

Walnut Tree Lodge School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	822/6014
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Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is 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

Walnut Tree Lodge School is located in a rural setting approximately four miles north of Bedford. The school is part of the Continuum Care and Education group. This is the school's first inspection since it was first registered as a day school in July 2009. It can educate a maximum of eight students, aged 11–16 years. At the time of the inspection five students were on roll, four of whom had statements of special educational needs relating to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Three students are dually registered with another school. Walnut Tree Lodge School also admits students from the company's children's home. The school describes its vision as 'establishing a culture that promotes excellence, equality, positive regard and high achievement for all young people'. The school aims to provide the National Curriculum and a range of other accredited vocational courses, with a strong emphasis on land-based skills. The headteacher divides his time between Walnut Tree Lodge School and another school belonging to the company, based in Northampton.

Evaluation of the school

Walnut Tree Lodge School provides a good quality of education, which promotes students' academic progress well. Students benefit from good teaching and a well constructed curriculum. The school successfully meets its aims and provides a positive and supportive environment, predicated on a land-based and vocational curriculum. Students enjoy the variety of horticultural and animal husbandry activities on offer. They make satisfactory improvements to their behaviour, social and emotional development, as their often turbulent and fragmented backgrounds restrict their maturity and self-discipline. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

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 quality of the curriculum is good and is continuing to develop and improve. The strength of the curriculum is the flexibility to meet the wide ranging needs of students. A good range of academic and vocational programmes of study are provided for students to follow. These follow the National Curriculum and have a strong emphasis on the natural environment through studying a range of land-based activities such as animal husbandry, woodland management and horticultural training. The school is very effective in engaging students in learning and providing creativity and enjoyment of learning. The school has an agreement with the local farmer for students to help look after cattle and participate in work experience placements. Students enjoy taking responsibility for looking after a variety of smaller and larger livestock such as hens, sheep, pigs, cows and also growing vegetables. There is an appropriate focus on basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Students have opportunities to gain externally accredited vocational courses such as First Aid qualifications and through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards. More able students undertake nationally recognised qualification, such as GCSEs and Entry Level certificates, dependent upon their abilities. Where appropriate, information is shared between the school and children's homes so that issues can be addressed systematically, although homework is not used enough to maximum effect.

Curriculum planning is good. There are comprehensive long and medium-term schemes of work, based on the school's curriculum aims and philosophy. The curriculum is modified well to meets the abilities of all the students. Individual education programmes are carefully constructed, so that individual learning needs are met effectively. The personal, social and health education programme is well planned and promotes students' healthier and safer lifestyles effectively. Important risks are explored and students receive helpful input from the local police and health services, who come in to speak with the students on a range of topics such as substance misuse. Students have access to appropriate careers guidance from Year 9 and attend vocational college courses, such as construction and agriculture. For those students who have dual placements, there are good liaison arrangements with participating schools. However, the opportunities for students to participate in sporting and leisure activities, such as competitive sport and swimming, are limited.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and enables students to make good progress. Teaching is lively and motivates students well. Relationships with staff are trusting, supportive and positive, enabling students to engage in learning effectively. Lesson planning is very good and contains clear learning outcomes which are explained at the start of lessons. Plenary sessions are used well to re-cap the main learning points of the lesson. Flexibility to meet individual needs is a strength of teaching, for example, lessons always have a 'plan B' which can be used if students are not able to engage in the planned activity. Teachers use questioning well to test students' thinking and encourage verbal contributions. There is a good emphasis on practical and vocational activities such as horticulture and animal management,

which captures the interest and enjoyment of students. There is a good pace to learning with lessons no more than 30 minutes in duration. Challenging behaviour is sensitively managed so that interruptions to learning are minimised. The lack of interactive whiteboards in classes limits opportunities to enhance teaching and learning for students. For example, in whole class sessions, teachers are not able to teach concepts using resources from the internet, related to pupils' interests to further bring learning to life and provide greater motivation. Some students are not able to get to school on time at the beginning of the day from their care home and miss part of the initial lesson.

Students' attainment varies widely, but they are carefully and regularly assessed on a termly basis. Students' work is assessed and recorded using a programme to measure progress and assist with target setting. Students are assessed on entry using this system in core subjects. The combination of regular reports, assessments and challenging target setting enable the majority of students to make good progress. Records provide strong evidence that students are making good levels of progress in basic skills, over a short period of time and are now in a position to undertake nationally recognised qualifications.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. Their moral and social awareness is satisfactory, although occasionally relationships between students are fractious. Where students lack sufficient self-discipline, staff manage students sensitively. Students enjoy their schooling, which is a positive achievement as many students have had negative experiences in the past. Their good attendance is evidence of their enjoyment of school. The emphasis on vocational, farming and environmental education strongly promotes students' self-esteem and their enjoyment of learning well in outdoor settings. In lessons, students make improvements in their attitudes to learning and these are satisfactory. Overall students' behaviour is generally satisfactory, although sometimes challenging, and their use of mobile phones can cause unnecessary distractions. Students' economic well-being is promoted very effectively through the opportunities to work towards nationally accredited qualifications with most taking up college placements. They also relish work-related learning experiences on the local farm. The opportunity to experience success helps to develop students' self-confidence well.

Students make a positive contribution to school life through participating in school activities and they develop responsibility by looking after the animals, such as collecting eggs from the hens and harvesting produce. However, their contribution to the wider community is more limited. Community facilities such as libraries and leisure centres to broaden students' horizons and increase sporting and leisure activities are under-utilised. Students' understanding and tolerance of different cultures is satisfactory and is taught through religious education and the personal, social and health education programme, although the use of visits and visitors is not yet embedded into the life of the school. Students satisfactorily develop their understanding of public services through aspects of the curriculum. Tutorials are

used to discuss wider issues and topics of interest in the news. Students' economic well-being is good; it is promoted through being able to achieve academic and vocational qualifications and good work related learning opportunities.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The promotion of students' welfare, health and safety is good. Students develop a good understanding of healthier lifestyles, through learning how to grow their own food and eat healthily. A visiting chef teaches students the importance of a balanced diet and healthy eating. Outdoor experiences encourage physical activity and plenty of fresh-air, although the amount of organised physical activity is insufficient. Where appropriate, students have access to clinical psychology input to promote students' emotional health and well-being.

Students are closely supervised through high levels of staffing. Students stated that they felt safe and enjoyed school. There are instances of bullying, but students reported that these are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are taught about important risks and how to keep safe, through the personal, social and health education programme. They are taught about farm safety and the importance of hygiene in relation to handling animals.

The behaviour policy has clear expectations to promote positive behaviour and to manage poor behaviour effectively. The school has devised and implemented a range of well-thought-out policies and risk assessments, including suitable policies and procedures for child protection. Visiting professionals and work experience providers are appropriately vetted. The headteacher is the designated member of staff responsible for safeguarding. He has attended the required training and all staff receive regular safeguarding training. There are suitable cover arrangements in place for when the headteacher is not on site. The school has suitable fire safety procedures in place. It has drawn up a three-year plan to show how it will fulfill its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school checks carefully and systematically the suitability of all staff, including the proprietor, to work with students and holds the required information on a comprehensive single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school occupies a detached, well-maintained and well decorated building and enables students to learn safely and securely. The school is set within farmland, which provides valuable learning opportunities and experiences for students. The school grounds are used for livestock and growing vegetables. There are two medium sized classrooms and one is also equipped as an information and technology room. The small kitchen provides opportunities for food technology. The school does

not have specialist facilities, but has arrangements to use facilities at another school for subjects, such as design and technology and science if needed. Whilst there are sufficient toilet facilities for male and female students, there is no separate facility for adults.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents, carers and others with all the required information. It keeps parents, carers and others informed through an effective reporting system. Termly reports are comprehensive and give a helpful indication of students' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a policy and procedures which fully meet the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide sufficient washrooms for staff (paragraph 5(k))

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Improve students' understanding of wider cultural development, through visits and visitors to the school.
- Increase the opportunities for students participate in sporting and leisure activities.
- Enhance teaching and learning through the use of interactive whiteboards in classes to increase students' interest and enjoyment of lessons.
- Improve the punctuality of some students at the start of the day.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

Inspection judgement recording form

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 students		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		✓		
How well students make progress in their learning		✓		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of students			✓	

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Walnut Tree Lodge School		
DCSF number	822/6014		
Unique reference number (URN)	135990		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2009		
Age range of students	11–16 years		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Annual fees (day students)	£31,800 (approximately)		
Address of school	Wilden Road Wilden Bedford MK44 2PY		
Telephone number	01234 772081		
Fax number	N/A		
Email address	richard.platt@farrowhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Richard Platt		
Proprietor	Bob Hall		
Reporting inspector	Frank Price		
Dates of inspection	11–12 May 2010		