

The Serendipity Centre

399 Hinkler Road, Southampton, SO19 6DS

Inspection dates 13–14 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because:

- The students make exceptional academic progress, particularly in view of the fact that many of them have had traumatic and disturbed experiences in life and in previous school placements.
- The high quality of the support and guidance provided has enabled the students to make rapid improvements in their behaviour and personal development.
- Teachers' expert subject knowledge and professional skills make it possible for students to overcome their barriers to learning and make outstanding progress given their original starting points on entry to school.
- The valuable and very effective use of qualified therapists supports the development of learning outstandingly well.
- The excellent range of resources available matches the needs of the students extremely well.
- The outstanding and inspirational leadership provided by the proprietor and Principal has resulted in excellent outcomes for the students. They have made an excellent impact to improve teaching and learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed eight lessons taught by three different teachers, looked at students' work, and held meetings with the proprietor, staff and students. He spoke to some of the schools' external stakeholders including a representative from one local authority and a member of the local police service.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, monitoring reports of teaching and learning, and staff training records.
- No parents or carers, pupils or local authority representatives responded to the online Ofsted questionnaires. The inspector took account of the school's own questionnaire of students' views. Nine questionnaire responses from staff were evaluated.

Inspection team

John Gush, Lead Inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Serendipity Centre in Southampton is a special school that admits girls with severe and complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, aged 11 to 16 years of age, for whom local authorities cannot find a suitable placement in maintained schools.
- The school first opened in April 2006 and was last inspected in September 2009.
- Students have had turbulent educational, social and emotional experiences. Typically, they have been excluded from mainstream or special schools and may have experienced unsuccessful placements in pupil referral units. All students have a statement of special educational needs. There are no disabled students.
- There are eight students on roll with seven students who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school does not provide or use any alternative or additional provision.
- The Serendipity Centre aims to become a centre of excellence in the care and education of girls with complex behavioural, social and emotional needs. The centre's values are based on the concept of 'respect', and its aims include to 'support, promote and re-engage students in learning so that they may achieve their full academic and personal potential'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The centre should continue to provide the encouragement and support that will enable the students to make their already good behaviour outstanding.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students' achievement is outstanding as a result of the highly effective teaching and the successful efforts made by staff to get the girls to re-engage with education and to rapidly make up lost ground given their previous disrupted education. As a result of the teachers' excellent efforts and the outstanding, responsive and interesting curriculum, all students have developed very positive attitudes to learning. The girls are learning exceptionally well and are acquiring a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding in all of the subjects taught, particularly literacy and numeracy. Students' newly developed communication skills are particularly impressive.

Students report that they enjoy their lessons and this is reflected not only in the excellent engagement they demonstrate in class but also in the pride that they take in the outstanding quality of the presentation of their work. One impressive example of their attention and interest in lessons was the self-confidence they showed in planning and executing the extraction of DNA from a crushed banana. Students' basic skills and personal qualities equip them well for their next stage of life.

The outstanding progress that they make in academic subjects represents a significant achievement given their very low starting points on entry to the school. Students do well in nationally recognised accreditation, including the adult literacy and numeracy (ALAN) awards and GCSEs in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good

Students' behaviour is good. It is not outstanding because on a very few occasions there are instances of poor behaviour. Effective and consistent behaviour management strategies are adopted by staff. Students are now much more aware that their behaviour has an effect on their own and others' learning. There is a calm and business-like learning environment in classrooms and around the school and the vast majority of students follow the school's code of conduct. Records from the school's psychological therapist show that, over the past year, there has been an increase in students' self-esteem and a decline in the amount of disruptive behaviour. Individuals' improved self-worth and self-confidence have a good impact on their progress and achievement. Students say that they feel safe and secure in school and that bullying is rare. When incidents of bullying and inappropriate behaviour occur, they are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students attend regularly and are consistently punctual for their lessons. This is an impressive improvement on their past attendance in other settings and is achieved by effective and encouraging support from staff.

The school makes outstanding provision for students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Staff promote the principal of respect very well and students are aware of what this means in practice. This was exemplified when one student commented, when asked about what she liked about the school, that staff 'give you respect, they're fair, they'll meet you half way and give you support'. Regular activities such as the recent South Africa day are arranged to promote students' awareness of other cultures and to help them develop an attitude of tolerance. Students are effectively taught about British institutions and services through the personal, social and health education course as well as through regular visits from people such as the local community police liaison officer. Students develop very good relations with the local community through use of facilities such as shops, library and the leisure centre and in their fund raising activities for Children in Need.

Students record their academic and personal development successes and their areas for

development in their 'Star Book'. This provides a daily record of their effort and attainment in all activities and provides a valuable incentive for further academic and personal development.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding and it enables students to make exceptional gains in learning in lessons and over time. Teachers have high expectations as to what students can achieve and plan lessons carefully and in detail. They address the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs very well in respect of students' personal and academic needs. They use their subject knowledge extremely well to enthuse students and they make excellent use of a wide range of resources to produce stimulating and well-paced lessons that retain students' interest and engagement. In one mathematics lesson, a range of worthwhile activities and interesting resources were used to help students improve their ability to tell the time. The input involved moving the girls and their learning support workers through quarter and half turns, gluing numbers to a clock face and then making the clock hands out of play dough before moving them to the appropriate place on the dial.

On-going assessment is used very effectively. Teachers know the abilities and learning targets of individual students well and plan lessons to meet their differing needs. They assess students' abilities when they begin their placement at the school and their progress every term thereafter. Students' progress is measured against National Curriculum levels and the accuracy of the teachers' assessments is ensured by effective moderation by other staff. Students' work is consistently well marked and all teachers use a marking policy that is displayed on the classroom wall. Marking is respectful of students' effort, encourages further progress and suggests strategies to bring about further improvement.

Teachers make excellent use of enthusiastic learning support workers, whose tasks are effectively directed in lesson plans. Support workers often take the initiative to move students' learning on at rapid rate.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The school has developed an outstanding curriculum that supports students' learning extremely well and enables them to make the most of their potential. It is based on the National Curriculum and covers all of the required areas of learning, including religious education. Very careful use of assessment information, together with very small class size, allows the curriculum to be planned and delivered in an individualised manner, appropriate to the learning and emotional needs of each student.

The school is currently replacing its ALAN curriculum by the functional skills curriculum. ALAN is currently very well used to supplement GCSEs and it enables each student to develop their basic skills in a way which suits them best. Excellent cross-curricular links provide outstanding opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge, skills and understanding in a way that makes learning more coherent and meaningful. For example, history is discussed in art and recent learning in science reinforces what is taught in English. Opportunities for students to improve their reading skills are effectively and consistently provided, including the use of phonetic (the sounds that letters make) word building skills where appropriate. The school's art department is very well resourced and students take justifiable pride in their outstanding work, which is displayed in school. Physical education is very popular and is of very high quality. It takes place in the local leisure centre with students also taking part in outdoor education activities, such as climbing and horse riding, which students thoroughly enjoy.

Students learn how to keep safe and to recognise threats and dangers through the very well-designed personal, social and health education programme. This is supplemented by very effective individual therapy aimed at promoting positive mental health, where relevant. The therapy department provides very valuable guidance for students and staff, including teaching of 'Brain Training', where individuals are enabled to identify whether they are responding to a situation with their 'reasonable, emotional or wise brain' or not. This course successfully helps students to understand their thoughts and emotions by considering, which 'sort' of brain they are using and helps them to develop a vocabulary to communicate their views.

Excellent careers advice is provided for all, and older students make very good use of day release college placements in subjects such as catering and horse care.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. It is characterised by a high level of commitment to students' well-being and care. A range of high-quality health and safety policies has been produced and they are very well implemented. For example, the anti-bullying policy is clear, and is properly adopted thereby ensuring girls are free from intimidation and harassment. Policies are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain up to date and that staff are familiar with their contents.

Robust attention is paid to all aspects of staff recruitment and the required single central register is carefully maintained. Staff training in child protection and first aid is thorough and is regularly updated within the recommended timescales. This includes suitable training, at the appropriate level, for the designated safeguarding officer. Fire safety is good. Fire drills are routinely carried out and fire fighting equipment is subject to regular inspection. Daily staff meetings and regular meetings with local authority staff, parents and carers, provide excellent opportunities for continuous awareness of students' issues.

Students report that they feel very safe in school and that they receive excellent support and guidance which they value. Supervision in school is provided in a good-humoured manner, which students appreciate. This is demonstrated in the respectful relationships between students and staff and in the confidence the students have in the support and guidance that they receive. Risk assessments, including those for visits outside school, are thorough. Results are formally recorded and action taken where necessary.

Students are very well supported to adopt a healthy lifestyle. This covers not only an awareness of the importance of eating and exercising well but also sex and relationships education and the importance of keeping safe when using social networking sites.

The psychological therapy department offers staff and students outstanding support. This helps students develop their self-awareness, boosts their self-confidence and helps them to deal effectively with any individual problems that arise. Staff monitor constantly whether they are continuing to provide a safe and supportive environment that promotes emotional stability and improves individuals' academic and personal development.

The school initiates very effective 'network' meetings where all relevant stakeholders involved with a student are able to work together to ensure the best possible outcomes. The local police liaison officer commented on the excellent and increasingly effective results of the school's efforts to build 'rapport' between the students and the various agencies that support them.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The proprietor and Principal work together to provide the inspirational leadership and very effective day-to-day management that delivers the high quality school outcomes and ensures that all the standards for independent schools are met. Their commitment, dedication and ambition provide an excellent role model for all staff. They monitor provision effectively and consistently drive improvement and value the contribution that staff make to ensuring students' outstanding achievement. Their leadership of teaching and learning has been key to the school's success. Self-evaluation is fair and accurate because thorough, regular audits are carried out to evaluate provision and its impact. Good attention is paid to ensuring school documents are current, informative and useful. The Principal and proprietor have instigated an extensive schedule of meetings with local authorities, parents and carers, where issues concerning individuals' progress and well-being are considered. The meetings are productive and beneficial. A commissioning officer from one local authority said that the school provides students with 'the best possible chance' to make progress in their lives and that the school is 'a resource I could not do without'.

The proprietor has provided high-quality accommodation. The school building contains a wide range of facilities including very well-resourced classrooms and specialist teaching areas, all of which are supplied with excellent information and communication technology resources. An additional building has recently been purchased and is currently being refurbished. It is intended that this will provide extended facilities for the therapy department and provide a new 'well-being' suite for students.

All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others through the school's website, its brochures and the extensive parent information pack. The complaints procedures meet regulatory requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	131556
Inspection number	397745
DfE registration number	852/6009

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Special school
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	9–16 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	8
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Sue Tinson
Principal	Chris Sweeney
Date of previous school inspection	September 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£68,007
Telephone number	023 8042 2255
Email address	info@serendipity-education.com

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