

Smallbrook School

Independent special school standard inspection report

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Smallbrook is an independent day special school which provides for up to 18 boys and girls aged 11 to 19 years who have behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties and associated challenging behaviours. Smallbrook is located near the centre of Whitchurch, in Shropshire. The school forms part of the integrated provision of education, care and therapy provided by the Bryn Melyn Care organisation. All students are looked after by Bryn Melyn Care, and are referred and funded by their local authorities. There are currently 15 students on roll, 10 of whom have statements of their special educational needs. Six students are in Key Stage 3, eight in Key Stage 4 and one student is of post-16 age. The overall aim of the school is 'to encourage and promote effective, individualised learning through activities that are designed to enthuse, motivate and challenge students, thus broadening their outlook on life, their perception of the world around them and their future aspirations.' The school first opened in 2001 and was last inspected in October 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Smallbrook provides good quality education. The curriculum is outstanding and students make good academic progress. Provision for students' health, safety, welfare and personal development is good and, as a result, students' behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are also good. Students are safeguarded well by robust arrangements. The school has grown and developed considerably since the last inspection, due to good leadership, management and support from the Bryn Melyn organisation. The school meets its aims and all but one of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. Students each have an individual curriculum that is tailored especially for them. The curriculum has developed considerably since the last inspection and its development continues. It includes a broad range of subjects that promote students' academic and vocational skills, and their health, safety and personal development. All subjects, including vocational subjects, lead to accreditation, and a wide range of accreditation is offered that suits students' diverse

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

needs, abilities and interests. Having gained accreditation in a particular subject, for example at GCSE entry level, students are encouraged to progress to a higher level. Information and communication technology is used well in most classroom-based lessons. High quality provision for art, music and media studies provides students with many opportunities to develop their creative skills and self-esteem. One outstanding example observed was a short video piece combining acting, music, graphics, puppetry and great student talent. Where possible, students have work experience placements and follow additional courses at local training centres and colleges. Good use is made of external facilities and organisations to enhance the curriculum, for example sports coaches and the Forest School organisation. The school has facilities for some vocational courses, such as vehicle maintenance, and students are currently building a small pottery as part of their construction studies. Smallbrook is about to open additional premises which will provide vocational courses on a much larger scale for students in Key Stage 4 and post-16. There is good collaboration between school and students' homes, and some aspects of the curriculum are completed at home with individual support from their care workers. The curriculum prepares students very well for the next steps in their lives and for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall, but teaching is a considerable strength of the school. Students' behaviour in lessons is good because it is well managed by staff and by the use of the school's systems. Students generally concentrate and apply themselves very well, and make good academic progress. Progress in personal development is often outstanding. Teachers universally show good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well, and make the lessons interesting and relevant to students' needs and interests. Most teaching takes place on an individual basis, often with the additional support of students' care workers who accompany them from home. This results in a professional, tutorial-like atmosphere in which every moment of the lesson is tailored to meet the individual's needs. Some opportunities are provided for learning in small groups, and lunch and the morning meeting involve all students. This provides them with experience of 'real life' where they have to learn to get on with one another. Teaching is often outstanding. This is characterised by an outstanding relationship between student and teacher, whereby the lesson becomes collaborative. For example, in a science lesson, the teacher and student seamlessly interchanged roles to weigh out marble chips, measure out dilutions of acid, add the two together and time the production of a test tube of gas. The teacher's ongoing commentary ensured that the student was drawing conclusions throughout. On another such occasion, a student and teacher worked together, using an advanced computer programme, to record a beautiful error-free piece of piano music played by the student.

Assessment is good. Students' skills are thoroughly assessed when they first join the school. This informs the construction of their individual programmes of study and further assessments take place periodically which provide additional diagnostic and summative information. Very detailed termly, individual education plans are devised. These closely reflect the targets on students' statements of special educational needs, including behavioural targets, and also outline all the targets for each unit of

work in every subject studied. The date of achievement of each target is noted, and this forms an accurate on-going record of learning and progress towards accreditation. However, the assessment of students' attainment against national data in academic subjects, and a means of similarly tracking progress are not yet in place. Consequently, students do not always understand what they need to do to move up to or beyond expectations for their age, and the school cannot reliably compare their attainment and progress with national expectations. This development, though, is planned for introduction shortly.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. It is supported very well by the curriculum, the school's reward and sanctions system and the individual approach taken to students' education. Relationships between staff and students are outstanding. Students' attitudes to school and their work are good, and are reflected in the good progress they make in their studies, behaviour, personal development, and their enjoyment of much that the school has to offer. The school environment is untouched by damage or graffiti, which reflects students' positive feelings towards school.

Students' self-esteem improves significantly alongside their academic success and personal development. With support they become increasingly self-aware, confident and happy. Most students are in no hurry to leave at the end of the day. They understand their own difficulties, and generally have the confidence to say what triggers their challenging behaviour and how they try to control it. Although attendance is below average overall, the attendance of most students is greatly improved in comparison to that in their previous schools. Students express aspirations for the future, for example, one student was about to apply for a position in a restaurant kitchen as a first step towards becoming a chef. Questionnaire returns from students, parents, carers and local authorities confirm that students enjoy school and benefit from it.

Although still challenging at times, the students' behaviour is good overall. It improves with the support of school, home and therapy. Students learn to take responsibility for themselves. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and know that their actions have consequences. The 'points' system contributes effectively to this, and students enjoy planning what their reward activity might be. During the inspection, they suggested ice skating, prompted by the snowy weather. Students come to understand the basic institutions, rules and services of a democratic society through curriculum studies and visits. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community, for example, through the school 'brain trust', raising money for charity and sharing the responsibility for making lunch for the school community. The curriculum supports students' cultural development very well, through the high quality provision for music, art and media studies, and the focus on the traditions of other cultures taught in a range of subjects.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for students' welfare, health and safety. Child protection and staff recruitment procedures are very thorough and are underpinned by Bryn Melyn's robust practices. Staff members undergo suitable training to ensure that statutory requirements are met, for example in safeguarding, fire safety and positive handling. They also undertake other training to support their work and professional development. The school does all it can to minimise risk, including any risk of confrontation between students. Risk assessments of students and on- and off-site activities are frequently revised and are embedded in everyday practice, for example, including the risk associated with the tradition of setting light to the Christmas pudding. The school has a suitable three-year accessibility plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended). However, the attendance and admission registers are not kept as required, and this regulation is not met.

Outstanding consideration is given to each student's individual needs and well-being. The high quality collaborative work between the school, therapists and children's homes is fundamental to this, as is the individual approach taken to each student's education. Outstanding support is given to help students lead safe and healthy lives. The students are well safeguarded by a number of school and company policies and practices. Their physical health is strongly promoted through a wide range of curriculum activities such as Forest School and outdoor education, sports reward activities, and the emphasis on healthy eating and no smoking. The school has gained the Platinum Healthy Eating Award. Students' emotional and mental health is of great importance to Bryn Melyn. These are very effectively supported by direct therapy, the school's supportive ethos and through curriculum subjects such as personal, social and health education. This helps students to develop self-esteem and more appropriate behaviour and relationships, and supports their future well-being very effectively.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All regulations are met in relation to checking the suitability of the proprietor and staff, and details are entered as required in a single central record.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school occupies an extended detached house in a residential area close to the centre of Whitchurch. It is set in a large garden which is used for break times and also for domestic horticulture and animal care. The school has been completely refurbished since the last inspection. It now provides very good accommodation which enables students to learn safely and effectively. Classrooms are very well resourced for everyday teaching and learning. They are organised and resourced as specialist subject bases which contributes to the school's professional atmosphere. The accommodation is considerably enhanced by good quality displays of students' work and art, and commercial support for learning.

Provision of information

The prospectus provides all the information required by the regulations and indicates what additional information can be requested. This is supplemented effectively by the Bryn Melyn website which contains more detail about the organisation's holistic approach to students' education, care and therapy. Good quality reports on students' progress in academic subjects and personal development are provided for parents and carers, and to local authorities for students' various reviews.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clear policy and procedure to address any complaints, and an appropriate additional procedure to address any complaints made by students. All regulations are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

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

- maintain admission and attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- implement a system to assess students' attainment in relation to national norms, and to track their progress in relation to national data for all pupils and for those with special educational needs, and
- use this information to help students understand what exactly they need to do or learn to move up to or beyond expectations for their age
- determine how to increase opportunities for learning in small groups while continuing to minimise risks to health and safety.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

Inspection judgements

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

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special day		
Date school opened	12 November 2001		
Age range of pupils	11-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 8	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 6	Girls: 4	Total: 10
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 8	Total: 15
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,000		
Address of school	Smallbrook Lodge, Smallbrook Road, Whitchurch, SY13 1BX		
Telephone number	01948 661110		
Email address	peter.sinclair@brynmelyncare.com		
Headteacher	Peter Sinclair		
Proprietor	Steve Nevitt		