaluating its work and identifying and addressing its priorities for improvement.

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

- provide information for parents and others about the complaints procedure adopted by the school, as required in section 6 of this report.

Next Steps

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

- ensure all pupils are sufficiently challenged and encouraged to develop as independent learners;
- involve the pupils more in setting their learning targets and reviewing their progress;
- clarify the respective roles of teachers and support assistants in lessons;
- continue to improve the curriculum in line with the school improvement plan by:
 - developing long term plans for all subjects on both sites to ensure that pupils build systematically on prior learning;
 - increasing the choice and range of courses and accreditation available for all pupils from the age of fourteen;
 - formalising the planning and links between the residential and school curricula to strengthen the learning and personal development taking place; and
 - further developing the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum at Underley Garden School is satisfactory, with many good features. It is rapidly improving. It is sufficiently broad and balanced and offers strong personal and social education as well as all the subjects of the National Curriculum, although provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is not developed well enough.

The current system for planning the curriculum is relatively new and is satisfactory. All subjects have a policy and most, but not all, are organised to make sure that pupils build systematically on what they have learned and so make progress. Subject planning is largely in place on the Garden site, but, due to its increasing population, planning for many subjects on the Orchard site is, inevitably, at an early stage. All pupils make progress with this system because their teachers make sure that they record and build on what is learned while the curriculum is being developed.

The school is in the process of adapting courses to meet the different and very complex needs of pupils and their requirements are considered on an individual basis. For example, a sensory approach is used to support learning for pupils with more severe learning difficulties. There are also specialist systems, including good speech therapy, for encouraging communication in those with autism. The one-to-one adult support is currently an important element in ensuring that the curriculum is sufficiently well adapted to meet the needs set out in pupils' statements.

The programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education is comprehensive, highly individualised and linked to every aspect of the school's work. A discrete course is also taught to each pupil each week covering essential elements of the subject, such as drugs education and sex education. Pupils know what to do to keep healthy, choosing fruit and vegetables regularly for lunch and taking plenty of exercise, because the school has a strong focus on healthy living.

Pupils aged 14 – 19 receive good guidance on their future careers and preparation for the world of work. The choice of courses broadens out for this age to include some vocational and college courses, which are good for the post-sixteen pupils, but the school recognises that these are still limited for those up to the age of sixteen. There is a suitable range of courses leading to qualifications, with one exception. For those who cannot take the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), especially the most able from the Orchard site, there are too few opportunities to gain Entry Level qualifications and so show how well they can do.

The good quality residential provision supports the school curriculum and pupils' personal development. The care staff offer a wide range of activities in the evenings and at weekends, including swimming, football, trampolining, yoga, painting, visits to galleries and concerts and Sea Cadets. Links between the school and the residences are close, but without a formal system for jointly planning what is taught

and what each child is trying to achieve, the system is not efficient in securing maximum development from the 24 hour programme.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching was good in over half of lessons seen. The recent introduction of performance management arrangements, which focus very clearly on improving teaching and assessment for learning, have contributed to the current good practice. As a result the pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning and good progress in their personal and social development. More rigorous systems have been introduced for assessing pupils' learning and tracking their progress and these are beginning to improve the quality of their individual targets and the reporting of progress. The good initial assessments on admission to the school form the basis for the pupils' individual care and education plans. The pupils are very familiar with their individual targets for behaviour, but are less well informed about their targets for learning and consequently do not yet know well enough how they are progressing or what they need to do to improve. Whilst there is some sharing of targets between both the care and education settings, opportunities are missed to plan for this to happen routinely so that pupils develop and apply what they have learned in the different contexts.

All lessons start promptly. Where teaching is at its best, the staff have high expectations of their pupils and challenge them to achieve higher standards. They plan appropriately for their pupils' individual needs, recognising both their ages and levels of ability. They use teaching methods and resources which capture the pupils' attention and imagination and engage them in wanting to know or do more. The pupils respond particularly well to practical activities and to tasks where the purpose is clear. In most lessons ICT is not used well enough to reinforce or extend learning. In the less effective lessons teachers did not use visual means of presentation well enough and missed opportunities to model tasks so that pupils could understand what was expected of them and so work with minimal help. Learning support is provided by care staff and learning support assistants. In many lessons they provided good, essential support so that the pupils could remain on task. In some lessons both teacher and pupils relied too heavily on this individual support to ensure progress in learning took place. The support is most effective when it challenges the pupils to think for themselves, offers emotional as well as learning support, and encourages them to become independent learners. It is least effective when it allows the pupils to become over-dependent on adult support and therefore take too passive a role.

The consistently calm manner used by all staff promotes positive relationships. Staff skilfully re-direct attention from a focus on behaviour to a conversation about the subject matter. However, the roles of teachers and support staff are not always clear and at times teaching staff allow themselves to become too involved in dealing with issues such as pupils not having the necessary pencils or clothing, rather than leaving the support staff to manage these matters and themselves remaining focussed on their teaching.

The pupils are proud of what they have achieved. The older pupils talk freely about what they are learning at college and the work they are doing towards their AQA units or their GCSEs.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their self knowledge, self-esteem and self confidence is developed well through many aspects of the school's work. Pupils arrive at the school because they have extreme difficulties in their lives and the school seeks to assist them to overcome these and move on to achieve success in the future. In lessons, teachers and assistants use every opportunity to raise pupils' self-esteem and show them how well they are doing. The residential care staff support the young people to grow in confidence through individual counselling, and through helping them develop their everyday skills and understanding of themselves and others. Each pupil has targets for improving their behaviour, social skills and independence.

There is very good provision to help pupils distinguish right from wrong and to accept responsibility for their behaviour. A highly skilled approach to managing behaviour often enables pupils to return to learning and relate well to others. There is plenty of discussion about how pupils should behave and why. As a result their attitudes to learning and their behaviour in and around school are satisfactory and improving.

Pupils increasingly show initiative and understand how they can contribute to community life. There are pupil representatives on the 'Pupil Forum' and for each residential bungalow. In addition, the school and residences provide plenty of opportunities for the young people to be responsible, clearing up after themselves and helping others. For example older pupils hear the younger ones read and help in the classrooms when their examinations are finished. The citizenship programme provides a comprehensive view of the way government, the law and other public services operate and how they can be used.

Assemblies, therapy, discussion and religious education all contribute well to the increasing understanding pupils need to overcome their difficulties and take their place in the world. There is a successful programme to help pupils appreciate their own and other cultures. The school pays careful attention to the diversity in the world through many subjects and this means that pupils learn to be tolerant of different cultures and religions. In English for example, pupils study poetry about cultural differences and in religious education they begin to understand how different people celebrate their festivals. There is a strong spiritual dimension to several lessons, especially in drama, art and music.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and well-being of its pupils. Its rigorous policies and procedures are implemented with great care by all staff and fully comply with all regulations. Detailed risk assessments are routinely undertaken and their purpose is understood by staff and pupils. Through the comprehensive induction programme, new staff are well informed about the high standards expected by the school.

The headteacher and senior staff actively involve the pupils in recognising and reporting any incidents of bullying and the pupils are pleased that there are fewer such incidents taking place. Effective staff training ensures that all staff understand the child protection procedures and have a positive approach to managing behaviour, including, where appropriate, the use of physical restraint. The shared code of conduct is having a positive effect on behaviour and relationships and the school has seen a significant reduction in the number of serious incidents and absconsions from the premises over the past year. Staff and pupils are fully aware of the clear range of sanctions and rewards used to promote good behaviour. All pupils are allocated a 'courier' who acts as key worker. Staff know the young people very well and the daily handover arrangements between care and education ensure a smooth transition takes place.

Attendance at the school is very good. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations.

Medical and therapeutic advice and treatment is readily available. There is a full time nurse and regular support from a psychotherapist and other professionals. All staff undertake at least basic first aid training.

The school is going through a time of change in relation to the range of pupils' needs provided for, and the proprietors and senior managers have drawn up an effective accessibility plan which reflects the planning for these changes.

The school meets the requirements of the *National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes*, as inspected by CSCI, with some minor recommendations for improvement being made. The proprietors have suitable plans in place to address these.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

Underley Garden School has robust procedures in place for recruiting staff. These ensure that they are well qualified and suitable to work with children. All staff are required to undergo checks with the Criminal Records Bureau at enhanced level prior to commencing employment, and this policy is rigorously enforced. The school is deserving of its Investor in People award because it goes to great lengths to

develop the expertise of its staff, both in relation to the curriculum and the needs of its pupils.

The high staff levels ensure that the young people are very well supervised at all times.

The proprietors have high expectations for the standards of care and education they wish to provide at the school and are well supported in this by the advisory board who play an important part in developing and monitoring policy. The school also benefits from a range of external advice and support from consultants and other professionals.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The accommodation for Underley Garden School is good. It serves two distinct groups of pupils; those at the Orchard site for pupils with severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders and those at the Garden site who have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Accommodation is in a period of transition. The Orchard site is becoming too small for the increasing numbers of pupils. Plans are in place to phase in the use of the Garden site accommodation in the summer term 2006, starting with a classroom specially equipped to meet the needs of the pupils with the autism spectrum. The Orchard site has a newly built sensory room and a small developmental classroom which meet the increasingly complex needs of the pupils well. All other classrooms are of a good size and there are specialist rooms for most subjects.

The residential accommodation is also quite adequate, with comfortable communal spaces, good sized bedrooms and plenty of bathrooms for staff and young people. It is quite homely so that the young people, who often spend all year there, can relax and live like any other teenager.

All of the accommodation, which is largely on one level for easy access, is well kept and pleasant to be in. The extensive grounds and local facilities are used well to enhance the curriculum through nature walks, sport and swimming for example.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides a good range of information for parents and other partners. The prospectus is fairly comprehensive; it clearly outlines the school's aims and gives a good overview of the curriculum offered as well as the residential provision. However, it only makes brief reference to a complaints procedure being available and does not outline clearly enough what steps a person wishing to make a

complaint should take. Neither does it indicate the availability of information about the number of complaints received in the preceding year. Half of the parents returned their questionnaires; they are generally supportive of the school and most feel that their child is making good progress during their time there. A small number do not know about the complaints procedure. The school provides detailed termly and annual reports of each pupil's progress.

The proprietors have drawn up a suitable template for reporting annually to local placing authorities the income and expenditure incurred in respect of individual pupils.

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:

- *provide details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, (paragraph 6(2)(j)).*

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

The school has established effective procedures for handling complaints from pupils and parents or other external agencies which fully meet requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Underley Garden School
DfES Number:	909/6044
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	9 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 20 Girls: 31 Total: 51
Number of boarders:	Boys: 20 Girls: 31 Total: 51
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 18 Girls: 30 Total: 48
Annual fees (boarders):	£56,730 - £168,420
Address of school:	Underley Garden School Kirkby Lonsdale Carnforth Lancashire LA6 2HE
Telephone number:	01524 271569
Fax number:	01524 272581
Email address:	ugsoffice@underleyschools.co.uk
Headteacher:	Ellie Forrest
Proprietors:	Mr Derrick Cooper and Mrs Decima Cooper, Underley Educational Services
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Caroline Broomhead HMI
Date of inspection:	16 – 19 January 2006

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