

Headstart

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	835/6051
Unique Reference Number	134148
Inspection number	320356
Inspection dates	17-18 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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 by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order 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

Headstart is a special school situated near the village of Ninfield, close to Battle in East Sussex. It was originally founded in 2000 and achieved registration in 2005. There are currently seven pupils on roll and all but one have a statement of special educational needs relating to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and other associated learning difficulties. Three pupils are looked after. The school's stated purpose is to enable all students to develop the ability to make choices, which impact positively on their overall life chances within the wider community. This is the school's first published inspection report.

Evaluation of the school

Headstart provides satisfactory education for its pupils who make satisfactory progress. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. The school is successful in enabling the pupils to improve their behaviour which is satisfactory overall. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also satisfactory. Parents and carers hold positive views of what the school provides for their children. The attention given to the pupils' welfare health and safety is satisfactory. The school meets most regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is satisfactory and enables the pupils to make satisfactory progress. There is an appropriate focus on the improvement of skills in literacy and numeracy. The satisfactory curriculum is supported by schemes of work based on the National Curriculum and the requirements of the relevant examination boards. There are accredited courses including GCSE, unit awards and entry level certificates in English, mathematics and science. The pupils' economic well-being is adequately promoted by this preparation for the next stage of education. Other programmes of study include personal, social, health and citizenship education, design and food technology, humanities and information and communication technology. There is a strong emphasis on practical application of knowledge within vocational education, for example, music and video editing, vehicle mechanics, photography, the life-skills programme and horticulture. A recent innovation in caring for animals takes advantage of the school's agricultural location. In response to the pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs regular attention is given to encouraging them to

manage their behaviour and gain self esteem and pride in their achievements. Although some lessons and visits enable the pupils to learn alongside each other, opportunities for collaborative working are missed. Extra curricular activities are limited by daily transport requirements.

The quality of teaching throughout the school is satisfactory overall and some teaching is good. Staff know their subjects and pupils well; they serve as good role models and are committed to forming positive relationships with the pupils. Lesson planning is satisfactory and most planning takes good account of pupils' abilities. Staffing ratios are very high and support is always readily available when learning is interrupted by unsatisfactory behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants employ their experience and relevant training to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum. Teachers work well with available resources which are adequate for most subjects. Some teachers reinforce subject specific vocabulary in displays which sometimes include subject level descriptors that help pupils understand what they need to do in order to progress up to the next level. This good practice is not consistent throughout the school.

Although the teachers' assessment of individual pupils is good and assists in the development of personal learning programmes, objectives in a minority of pupils' individual education plans are insufficiently focussed on progress in learning or behaviour. One of the school's key objectives is to enable pupils to work independently in order to maximise their opportunities after school. In some pupils' folders, teachers' annotations don't always indicate to what extent the pupil worked unaided to complete tasks. However, external moderation of pupils' work is well established within accredited programmes.

Monitoring of classroom practice by senior managers gives them a sound overview of the quality of teaching although self evaluation using assessment data is in the early stages of development. Systematic evaluation of whole-school academic achievement and target setting are underdeveloped.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most pupils respond well to the provision of regular opportunities to reflect on their behaviour, achievements and attitudes to learning and other people. Some pupils' personal development is good, for example, they learn to manage their behaviour more effectively and their learning improves as a result. A minority of pupils do not respond so well to the school's efforts and this is reflected in the persistent non-attendance and underachievement.

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. All pupils are encouraged to consider themselves responsible for their own behaviour and their impact on others. Most respond positively to the school's points system which recognises and rewards positive attitudes to learning and other people. Although all pupils find relationships difficult,

there are frequent examples when they fully engage in lessons and appreciate the praise and support they are offered. The pupils show age-appropriate maturity moving around the school site as it undergoes improvements.

Pupils have few opportunities to contribute to the school community as no particular responsibilities are offered. They understand the role of local institutions such as the police, fire and coastguard services. Attendance at college is an option for older pupils as is work experience. They raise money annually for charities such as MacMillan nurses and gain an understanding within the curriculum of anti-racism and respect for different faiths.

Through the curriculum they learn to understand some of the issues related to caring for their immediate environment, including animals, and what it takes financially to live independently. Accreditation of these activities assists their future economic well-being.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The individual tuition and the regard for their individual needs ensure that the pupils receive close attention and supervision from staff. The morning briefing enables staff to share information about pupils' welfare issues. The school maintains good working relationships with external agencies to promote the health and well-being of its pupils, for example, Connexions and medical staff.

The school's policies promote the pupils' health, safety and welfare on site although risk assessments for visits off site are not always fully completed. For example, risks are identified but measures to reduce such risks are not. The supervision of pupils in school is appropriate, particularly when they experience problems in lessons. Students' behaviour is satisfactory overall and sometimes good, for example, when near or using motorised bikes. Inclusion staff are readily available to support pupils and teachers. One student was observed using milling machinery in a safe manner when making a clock. Arrangements for child protection are good and pupils indicate that they feel confident to talk to staff if they have problems. The school's policies for the promotion of good behaviour and administering first aid are well understood. Accidents and incidents are recorded in detail.

Routine attention to health and safety is satisfactory. Systematic checks are made on portable electrical equipment and a recent review in relation to fire safety has been completed. However, the school has not yet received the written report to ensure all risks have been properly assessed and addressed. Registers of attendance are maintained regularly and the school uses every measure at its disposal to reduce absence. The school's recent attention to its admissions register has ensured that it now contains all the required information. The proprietor is yet to create an appropriate three year plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has established appropriate safeguards to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures are appropriately informed by the most recent guidance, and include the maintenance of a single central register of the checks made.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are adequate. The site offers a suitable number of classrooms and teaching areas for the numbers on roll. The classrooms are of appropriate size for individual tuition and small groups. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of all available space and some rooms display pupils' work that aids motivation. Rooms are suitably equipped for specialist teaching in art, science, design technology, and the workshop is well used for pupils to learn about vehicle mechanics. The large central area affords an adequate area for indoor play. The number of washrooms is adequate.

Situated on farmland, the outdoor areas are suitable for the pupils to learn about animal husbandry and work skills including maintenance to the property. The site has some ageing temporary accommodation that the proprietor has identified for improvement or replacement. Minor works are already underway to improve access to the school site.

In support of the curriculum, good use is made of local community sports centres for team games and swimming. When appropriate, pupils attend local schools and colleges of further education. Occasionally, trips are made to local places of interest.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is satisfactory and meets all requirements. The school maintains good contact with parents and carers by regular telephone calls and progress meetings. When necessary, home visits are made. Termly written progress reports are adequate overall but some say too little about pupils' academic targets and gains they have made in their knowledge, skills and understanding. A notable exception is the reports in design technology. The quality of reporting is better in the reviews of pupils' statements of special needs and for those who are in care. The school's attractive website is a source of useful information.

Parents and carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that they are satisfied with the information they receive from the school. The school routinely seeks their views about its effectiveness to gain feedback as to how it may improve its work further.

No feedback was received from local authorities who place pupils at the school. However, as required, they do receive an annual account of how their funding for pupils has been spent.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints policy and procedures for handling complaints are satisfactory.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

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

- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils 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))
- ensure the school has a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and by a report from the Fire Authority (paragraph 3(5)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- provide more opportunities for pupils to learn together so that they may improve their abilities to work productively alongside others
- ensure that all reports on pupils' progress are as good as the best examples in the school.

School details

Name of school	Headstart		
DCSF number	845/6051		
Unique reference number	134148		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2000		
Age range of pupils	12-17		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 4	Girls: 2	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,000 - £45,000		
Address of school	Crouch Lane Ninfield Nr Battle East Sussex TN33 9EG		
Telephone number	01424 893803		
Fax number	01424 893803		
Email address	nickidann@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Ms Nicki Dann		
Proprietor	Ms Nicki Dann		
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell AI		
Dates of inspection	17-18 January 2008		