

Inspection report

Belmont School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 888/6029

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.

Information about the school

Belmont School, situated in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, is a day school for up to 86 boys who have emotional and behavioural difficulties and who are aged between 10 and 16. There are currently 83 pupils from the age of 11 attending the school. All are placed in the school by their local authorities and have statements of special educational need relating to behaviour. Many also have learning difficulties and disabilities. A small but increasing number of pupils have additional difficulties, such as speech and language difficulties, autism, or Asperger's Syndrome. Many pupils have diagnosed hyperactivity and take regular medication. A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic or mixed ethnic backgrounds.

Pupils mainly come from the surrounding areas of East Lancashire; although some come from authorities further away that involve journeys of up to an hour. All have previously experienced disrupted education and have been excluded from one or more schools. They come to the school with poor attitudes to learning, low self-esteem and a history of verbal or physical aggression. As a consequence, when they enter the school, most of the pupils are attaining levels below those expected for pupils of the same age, although occasionally a pupil is admitted who is performing at an average level.

Summary of main findings

This is a highly effective school where pupils develop more positive attitudes about themselves, towards other people and towards learning. They improve their ability to manage their behaviour. The very strong leadership and the effective management team have developed a school where there are high expectations for teaching, learning, achievement, and the well-being of pupils. There is consistent management of behaviour throughout the school, with good and sometimes outstanding teaching, and a good curriculum. This takes place in high quality specialist teaching areas and with a good range of resources. All this ensures that pupils improve their attendance, re-engage in learning, take pride in their achievements, and leave education with a good range of relevant external accreditation. As pupils settle into the school, they respond very positively to the routines and the high expectations of them. Pupils' behaviour is excellent, and although there are times when they show anger or are difficult, they show respect for their surroundings, for the adults who work with them, and towards visitors. There is a high emphasis placed on preparing pupils to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, including work and further education, developing acceptable behaviour in different situations, knowing right from wrong, and being healthy.

What the school does well:

- it helps pupils improve their behaviour, gain self esteem and develop very good relationships;
- it ensures that pupils achieve well and leave school with an appropriate range of external qualifications;
- it recruits staff with relevant subject expertise and trains them very well so that the quality of teaching is consistently good and on occasions excellent;
- the leadership and the management team set high expectations throughout the school and ensure that there are robust monitoring procedures;
- it provides high quality accommodation and resources, which pupils treat with respect; and
- it makes sure that pupils are safe, secure and well cared for.

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

The school complies with all the regulations.

Next Steps

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

- ensure that all lesson planning is of an equally high standard.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a good curriculum which reflects its aims, focusing on motivating pupils to engage in learning so that they achieve their potential, and equipping them with the necessary numeracy and literacy skills for adulthood. The curriculum also ensures that, when they leave school, pupils move onto further education and training and take with them externally recognised accreditation. The school provides all the subjects of the National Curriculum and a programme of personal, social, health education and citizenship. The planning of subjects draws on National Curriculum guidelines and the schemes of work for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or Entry Level Certificate (ELC). Pupils take GCSEs or ELCs in up to eight subjects. They achieve well, gaining as high as B or C grades. The use of different types of accreditation allows pupils of all abilities to leave school having achieved well. For many this is in sharp contrast to their achievements before coming to the school.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is very good. The school recognises that many pupils come to the school with literacy difficulties. These are very well identified through initial assessment. Pupils with such difficulties receive additional support and monitoring from a specialist support teacher who works in a one-to-one situation on individual targets. This support is extended by the sharing of the information on each pupil with their classroom support worker, who along with the teacher, modifies the tasks or activities to meet the needs of the pupil.

All subjects, except for physical education, are taught in specialist rooms and all are well resourced. The lack of a space for physical education does not undermine the range of sports activities, as very good use is made of the local leisure facilities.

The school has developed the careers and work-related aspects of the curriculum. Pupils are successfully taking part in local college link courses and work experience placements. Pupils and their families are well supported by the Connexions Service which helps the school to provide careers advice and also support and guidance specific to the needs of the pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons it is outstanding. The management's decision to recruit teachers with subject expertise, and in some cases support them through the graduate training scheme, has been very effective. Consequently pupils are taught by teachers with specialist subject knowledge and are set challenging work which enables them to achieve GCSE successes. The school has developed a consistent approach to managing behaviour which all teachers fully understand and apply. This is based on getting to know pupils very well, in terms of what they can achieve, what they find difficult and their different learning styles. Teachers plan lessons so that pupils are presented with a variety of activities or tasks and have no time in which to become restless or bored. Pupils

come to accept that learning is the priority in lessons. Behaviour is excellent, with all pupils willing to learn and interested in their work.

The teamwork between the teachers and the pupils' support workers is of a very high standard. The support workers are attached to groups of pupils and follow them into each lesson. This enables them to monitor the pupils' behaviour and progress across a week and also to provide the teachers with ongoing information about any difficulties pupils are experiencing.

The school has good assessment systems in place. Recent improvements have been made to the assessment of pupils when they first come to the school so that any difficulties are identified. An assessment of achievement and effort is made in every lesson and recorded so that progress can be checked and monitored. Assessment of learning in lessons has developed well. Most teachers are using questioning at the end of each lesson in order to see how much pupils have understood. However, the quality of lesson planning varies between teachers and where it is weakest the teachers do not identify what they want the pupils to achieve. This does not support their ongoing assessment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. This is immediately evident in the pleasant atmosphere and very orderly behaviour of pupils around the school. Relationships are very good and contribute to a supportive learning and social environment. Religious education is taught throughout the school and focuses on all major world faiths and leading personalities. In the course of their activities, pupils create and appreciate memorable and impressive moments. Year tutors base daily discussions in assembly on topical issues drawn from newspapers. The ethos of the school is based on a strong understanding of acceptable behaviour and of each pupil's responsibility to his peers and the school. More vulnerable pupils are supported and encouraged by others. Older pupils become role models and influence others.

There are many strengths in pupils' social development, such as the breakfast, the assembly and activities in year groups, the school council and sporting activities. The school has an increasingly multi-ethnic population of both pupils and staff and there are good relationships and mutual respect between ethnic groups. The curriculum contains planned opportunities for the appreciation of other cultures, especially in humanities and art. Cultural understanding is encouraged through visits to museums and art galleries.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes very good overall provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils, and some elements of the provision are excellent. A well thought out range of policies and procedures addresses all aspects of pupils' welfare. The management of the school have ensured that there are good, comprehensive, appropriate and monitored procedures to safeguard pupils. For example, they provide a transparent, recorded, detailed trail of any incidents necessitating sanctions, including physical intervention, from initial incident through intervention to monitoring and recording of the sanctions and outcomes. Detailed behaviour and anti-bullying policies outline the school's ethos and approach and give clear details of sanctions and rewards.

Pupils are closely supervised and this ensures their safety at all times. All the pupil support workers are qualified in First Aid. When visits are undertaken outside school, detailed risk assessments form part of a comprehensive checking system.

Staff have a clear understanding of school policies and they implement them sensibly and sensitively.

The school is conscious of its responsibilities to provide access to the school and to the curriculum for pupils who have disabilities, and much is already in place to help the school meet those responsibilities. This includes a development plan for the accessibility of the building.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school takes all possible steps to be sure of the suitability of staff before confirming appointments. All identities, qualifications and health records are verified and clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is obtained. Longer-serving staff have undergone standard police checks, and have recently applied for CRB clearance so as to update those checks.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

Accommodation is of a high standard and some is outstanding. Education is provided in three buildings. All are in a good state of repair, and classrooms are appropriate in size for the activities which take place in them. Some of the rooms are sufficiently spacious to accommodate larger groups, such as drama workshops or for upper or lower school populations to come together. The school has specialist teaching areas for most subjects and the more recently opened building has a purpose-built science room. They are safe, hygienic, and well lit, heated and ventilated, although the ICT suite becomes hot and stuffy. The standard of

decoration is satisfactory, and is often very good. There is good access to the buildings for those with disabilities. The site includes reasonably sized hard play areas.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

There is an informative prospectus for parents and professionals that provides guidance on expectations and routines. This is supplemented by a more pupil-friendly version which helps young people understand the rules and routines. The school has a clear admissions policy which, after referral by the local authority, includes pupil and family interviews and visits to the pupils' homes.

Information for parents or carers is regular, with informative reports each term on academic progress, effort, behaviour and attendance. The information for these reports is collated through a very structured system and provides the basis for the annual review. The school holds regular review meetings to which all interested parties and professionals involved are invited and to which they may contribute. Detailed information concerning pupils' targets, their academic and personal achievements, as well as any concerns about them, is available for pupils, parents, carers and other professionals involved with the pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a detailed and comprehensive complaints procedure that is clearly outlined in an informative policy document. All parents or carers are provided with a copy when pupils are admitted and the school makes further copies available on request. The complaints procedure includes clear time-scales for the informal and formal stages of a complaint and there is an appeal stage with a panel that includes an independent representative. The complaints procedures link well to the procedures for recording incidents.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Belmont School
DfES Number:	888/6029
Type of school:	Special day school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	10 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Boys
Number on roll:	83
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	83
Annual fees:	£24,210
Address of school:	Haslingden Road Rawtenstall Lancashire BB4 6RX
Telephone number:	01706 221043
Fax number:	01706 234685
Email address:	admin@belmontschool.net
Headteacher (Acting):	Mr M Stobart
Principal:	Mr G S McEwan
Proprietors:	Belmont School Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs F Gander
Date of inspection:	27 February – 2 March 2006

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