

The Yellow House School

Independent special school inspection report

DCSF registration number	881/6048
Unique Reference Number (URN)	1342398
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Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI

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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

The Yellow House is an independent day special school that operates on two sites, approximately eight miles apart. The school opened at Sible Hedingham, Essex in 2002 and a second site was added in 2006 at Clare in Suffolk. Both sites occupy former shops in villages. The school is run by the proprietor, who is also the headteacher. There is provision for up to 15 full time students aged between 13 and 17 years. There are currently three full time and 13 part time students on roll. All students have a statement of special educational needs, which include autistic spectrum disorders and associated behaviour, emotional and social needs. Most students have a history of exclusion and poor attendance at other schools. Students are often involved with local mental health teams and some have input from the youth offending service. The school's mission statement is: Freedom to learn and grow into caring, assertive, responsible adults. The school operates a therapeutic approach, supporting students to reflect upon, understand and confront their underlying social and emotional issues. Ofsted last inspected the school in October 2007, when it was judged as good with 10 regulations not met at that time.

Evaluation of the school

The Yellow House School fulfils its mission statement well, providing a good standard of education and outstanding welfare, health and safety for the students. When they leave the school, students, who often had little success at previous schools, are confident, responsible young adults, able to join local colleges for mainstream courses. Of the 10 regulations not met at the time of the last inspection, one has not been totally addressed. On this occasion, a total of four regulations are not met. All safeguarding requirements are met.

Quality of education

A good curriculum, good teaching and satisfactory arrangements for assessment combine to offer a good quality education for the students. It is difficult to separate out the academic and social aspects of the curriculum and teaching because the school successfully meshes the two together and this serves the students well. Taken

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

as a holistic package, the students' experience of education provides them with opportunities and achievements that were not previously possible. The acquisition of nationally accredited qualifications to GCSE level enables students to gain and sustain college placements. This represents good progress from low academic starting points, particularly in relation to improved literacy and numeracy skills.

The curriculum for each student is completely personalised and the way that the curriculum is planned and organised ensures the necessary flexibility to provide this level of personalisation. Schemes of work provide suitably brief subject overviews, which are then tailored to facilitate individual programmes, generally centred within examination or accreditation frameworks. More subjects are on offer than at the time of the last inspection. While maintaining a suitable focus on basic literacy and numeracy, the balance of time spent on each subject, and the range of subjects taught depends on students' interests, their time on-site and future career aspirations. This not only provides students with their entitlement to the National Curriculum but also improves their attendance, attitudes to work and ultimately their achievement. Individualised timetables are facilitated by one-to-one teaching for most lessons. This is suitably balanced with social and practical activities, usually in the afternoons, where students come together in small groups.

The school has a deliberate policy of building up students' time gradually towards full time education. This approach re-engages students with learning successfully and consistently. Three students currently have a full weekly timetable others generally attend every day for at least half of the day. Those with the most reduced timetables are those students admitted within the last two terms. There is an intensive focus on learning. No time is wasted. In addition to formal teaching time, morning arrival and break times are well thought through and well supervised, providing extended opportunities for emotional and social development. This prepares students well for subsequent parts of the day, as well as time to reflect on pertinent issues.

Some areas of the curriculum are planned more clearly around intended outcomes than others. Good examples include the schemes of work for science and the newly established units for information and communication technology. The school acknowledges that the different aspects of personal, social and health education (PSHE) need to be brought together in a more organised way to ensure that students' access to each component part is suitably equitable. While good in their respective parts, programmes for life-skills, personal and social education, cultural and religious education, citizenship and off-site activities are not always sufficiently coherent to ensure that each student is getting the full range of experiences. Nevertheless, the range of PSHE programmes is good and sits well with the school's therapeutic approach. Work experience programmes and careers education are well established and serve students well in their preparation for making informed choices and maintaining high aspirations for what they can confidently achieve.

At the time of the last inspection the school was asked to ensure that lessons were well planned and there was a recommendation that training was provided for

unqualified teachers, so as to develop their skills further. Since then, teachers have attended a range of relevant courses. Formal lesson planning requires further work. Lesson plans are not always focused on what students will learn and how the learning activities will give sufficient opportunities for them to reach their personal targets. As a result, assessment is too often linked to what has been taught rather than the quality of students' learning. In addition, although students receive good verbal feedback on how well they are doing, opportunities are missed to enhance this through marking and setting next steps for improvement. In general, although much professional discussion takes place, formal assessment procedures are not well organised to make the most of the information gathered, making it difficult to track how well students are achieving academically over time. Conversely, good systems are in place to assess and track students' personal development.

Nevertheless, the overall quality of teaching and assessment is good because students engage well, they achieve well and their emotional and social needs do not detract from the business of learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they are particularly adept at identifying gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understanding and sensitively work through these. There is a high focus on meaningful learning experiences, in class and off-site. Teachers are highly skilled in behaviour management, making a significant contribution to students' attitudes to education. The level of challenge in lessons is generally good but on some occasions, too much is done for the students, reducing opportunities for them to reach their personal targets and further develop their independent study skills.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' outstanding spiritual, social and cultural development is exemplified by their exceptionally positive attitudes towards school and to one another. They are respectful of one another's differences and difficulties, and often support each other when things go wrong or during stressful circumstances such as taking examinations, going out to public places and eating together. Over time, students also develop a good understanding of cultural traditions and values other than their own. Students rise to the challenge of doing things for others, either in school or in the local community. Examples of this include taking turns to cook lunch for everybody in school and working with a cancer charity to develop a woodland site. This not only improves their practical and social skills effectively but also develops their understanding of the perspectives and needs of others in relation to their own, which may be quite different. Students increasingly develop a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities within local and national frameworks and institutions.

Students value their education at The Yellow House School, as demonstrated by the fact that almost all students attend all sessions on their timetable. Students demonstrate a high level of confidence and trust in the ability of staff to help resolve their problems as they arise, as well as helping them to tackle their longer term difficulties. Over time, and with an eye securely on when they reach school leaving age, students increasingly apply the strategies that help them to make choices and

to manage their anxieties effectively. On occasions, it is difficult for students to maintain acceptable levels of conduct, but their behaviour is nevertheless good because they respond well to adult support, reflecting on any problems and make a fresh start quickly. Over time this increases students' self confidence to the point that they become responsible young people who are not so afraid to play a fuller part within their local and wider community, able to make sensible decisions that they then stick with. Over the past few years, almost all students have successfully gone on to enjoy the challenges of the much larger environment of college. This is a significant achievement in relation to the difficulties presented by each student on admission to the school.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

If it were not for the outstanding level of welfare, health and safety afforded by staff, students would not develop their academic and social skills as well as they do. To say that the school 'goes the extra mile' and that staff know their students very well, does not sufficiently explain the commitment of the school to students' welfare. Staff work very closely as a team, with a clear understanding of what students need. They offer support with consistency, determination and high levels of professionalism. Particular emphasis is given to students' emotional and physical well-being, and to their safety and sense of personal security, as pre-requisites to their academic development. But this therapeutic approach does not lose sight of improving academic attainment, with a long term view on post-16 provision. This is exemplified by transition plans, which start in earnest as soon as the student is settled following admission. Staff often attend medical appointments with students and meticulous records are kept in school to inform the effects of particular medications. Structured sessions with staff help students develop an understanding of their medication, its effects and properties, and to take responsibility for decisions about their health and well-being. Home visits are conducted every fortnight and excellent relationships with students' families make a significant difference to their access to education because plans are made and when problems arise they are more easily resolved.

The school has addressed the regulations that were not met at the last inspection. A policy and plan is in place in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, the admissions register is now in good order and staff have the required training for child protection. Three staff have completed training for the designated person for safeguarding students, ensuring that one of them is always available on each site. Similarly, all staff have first aid training, ensuring a suitable level of vigilance at all times. A range of policies to ensure appropriate attention to welfare, health and safety are in place and strictly adhered to. They suitably reflect the particular need of the students both on and off-site. There is one exception; the policy for first aid is out of date and does not reflect current good practice.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

With the exception of seeking evidence of medical fitness, all the required checks are made on staff prior to their appointment and a suitable single central record of the checks is in place. Interview notes are not routinely kept on file.

School's premises and accommodation

The small, intimate nature of the two school buildings works well to provide suitably high levels of supervision discretely and sensitively. There is no available play space on site but local facilities are used daily for recreation and exercise and the close proximity of shops and public amenities enables students to develop their confidence within the local vicinity. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been addressed; kitchens on both sites now have separate sinks for washing hands and preparing food, areas of unsuitable flooring have been replaced and suitable arrangements are in place for students when they are ill.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers are provided with termly reports on their child's progress. These reports include a range of useful information on attendance, behaviour, accreditations gained and the student's comments. The information about students' attitudes and personal development provides a useful means for tracking their progress over time. Information about academic progress is not so informative because the comments are about what has been covered in each subject rather than what has been learned. Similarly the reports lack specific targets for achievement. All of the required information about the school is available in the prospectus. Annual accounts of income and expenditure in respect of each student are not sent to the respective local authorities.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy fully meets the regulations.

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.³

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

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- ensure that lessons are sufficiently well planned for what students will learn and how they will meet their personal targets (paragraph 1(3)).

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

- revise and implement the policy for first aid so that more specific guidance is available for staff in the event of medical emergencies (paragraph 3(6)).

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, ensure that checks are made for medical fitness, and ensure that interview notes are kept in staff files (paragraph 4(2)).

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

- provide local authorities with annual accounts of income received and expenditure incurred for each student that they fund (paragraph 6(8)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improve the way that the PSHE policy and scheme of work encompasses areas of citizenship, life skills, and social activities
- develop assessment procedures by thoroughly recording what students can do in relation to their academic targets and the lesson objectives so as to better evidence academic progress over time.

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	The Yellow House School		
DCSF number	881/6048		
Unique reference number (URN)	134398		
Type of school	Day special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2002		
Age range of pupils	13-17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 5	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,591		
Address of school	1 Alderford Street Sible Hedingham Halstead Essex CO9 3HX		
Telephone number	01787 462504		
Email address	yellowhouse@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Debbie Pester		
Proprietor	Debbie Pester		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Dates of inspection	27-28 April 2010		