

Inspection report

Underley Hall School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 909/6036

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 27 February – 2 March 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. Independent special schools which have been granted 'Approved' status under section 347 of the Education Act 1996, were inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 prior to 2003.

Information about the school

Underley Hall is an independent special school for up to 50 boys aged 9 to 16 years who have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The school has Approved status. There are currently 38 boys on roll, most of whom have a history of disrupted schooling and they all have statements of special educational needs. The school makes residential provision for 39- and 52-week placements and consequently is registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) as a children's home. The boys come from 24 local authorities across England and over half are looked after by their local authorities. The school is situated in Kirkby Lonsdale in Lancashire. It also has a site in Kendal, Underley Lodge, where the Year 11 pupils reside. The proprietors, Derrick and Decima Cooper, also run the sister school, Underley Garden School, which is in the same grounds but registered separately.

The school was last inspected in 2003, under section 10 of the Education Act 1996, and was judged to no longer require special measures as it was providing a satisfactory standard of education.

The school is awaiting a decision from Department for Education and Skills about its application to become co-educational from September 2006, with the intention of admitting up to 14 girls in the same age range.

Summary of main findings

Underley Hall is a good school. It has steadily improved since the last inspection in 2003 and the quality of its provision is now good. Standards of care for pupils are high. The headteacher and senior managers routinely present models of their high expectations of behaviour based on mutual respect and good manners and this effectively promotes consistency in approaches used by all staff. As a result, pupils' behaviour around the school and in the residential units is generally calm. The broad curriculum successfully spans the school and residential settings and is suitably adapted to meet the pupils' needs and interests.

As a result of the good teaching, the pupils, particularly those who have been at the school for some time, make good progress. The older pupils are well prepared for moving on to college or the workplace. Provision for pupils' social and moral development is very good; for their cultural and spiritual development it is satisfactory. Resources to support teaching and learning are adequate and the use of information communication technology (ICT) is improving, although more needs to

be done. The school benefits from spacious premises and accommodation, but the heating and equipment for indoor sports activities are inadequate. Procedures for ensuring the health, safety and protection of pupils are good, including thorough arrangements for recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff. Underley Hall is a 'learning environment' for staff and pupils alike and it is rightly proud of its 'Investors in People' award. The school is taking appropriate action to address the recommendations made in recent CSCI inspection reports concerning the premises and the arrangements for those leaving care.

What the school does well:

- it provides high standards of care;
- it develops pupils' independence and skills for adult life;
- it encourages a positive attitude to enjoying learning, achieving success and maintaining a healthy lifestyle;
- it gives good individual support for learning and social development; and
- the good teaching and excellent teamwork result in pupils achieving well.

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

- ensure that there is adequate heating in the large sports hall; and
- ensure that the prospectus includes particulars of the school's provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Next Steps

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development, some of which it has already identified in its improvement plan:

- as identified by subject leaders, extend and up-date the resources for teaching and learning;
- develop further the use of ICT across the curriculum;
- use assemblies more effectively to promote pupils' spiritual development;
- develop further the pupil profiles so that pupils and their staff can readily see the progress made over time; and
- continue to improve teaching by providing more effective support for temporary teachers.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum has continued to improve since the last inspection and is now good. It includes all subjects of the National Curriculum and is suitably adapted to meet the needs and interests of the pupils. It also successfully spans the residential and school settings. Teaching and care staff work well together to achieve this; for example care staff conduct mock interviews in the evenings to support the independence programme. During the circle time each evening, pupils explore topics, such as vandalism, which are related to those being studied in the school day. The good personal, social, health, and citizenship programme very effectively supports pupils' emotional, social and physical development and well-being.

Curriculum plans are carefully structured to a common format and they aid teachers in planning for pupils' progression. Subject co-ordinators have established development plans for their subjects, and have identified the need to improve resources for teaching and learning. The library has recently been moved to a new location and is beginning to be better resourced with a wider, and more up to date, range of fiction and non-fiction texts as well as ICT software.

There has been a clear focus on raising staff awareness about improving literacy across the curriculum and this is supported by good guidance. Similarly, practical advice has been given on using ICT in other subjects, but this has yet to become a regular feature in practice.

Off-site visits to 'bring the curriculum to life' take place mainly after school and at weekends, but are somewhat limited during the school day; a point which the pupils would like to see improve.

The school has successfully extended the range of accreditation available to pupils in Key Stage 4. This now includes General Certificate of Education (GCSE), Entry Level courses and Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) units which provide accreditation of modules taught across the school and residential settings.

The good work-related learning and independence programme for the older boys is structured to enable them to develop the skills and experiences they will need for adult life. Through the very well organised college links programme, those in Year 10 thoroughly enjoy taking part in weekly taster sessions covering practical skills such as welding, plumbing and catering. They are proud of what they have learned to do in the different occupational areas and some have been inspired to go on to further education or employment as a result. Connexions staff provide good support for pupils during their time at the school and in planning for moving on.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good; this closely mirrors the school's own evaluation. A significant number of lessons have very good features and some of the teaching is excellent. A very small proportion of lessons have weaknesses in the teaching.

Pupils make at least satisfactory progress in all the subjects and particularly good progress in literacy. They make significant gains, often in a short period of time. From low levels of attainment on entry, most pupils quickly improve in their achievements so that they significantly increase their National Curriculum levels of attainment. By the time they leave school they achieve success in GCSE, Entry Level, or AQA examinations.

In the best lessons, teachers have good relationships with pupils. They plan lessons well using information from assessments of pupils' abilities so that activities match their learning needs and engage their interest. Pupils are told what they will learn and how they can make the best progress. Teachers use questioning well to check pupils' understanding and to encourage pupils to develop their listening skills. They have in-depth knowledge of pupils' behavioural difficulties and use the school's behavioural management system effectively. This helps them to redirect inappropriate responses in a positive manner and to resolve potential disruptions to pupils' learning. Rewards and certificates are used consistently to recognise success and improvement in behaviour and in learning. Teachers are very well supported by teamwork with learning support assistants who provide excellent mentoring to support pupils' behaviour. The assistants are also increasingly becoming skilled at helping pupils develop their learning and academic performance. Together, teachers and learning support assistants have high expectations of pupils' engagement and performance. As a result of these strengths in teaching, pupils' learning, progress and achievement are good.

Reflecting a wide ranging programme of training and support provided by the school's education consultants, teachers are using differing approaches to ensure variety and success in pupils' learning. More opportunities are created for pupils to evaluate their own learning and progress and to help them understand how they can improve further. Good use is made of homework and of the marking of pupils' work to further support their progress. Good links are made by teachers with the care staff to ensure continuity of support and approach for pupils during evenings and weekends. This is a feature particularly of personal and social education and of the development of independent living skills.

The small element of unsuccessful teaching is the result of insufficient planning of lessons, lack of experience in using the school's behaviour management programme and inaccurate expectations of pupils' abilities and performance. Although some support is given to temporary or supply staff by senior managers, this is not robust enough to promote confidence or to ensure continuity in pupils' learning. Pupils are also not prepared sufficiently for such changes. As a result, some pupils' examination coursework, for example in art, has been adversely affected.

Teachers make insufficient use of ICT to support learning. Some subjects of the curriculum are resourced quite well, for example, the ICT suite and the refurbished

design and technology room. However, resources for learning, although adequate overall, do not always afford sufficient support for teaching. Much of the general equipment in classrooms is dated and needs renewing.

There have been significant developments in the use of assessment by teachers to inform their planning across the subjects and to meet pupils' individual needs. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked across the subjects and this helps staff when drawing up individual education plans. Lesson plans make use of assessment information to match learning activities to the needs of individuals. The school is developing good systems for collecting and interpreting pupil performance data and using this information as part of the overall assessment of pupils' progress and when setting individual targets for improvement.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes very good provision for pupils' social and moral development. Provision for their cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory. Daily whole-school assemblies effectively celebrate pupils' efforts and achievements and help them to develop self-confidence and a more positive view of themselves. They are rightly proud of the 'good work' which they submit to the headteacher for recognition in the weekly assembly. Praise is focused specifically on pupils' developing skills and knowledge across all the subject areas. The pupils demonstrate very clearly in assemblies how well they can comply with the school's high expectations of behaviour, respect and good manners. However, opportunities are missed during assemblies to develop pupils' spiritual awareness further.

Through their religious education lessons and occasional trips out the pupils think about their own beliefs and learn about their own and other cultures. They raise funds for children in need and are proud that they support a young boy in Senegal. They are clearly interested in the plight of others and put their thoughts and feelings into the written word, for example in an account written by one pupil of the experiences of those people caught up in the recent earthquake in Pakistan.

The citizenship course is helping the pupils to learn about government and the rights and responsibilities associated with elections and voting. Unit pupil representatives form the school council, and through their meetings with staff they have a voice and influence decisions, for example in relation to lunch time menus. Most of the pupils are positive about the school and feel that the teaching helps them to learn. A small number do not think that their views are listened to well enough, and some others are unsure about how safe their personal property is.

Behaviour in and around the school and residential units is generally calm. Relationships between pupils and with staff are usually, though not always, respectful. Staff expertly anticipate potential incidents of aggression and act swiftly and calmly to prevent escalation. Procedures for managing inappropriate or challenging behaviour are well understood and implemented effectively and

consistently by staff. The pupils are well aware of the school's expectations and the rewards and sanctions which are used. They value the rewards which their accumulating points can buy them. At the same time, they know that they will be fined if they damage property. Sometimes pupils respond negatively or aggressively when, at the end of lessons, they are not awarded the number of points they would like to receive. They consider this to be unfair, but usually their expectations in these circumstances are unrealistic and reflect their unwillingness to accept responsibility for their own behaviour during that lesson. The Learning Support room is used effectively for those pupils needing 'time out' from lessons, the expectation being that when calm they will return to lessons or will work with adult support in this base room.

A wide range of sporting and other activities takes place after school, at weekends, and, for those who are resident at the school all year, during school holidays. Some pupils enjoy going to Army Cadets, others are keen to practise their swimming or rugby skills. The school's campsite at Windermere is a firm favourite amongst the boys. Whilst there, they learn to be self-reliant and to work in teams. The boys enjoy being active and have a positive attitude to living a healthy lifestyle. They are pleased when they are invited to represent the school in local sporting fixtures against other schools and were seen during the inspection to play football with great energy and enthusiasm.

Through the well-planned independence programme in Year 11, the boys acquire the skills they will need when they leave school. Recent changes in the programme are resulting in them learning to look after themselves better and developing a deeper insight into their own interests and the possible training or employment routes open to them. They become part of the local community in Kendal. During their time at the more independent accommodation at the Lodge they have a four-week work experience placement, which they enjoy. Employers report favourably about their developing employability skills.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school is successful in promoting the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. The experienced full-time health and safety manager has instigated robust policies and procedures for all aspects of health and safety and regularly checks that these are properly implemented. Procedures for child protection are clearly established and followed and all staff are made aware of them through specific training.

Most staff are qualified in positive handling strategies that give safe support and intervention for pupils experiencing extreme difficulties with their behaviour which could harm themselves or others. Good policies for the management of challenging behaviour are in place and these aim to reduce incidents and promote positive attitudes. Careful records are kept of all serious incidents and accidents and of the action by staff taken to prevent further occurrences.

Pupils are closely supervised throughout the school day and whilst in residence. Staff make every effort to ensure that the school is a safe place in which to work and learn. All staff are trained in basic First Aid.

Good attention is given to promoting healthy attitudes to eating and to exercise. Menus at lunchtime provide for choices to ensure that pupils can choose a balanced diet. Regular exercise is encouraged and a range of physical activities is provided through physical education lessons and after-school activities.

A counsellor gives expert individual support to boys' emotional needs. There is a school nurse and the school liaises effectively with a range of other professionals and external agencies to ensure that the welfare and health needs of pupils are met.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietors and senior staff successfully achieve their aim of recruiting and appointing well qualified teachers and support and care staff. They also encourage and support them in developing their skills further and in achieving higher qualifications.

Procedures for recruiting staff are thorough and all necessary checks are carried out. The proprietors have established high standards and ensure that not only staff, but all adults who spend time on the site, have had enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. Teachers are additionally checked with the General Teaching Council to confirm their qualifications and qualified teacher status. Whilst there are basic procedures in place to check candidates' medical fitness which meet the regulations, the proprietors are seeking to improve this further and are currently introducing a written health assessment checklist as part of the application process.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The residential accommodation provides a warm and homely environment. Bedrooms and living areas are of a good size, in good decorative order, well-maintained and afford adequate privacy. All areas are kept clean and tidy.

There is a good range of facilities to support the subjects of the curriculum with specialist classrooms for art, science, music, design and technology, and an ICT suite. Although there is no separate food technology area, good use is made of the kitchens in the residential areas for teaching. There are two sports halls which are used for indoor games, but the largest of these has an inadequate heating system and the sports equipment is old and would benefit from replacement. There are sufficient general classrooms for the numbers of pupils. The school's extensive

grounds are well maintained. These include grassed and hard-surface outdoor play areas, with equipment for adventurous climbing. There is a large court area for basketball and other racquet games, a good sports field for soccer and rugby and a grassed running track for athletics.

Underley Lodge has very comfortable accommodation for pupils in the final year of school and provides them with good facilities for learning the skills of independent living. It has recently been redecorated with the help of the pupils themselves. There are spacious areas for recreational pursuits, a kitchen in which pupils can safely prepare their own meals, and well-furnished single bedrooms. Its location in the centre of Kendal means that pupils have ready access to all the shops and leisure facilities of the town.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that there is adequate heating in the large sports hall to comply with The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(p)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

Through its detailed prospectus the school provides a good range of information about the education and care offered, along with relevant information about its policies, procedures and arrangements for dealing with any complaints. It does not provide information about the provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language. Parents are mostly supportive of the school and believe that it has high expectations for their children. They receive regular, detailed reports about their children's educational progress and personal development and are encouraged to complete and return an annual questionnaire in readiness for their children's annual review meeting. Whilst the prospectus gives information about GCSE results and national tests at the end of Year 9, it does not report the wider range of pupils' achievements, which they are justifiably proud of.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *provide particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)).*

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

The school has clear procedures for handling complaints. These emphasize informal resolution, but there are satisfactory arrangements for addressing complaints where necessary through formal stages. These include policies and procedures in a form that is accessible for complaints which might be made by a child. The school has established sound systems for recording the progress of actions taken to ensure that complaints are resolved. Senior staff make regular checks of the complaints log-book.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Underley Hall School
DfES Number:	909/6036
Type of school:	Special school for pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Boys
Number on roll:	38
Number of boarders:	38
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	38
Annual fees:	39 week placement £51,345 - £56,265 52 week placement £78,495 - £83,445
Address of school:	Underley Hall School Kirkby Lonsdale Carnforth Lancs LA6 2HE
Telephone number:	01524 271206
Fax number:	01524 272581
Email address:	uhsoffice@underleyschools.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Lynne Proudlock
Proprietor:	Derrick and Decima Cooper, Underley Educational Services
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Caroline Broomhead HMI
Date of inspection:	27 February – 2 March 2006

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