

East Court School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	886/6055
Unique Reference Number	119003
Inspection number	301515
Inspection dates	13-14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth AI

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).

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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, 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

East Court is a co-educational independent special school. It provides for pupils aged seven to 14 years who have specific learning difficulties (SpLD) such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. The great majority of pupils are funded by their parents, including most of those with statements of their special educational needs. The school is situated on the coast road in Ramsgate and occupies two buildings. It provides termly boarding for more than half the pupils. The main building is grade II listed and provides the majority of classrooms and the residential accommodation for the boys. The second building, which is situated very close by, provides class bases for the two youngest groups and residential accommodation for the girls. The school aims to equip pupils with the skills they need to gain entrance to the schools of their choice and have full access to the curriculum when they leave East Court. The school was last inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in November 2006.

Evaluation of the school

East Court School provides good quality education and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The provision made for pupils' specific learning difficulties is outstanding. Teaching is good and as a result, pupils make good academic progress overall and excellent progress in overcoming their specific difficulties. The provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory overall, although the pastoral care provided is outstanding. The pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. The school meets most, but not all of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and its relevance to pupils' needs is outstanding. It effectively supports the school's aim of enabling pupils to move on to the non-specialist schools of their choice. The school provides a modified mainstream curriculum, and appropriate adaptations have been made to enable a very good emphasis on basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Additional subjects are provided, such as typing, daily reading, brain gym, speech and language and motor development programmes to give further support to the pupils in overcoming their difficulties. Where the time

spent on certain subjects such as modern foreign language or design and technology has been deliberately reduced, the school compensates by providing experiences through extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils have the opportunity of going to European countries for skiing holidays, and are currently working on making a large Indian temple in the design club. The curriculum is enhanced well by a good range of regular sport and one-off activities such as gliding. Pupils are grouped according to their age and ability in literacy and numeracy for some subjects, and are in mixed groups for other subjects such as art. This ensures that a focused approach can be used to support their specific difficulties. Planning takes into account the pupils' additional difficulties with organisation, visual and auditory memory and rote learning. It provides strategies to support and help them in the presentation of their work. However, planning for the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in subjects other than literacy and numeracy is not as well developed and does not always assure enough interest and challenge.

Teaching is good and pupils make good progress overall. They make outstanding progress in their basic skills. Many leave the school at levels above those expected for their age in English, mathematics and science. The best lessons use multi-sensory approaches and specific strategies to enable the pupils to understand, remember and take pride in their work. Examples of this include a diagrammatic representation of pupils' ideas for a new story; the use of modelling clay to work out area in mathematics, and pasting written labels onto diagrams to create high standards of presentation. In less effective lessons, pupils are not given interesting activities and they are not sufficiently challenged or allowed to use their talent for discussion and debate. As a result, pupils become restless and behaviour deteriorates. This is not always well managed.

Assessment is good. The very detailed diagnostic assessment provided by educational psychologists and other professionals, together with the school's own assessment of pupils' basic skills, is of a very high standard. It is used very effectively to inform teaching and the planning of pupils' individual programmes. In addition it is used to identify pupils who do not make anticipated gains in reading, writing or mathematics in order to give them extra support. The systematic tracking of attainment and progress in subjects of the curriculum, however, is under-developed.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

This aspect of the school's provision is good. East Court School places a very strong emphasis on pupils' personal development because many come to the school with low self-esteem. The pupils become well equipped for living successful adult lives. They clearly enjoy school, and this is confirmed by virtually all parents. Attendance is very good and behaviour is generally good. Many have previously found managing their own behaviour to be a challenge. Pupils are given many opportunities to build up confidence and their self-esteem grows as they achieve more. The pupils become independent, responsible, respectful young people who participate in and learn to

give back to their community. The school provides very well for pupils' social and moral development and these aspects of their development are good. Pupils are encouraged to think through the consequences of their actions and consider the feelings and needs of others. They comply with school rules, are supportive of one another and develop excellent relationships. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. They develop a good insight into their own and others' needs, and enjoy a range of activities such as art and community drama competitions. However, there are too few activities that consistently promote pupils' spiritual development and multi-cultural awareness.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for this aspect of the school's work is satisfactory overall. However, the pastoral support given to pupils is outstanding and they are keen to praise the school for the care and guidance it gives them. The ethos of the school is warm and supportive and there is an excellent family atmosphere. For example, pupils help themselves from bowls of fruit at break times, and younger boarders are read a story at bed time and are encouraged to talk through the events of the day. Counselling is given by highly qualified staff to any pupil who may need it, and pupils know who to turn to if in distress. Much work is done about anti-bullying as many of the pupils have been former victims and still suffer the after-effects. There are suitable practices to promote good behaviour, underpinned by an appropriate policy that is well understood by all. Pupils say they feel safe and parents agree.

Fire safety, first aid, child protection and arrangements for health and safety are all appropriately addressed. Risk assessments are made of a range of activities that take place inside and outside the school. However, some other policies and practices relating to safeguarding pupils need to be updated in line with recommended guidance, such as keeping staff checks in a single central record. The school does not have a disability access plan or an admissions register. Attendance registers are completed daily but not all entries are correctly coded and daily attendance is not calculated. The school works well to keep pupils healthy. They have constant access to water and are encouraged to take exercise. The food is of high quality, home-cooked, wholesome and takes account of all pupils' individual dietary needs. Good use is made of the beach to extend pupils' opportunities for active play.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school does not meet three of the five regulations in this area. The last CSCI inspection recommended that more robust recruitment procedures should be put into place. While the school has been active in trying to address the situation, this recommendation has not yet been fully addressed. Currently, not all staff, including a foreign national, have had appropriate checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with children. Information on staff checks is not held in a single, central record as recommended.

School's premises and accommodation

The school and the residential areas comply with all regulations despite the difficulties associated with maintaining a listed building. The premises are well maintained, hygienic, tidy and well organised. The site manager responds quickly and efficiently to identified problems, addressing any safety issue immediately. The premises are used effectively. There are several small rooms but the school appropriately uses them mainly for group work. The art room is very small for whole class work. The outside areas have been upgraded within the last few years and facilities for physical education and outdoor recreation are good. The gardens at both sites are very attractive and used very effectively to support pupils' spiritual development.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is good. All the information required by parents and prospective parents is contained in a combination of the prospectus, new parents' guide and various loose leaf additions. This is sent to new parents and, together with the additional information required, is available from the school on request. A guide with an accompanying compact disc has been produced by pupils for new entrants. A website contains some of this information. The school is aware that these sources of information need rationalising for ease of access by parents and others.

Parents are kept suitably informed about school events through newsletters, notices and displays. Reports on pupils' progress are informative. Nevertheless, parents' questionnaires indicate that some do not always feel well enough informed about activities, events and daily life at East Court School. The school does not provide an account of income received and expenditure incurred to those local authorities who fund places for pupils.

Procedures for handling complaints

A few parents indicated they were unclear about the school's complaints procedure. The procedure has recently been revised and is clear, fair and meets all regulations. It is available on request and the school has recently started to send a copy to parents of new pupils.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

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

- prepare and implement the necessary written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DfES guidance 0278/2002 (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- maintain an admission register and an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of their appointment, ensure that all staff have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b))
- comply with recommendations made by CSCI under Standard 27 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (paragraph 4(d))
- ensure that any foreign national employed by the school has been subject to checks for overseas staff for their suitability for working with children, as set out in DfES guidance 0278/2002 (paragraph 4(f)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide to local authorities the particulars of income received and expenditure incurred for each pupil funded by that authority (paragraph 6(7)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should write and implement a three-year accessibility plan.

School details

Name of school	East Court School		
DfES number	886/6055		
Unique reference number	119003		
Type of school	Residential and day special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1983		
Age range of pupils	7-14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 65	Girls: 13	Total: 78
Number of boarders	Boys: 42	Girls: 11	Total: 53
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 9	Girls: 2	Total: 11
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£15,450		
Annual fees (boarders)	£18,450 – £21,000		
Address of school	Victoria Parade Ramsgate Kent CT11 8ED		
Telephone number	01843 592077		
Fax number	01843 592418		
Email address	cjacobs@eastcourt		
Headteacher	Dr M E Thomson		
Proprietor	Dr M E Thomson and Dr N R Scott		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth AI		
Dates of inspection	13-14 June 2007		