

Olsen House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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

Olsen House School occupies a former local authority primary school in Crosby, Merseyside. This single-site facility is located on a busy main road surrounded by residential and commercial properties. Part of the premises has been isolated from the school and leased to a charity to provide vocational training opportunities for young people. Olsen House was registered in early 2010, opened in July of that year and this is the first inspection undertaken by Ofsted. It can admit up to 30 boys and girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties between nine and 16 years of age. Currently, there are 13 students in Key Stages 3 and 4, the great majority of whom have previously experienced severe disruptions to their education. All have a statement of special educational needs and a number have additional learning difficulties associated with communication disorders.

Olsen House has gained the Positive About Disabled symbol, and achieved the International School Award at Foundation level. It aims to prepare students for the future through a modern curriculum that meets their individual needs. The school sets out to provide 'an honest environment' where students are valued and supported. It desires to present opportunities for them to reach their full potential in life through the application of its motto of 'life-long learning and achievement'.

Evaluation of the school

Olsen House provides good education and, after only a short period of operation, it is already highly valued by students, parents and several local authorities. The school is beginning to demonstrate that it meets its declared aims and it complies with all regulations. Students settle quickly into the school and most begin to attend regularly. They say that they enjoy school, feel very safe here and that their behaviour improves rapidly because of the good social and moral support that they receive from the dedicated and experienced staff. Students are well cared for and the good welfare, health and safety practices are exemplified by the high standards of safeguarding and child protection procedures that the school maintains.

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

Quality of education

The curriculum is good because it successfully meets the needs and interests of individual students. For example, most have timetables with unique elements that allow for individual tuition in any core subjects requiring extra attention. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is innovative and designed to be thematic. Nevertheless, it is thorough in its coverage of the National Curriculum and provides good opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills and understanding of subjects in an interesting manner. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are embedded into the lessons and students are encouraged to develop basic skills that enhance their studies such as learning how to undertake research and to work cooperatively together. However, the literacy, numeracy and ICT contents are not always described well in teachers' planning and detail is often lacking. Consequently, opportunities are sometimes missed for students to make even better progress in developing their key skills.

The curriculum for Key Stage 4 is highly individualised. Students can undertake courses off-site in vocational education or at college according to their ability and interests. Some attend the recently-established vocational centre that is located next door with which the school has developed a close working relationship. All Key Stage 4 students are required to spend time working on English, mathematics and other subjects. Most courses are linked to accreditation and the school carefully matches these to students' levels of ability. Consequently, opportunities are available ranging from Entry Level qualifications to GCSEs and their equivalents. Olsen House provides careers information to older students and an advisor from the Connexions Service is linked with the school.

Teaching and assessment are good. Teaching is good because students engage in their lessons, stay on task and behave well. Therefore, learning is able to take place. Teachers and teaching assistants often collaborate productively to ensure that students have plenty of variety in their lessons with the correct degree of support. For example, in one lesson observed the teacher and assistant took it in turns to deliver a variety of activities in different ways. Staff are confident in their subject knowledge and they make good use of resources to help students maintain their attention and to prevent them from becoming distracted. Teachers' planning aims to meet the needs of individuals through employing personalised lesson targets and staff provide opportunities for independent work to take place. These strategies help students to understand how to make progress in the lesson and to know what is expected of them. However, staff do not always use concise language when describing the targets and consequently outcomes become difficult to assess during the lesson.

All students make good progress through the tasks they undertake in lessons. The school maintains accurate records of their achievements and attainments and these indicate that, from very low starting points for their age, students make good progress in the school over time. Senior staff are aware that in due course they should replace the current assessment system and develop a more sophisticated

system of assessment, recording and reporting that will allow them to compare the progress of their students with those in other similar schools.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Students report that they enjoy coming to school and this is demonstrated through their rapidly improved attendance and participation in lessons. One student, when asked about the good aspects of the school replied, 'just being here is best!' Students' behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding because they respond well to the rewards and sanctions of the behaviour policy. Aspects of the curriculum such as personal, social and health education (PSHE) help them to learn about right and wrong and also about public institutions, whilst trips and visits out of school encourage students to meet with others and respect their differences. Excursions off-site to sports centres, the climbing wall and places of worship occur as a regular part of the curriculum and these activities bring them productively into contact with others.

Students' understanding of how others work and live is also supported by engagement with vocational courses and through work placements. Students generally maintain positive attitudes towards each other and the adults with whom they work. For example, they appreciate that the frustrations occurring during lessons can be quickly resolved through employing the skills and experience of the staff in the effective 'time-out' system. This generally ensures that students can be rapidly returned to class. Students gain skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT that, together with the work experiences and placements in Key Stage 4, improve their chances of finding employment when they leave school. These activities with their associated successes help them to gain in self-confidence and self-esteem. This is recognised by parents and carers, one of whom told the inspector 'the best thing that ever happened to my child was to come here!'

All students and staff come together several times each day to consider behaviour and progress in lessons. These gatherings allow for moments of quiet reflection. Thus, students get to know about right and wrong from the staff who provide excellent role models and manage the effective behaviour support system. Students are learning to contribute to lessons and to these gatherings. Furthermore, some have opportunities to make their voices heard through the school council that is becoming effective in acknowledging the views of students and making changes to the school as a result. All take part in the charitable events that raise money for causes such as Children in Need, Jeans for Genes and Shelter.

In Key Stage 3 students gain insight through their studies into the way that people live in different places around the world. Spiritual education is promoted well and students have plenty of opportunity to learn about religions, values and lifestyles. They meet visiting speakers who come in to school. Students also learn about cultural practices through the celebration of feast days from around the world such

as American Thanksgiving Day. Aspects of these celebrations are incorporated into lessons.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of students is good overall with outstanding procedures for safeguarding that are robust and effective. All staff have undertaken training to the required standard and several staff, including all of the senior team, are trained to a standard acceptable to the local authority as practitioners in child protection. Additionally, the school employs the services of a safeguarding consultant. Consequently, procedures are in place to ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding and child protection issues. Students are kept aware of who the designated persons are through notices and reminders in gatherings. The required policies and procedures are well written, refer to the latest government guidance and cross refer to each other where appropriate. All policies and procedures associated with recruitment, safeguarding and child protection are reviewed annually by the proprietor.

Students are encouraged to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles through the wide range of physical and sporting activities that are offered. For example, students enjoy playing sports against other local schools and they were observed, during the inspection, using a local climbing wall to practise and develop their skills. Physical education is an important part of the timetable and arrangements are made to provide activities that match the interests of individuals such as using the trampoline. Students are encouraged to access the outside areas during breaktimes to enjoy the open air and reduce their stress levels. Staff and students cooperate in the school council to ensure that healthy menus and plenty of choices are available for school lunches.

Students report that they feel very safe in school and this view is supported by parents and carers. They claim that bullying and harassment are rare. They have confidence in staff to deal with any issues that might arise. Students are learning to be supportive of each other through the systems in place during gatherings and through the skills of cooperation that they learn in classes. Additionally, anti-bullying and other initiatives reduce antagonism so that behaviour is improved and all can feel safer as a consequence. Advisors and agencies, including the school nurse, help students to stay informed about issues that they face in everyday life such as sexual health and drugs awareness. Positive relationships with the police enable officers to visit the school to engage in discussions with students about issues such as gangs and knife crime. The school also encourages students to stay safe and healthy through focussed programmes in PSHE that include Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). Olsen House fully fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the regulations are met through undertaking all of the required checks on staff and the maintenance of a fully compliant single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

Olsen House provides an environment for effective education to take place. All areas of the premises promote the safety of students and staff and this single-storey building with wide corridors is suitable for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The teaching areas are of high quality and include well-designed classrooms, an assembly room and a dining room large enough for the whole school to enjoy meals together. The outdoor area includes recreational facilities that encourage students to exercise at breaktimes.

Provision of information

The school maintains a brochure and a website that provide clear, accurate, up-to-date information to students and to current and prospective parents and carers. Full details are provided on how to obtain school policies.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school maintains a clear and comprehensive complaints procedure that complies with all of the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- encourage teachers to improve the planning of literacy and numeracy in thematic lessons so that students can accelerate their progress in English and mathematics
- ensure teachers use concise language when setting lesson targets so that students' progress against their targets can be measured more effectively.

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		
Date school opened	February 2010		
Age range of pupils	9-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 3	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 10	Girls: 3	Total: 13
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£53,200 - £57,000		
Address of school	87 Liverpool Road Crosby Merseyside L23 5TD		
Telephone number	0151 924 0234		
Email address	hello@olsenhouseschool.co.uk		
Principal	Donagh McKillop		
Proprietor	Charles Mills		