Southover Partnership School
Independent Special School
Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number 302/6121
Unique Reference Number 135373
Inspection number 321994
Inspection dates 11 June 2008
Reporting inspector Heather Yaxley HMI

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).
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

This is the first published inspection report for Southover Partnership School since it was registered in August 2007. The school is owned and managed by the Southover Partnership and is registered to take a maximum of 20 students between the ages of 11 and 17. There are currently nine students on roll. The Partnership has provided part-time education for students who were excluded from mainstream schools, or who were at risk of becoming so, for many years. Following a registration visit by Ofsted in July 2007, the provision was registered as a school, having expanded its remit to offer students full-time education. All students are funded by their local authority (LA) and eight have statements of special educational need, most relating to their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The length of their stay varies. The school’s vision is to 'provide flexible and individually tailored education for young people out of school and, within a therapeutic ethos build trusting relationships that enable children to achieve'.

Evaluation of the school

This is a good school where staff work very well together and with relevant partners to provide students with an education that is carefully tailored to their personal needs. Good teaching and a good curriculum ensure that students make good progress from their starting points in academic and personal skills. With very good pastoral support from staff, students rise to the challenge of working hard and maintaining good behaviour. Inspection questionnaires show that parents, carers and LA officers are very positive about the education that the students receive at the school and this inspection confirms that their confidence is well-placed. The school evaluates the quality of its work well, accurately identifying strengths and areas for development. With the exception of one requirement, the school meets all of the requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good because it is highly flexible, enabling students to follow courses of their choice and enabling teachers to plan effectively to meet students’ individual needs for academic and personal development. The school goes out of its way to provide students with individually tailored learning programmes and the curriculum plans, matched to staff expertise, enable this to happen. The curriculum
offers students a good balance of basic skills and vocational education. All courses are linked to nationally recognised accreditations, usually towards GCSE, helping students to quickly appreciate that when they take their learning seriously and work hard they can gain valued and relevant qualifications. This contributes significantly to their improved behaviour and self-esteem, as well as developing their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

There are two strands to the curriculum. The first centres on lessons in school. English and mathematics are given high priority in the students’ weekly timetables. Other subjects taken include drama, art, design and technology, graphics and Russian, and there are community projects such as gardening. The second strand concerns off-site vocational education, provided by a private company Works Skills Learning, who work closely in partnership with the school. Subjects offered include creative craft, food technology, photography and a range of sports including swimming and table-tennis.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is taught through other subjects. The scheme of work provides activities for a range of learning objectives to support students’ personal development. However, it is not always easy to see how these learning objectives relate to students’ individual needs and similarly makes it difficult to track the progress that they are making in their personal skills. Nevertheless, curricular activities support personal development well, including extending their experiences through educational visits to places such as the National Gallery, the RAF Hendon Museum, the Museum of Domestic Architecture and to a commercial printer.

The school’s individual approach to the curriculum requires a high level of consultation with the students and their families. Because the school is able to accommodate their expressed preferences, there is a high level of commitment to the programme by the students. This approach also means that all parties have a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities. As a result, students are well-motivated, their attendance improves considerably, they achieve well and, even when faced with difficult times and challenges, they quickly resume their studies because they want to do the work and they want to achieve.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall, with considerable strengths in teaching, and areas to develop further relating to assessment. The personalised curriculum necessitates individual teaching, and teachers are often supported by teaching assistants. Such high levels of staffing can only contribute to students’ learning effectively when relationships between all involved are of high quality, and this is most certainly the case. Lessons are very well-planned and characteristically include a range of activities to support the learning objectives, which can be delivered flexibly according to the students’ motivations and behaviour at any one time. In this way the pace of lessons sensitively matches the needs of the students and they generally concentrate well for extended periods of time.
Not all teachers are specialists in their subjects but this does not detract from the quality of learning in lessons because teachers make good use of the schemes of work. This, together with teachers’ experiences and expertise ensure that lessons are planned well to meet the needs of the students as well as for the course requirements. Where students have a relatively limited amount of time to complete courses, teachers cover the required knowledge, skills and understanding well by focusing on key vocabulary and concepts. Additionally, they use students’ contributions to extend their thinking and application of the learning very skilfully.

Students make good progress, achieving well in tests and examinations. Teachers’ daily assessments of students’ progress and behaviour in lessons confirms this in great detail. These assessments provide a wealth of useful information about how well students are doing. Nevertheless, staff do not always make the best use of this information. The way that the information is gathered sometimes makes it difficult to see exactly how much progress students have made in relation to their personal targets because there is insufficient, specific reference to them. Similarly, reference to progress linked to PSHE objectives is not specific enough.

**Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

The school makes good provision for students’ personal development, enabling them to develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. There are times when, as expected, students find it difficult to manage their behaviour. However, in relation to their complex personal circumstances and difficulties, students make good progress in moderating their behaviour to acceptable levels. This is because they trust the adults to help them to learn and apply strategies to re-think situations when problems occur. Their increasing ability to acknowledge their part in a problem and make appropriate reparation is particularly impressive. Students are generally tolerant of one another.

All students are purposefully engaged in their education to the level of their ability. Their attendance is good, they want to be in school and they want to succeed. Maintaining the focus on their education is made possible because their self-esteem improves alongside success in tests and examinations. In addition to this, students are clearly proud of their accomplishments, for example, in renovating the community garden, qualifications in table-tennis, learning to swim, the production of three-dimensional pieces of art and craft work, and commercially printed graphics.

Students particularly enjoy educational visits, demonstrating not only an interest in the activity but also proving how they can act responsibly within the community. These experiences also extend their spiritual and cultural development well. For those students who feel able to participate in drama, there are good opportunities to explore thoughts, feelings and general well-being. The PSHE curriculum provides an awareness of public institutions and services, including monthly visits from the local police liaison officers.
Students are well-prepared for the next stage in their education. When they leave the school, either at the end of Y11 or when moving to another school, they take with them a range of relevant accreditation and portfolios of work. Their active participation and enthusiastic approach to vocational opportunities provide those moving on to college or employment with relevant skills for the workplace.

**Welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The school’s processes and procedures to ensure the welfare, health and safety of students, staff and visitors are good. The effective implementation of policies ensures that the school provides a calm, purposeful learning environment. There is a suitably high focus on health and safety, particularly in relation to students’ behavioural needs. The school has not yet established a three-year plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and is currently consulting on its disability equality scheme. All other appropriate practices and procedures are in place, supported effectively by a range of relevant polices.

Risk assessments are thorough and include detailed pre-admission assessments. This ensures that, from the students’ first day in school, staff are fully aware of their individual social and emotional needs, as well as any potential difficulties and how best to address them. Established procedures help students to settle quickly and to feel safe and secure. Staff are highly committed to the students and there is a correspondingly high level of trust between staff, students and their families. Above all, students know that the staff are serious about helping them overcome their difficulties. Staff are well-trained and experienced in addressing challenging behaviour. Records show that incidents are managed well, with a focus on positive conclusions so that trusting relationships are maintained. These records are sufficiently detailed but staff do not make best use of the information to track the effectiveness of their interventions and strategies on students’ behavioural development.

Healthy lifestyles and emotional well-being are promoted effectively through PSHE and sport. Smoking is a problem for some students and although they sometimes smoke on-site, this is managed carefully by the school.

**Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

All appropriate steps are taken to ensure that only suitable staff work with students. Recruitment and appointment procedures are thorough. Office staff are methodical and meticulous in their maintenance of personnel records.

**School’s premises and accommodation**

In response to the different needs of the students, education takes place in a range of settings, including tuition at home or at local meeting places. Most lessons take place in rooms that are rented from a venue in Finchley. This accommodation provides a suitable learning environment although display space and dedicated
learning areas are limited because of its shared use. Nevertheless, the accommodation is spacious and provides students with a purposeful learning environment. There is a small garden area, recently renovated by the students. All physical education activity takes place at local facilities.

**Provision of information for parents, carers and others**

The school’s web-site provides a range of useful information about the school. This is supplemented by handbooks for students, families and LAs. Parents and carers are kept well-informed about their child’s progress by regular telephone calls and emails, and termly reports. Good links exist between LAs and the school.

**Procedures for handling complaints**

The school has a suitable policy for handling complaints and reports that there have been no formal complaints over the past year.

**Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005. However:

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:

- develop the PSHE curriculum further to show how activities relate to personal programmes
- make better use of assessment information to link it more closely with learning objectives and PSHE targets
- revise the incident reporting system to make better use of the information when monitoring students’ behaviour.
School details

Name of school
DCSF number
Unique reference number
Type of school
Status
Date school opened
Age range of pupils
Gender of pupils
Number on roll (full-time pupils)
Number on roll (part-time pupils)
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need
Number of pupils who are looked after
Annual fees (day pupils)
Address of school
Telephone number
Fax number
Email address
Headteachers
Proprietor
Reporting inspector
Dates of inspection

Southover Partnership School
302/6121
135373
Special
Independent
2005
11-17
Mixed
Boys: 5   Girls: 1   Total: 6
Boys: 3   Girls: 0   Total: 3
Boys: 7   Girls: 1   Total: 8
Boys: 3   Girls: 0   Total: 3
£64,000
322A Ballards Lane
London
N12 0EY
020 8446 0300
020 8446 0430
info@southoverpartnership.com
Carol Frankl
Helen Jackson
The Southover Partnership Limited
Heather Yaxley HMI
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