

The Small School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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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

The Small School is a co-educational, non-selective independent school for students aged 11 to 16 years. It is located in former chapel premises in Hartland, North Devon. The distinctive ethos of the school attracts students from a wide area of North Devon. Just over half of the students live within walking distance of the school. There are 18 students on roll, none of whom has a statement of special educational needs. A majority of the students have been home educated. Flexi-schooling arrangements are in place for three students who attend part time. The school was established in 1982 by a cooperative of parents and carers who wished to provide a secondary education on a small scale. The aim of the school is to 'promote education in a small community where learning takes place in a nurturing and creative atmosphere, where human scale values are promoted for the development of individual talent, the acquisition of new skills and a sense of social responsibility'. The school was last inspected in September 2008. It had a follow-up progress monitoring inspection in July 2010.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education and fully meets its stated aims. All of the regulatory requirements for independent schools are met. Within a satisfactory curriculum there are strong elements which result in outstanding personal development. Teaching and assessment and the rate at which students make academic progress are satisfactory. The students are well cared for; safeguarding arrangements are thorough and government requirements are fully met. The school has made good progress since its last inspection and has addressed all of the regulatory failures identified at that time.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. Good provision is made for students to develop their creativity, interests and thinking skills. There are many opportunities, both planned and spontaneous, for students to acquire personal and social skills that stand them in very good stead for the future. Last year the school offered 13 GCSE subjects, including, classics and Latin; although provision varies according to the interests of the students and the availability of teachers. The school follows the syllabi of

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

accredited examination boards. Some of the coursework is appropriately adjusted and modified for students in Year 9 in order to meet their specific needs.

Schemes of work are satisfactory. In Key Stage 3 they are based on National Curriculum guidance and are taught using themes and activities that seek to develop a broad range of skills. The school is in the process of revising schemes of work for mathematics, information and communication technology and physical education (PE) to define more precisely how planning and assessment are structured, in order to accelerate students' learning and progress through Key Stage 3. Provision for PE is adequate but the limitations of space and location mean that the balance of activities within the physical education provision is not always quite right. The school makes every effort to complement dance and aerobic lessons with adventurous activities off site, but as yet does not have a reliable system for monitoring this provision over the two key stages in order to address imbalances. The curriculum effectively develops students' investigation, problem-solving and reasoning skills. Students' learning is enriched through numerous visits and visiting, which include scientists, astronomers, artists and poets. Cultural experiences are fostered well through activities in music, dance and a range of arts projects, combined with a regular programme of visits to Bristol and London for exhibitions and theatre shows.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress over time. During the inspection there were many examples of good quality questioning that inspired and encouraged ideas and thinking to develop. Relationships with the teachers are extremely positive and students were always keen to contribute. The lessons all contained a practical element to help focus learning and make it enjoyable. Clear introductions to the lessons were a consistent feature in which the purpose of learning was made clear. However, teachers do not always focus sufficiently on addressing the particular skills that students need to secure good achievement. Teachers are aware of individuals' gaps in prior learning, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, but are not always remedying them in a systematic and coherent way. In part this is because lesson planning does not always identify a student's particular needs, even though in discussion with the inspector it was clear that staff know students' specific needs well. Secondly, not all of the schemes of work set out the progression of skills which should inform teaching and learning.

The small numbers in each class ensure that one-to-one support is always available. Provision is effective in encouraging independence. Helpful direction is always given and ensures students remain on task and generally achieve the lesson objectives. In both art and science lessons the teachers exemplified and shared with the students what high-quality work looks like but in other lessons such opportunities were missed. In some lessons the pace of learning slows, and the teaching does not ensure students learn at a good rate. Where skills are taught with close attention to the next steps, as in the lessons for those following accredited GCSE courses, progress is generally good.

The strategies used for gaining a view of students' progress are now satisfactory. Since the last inspection the school has improved its systems for tracking students' academic achievements over time. Consequently, the headteacher has a secure

overview of each student's relative strengths and areas for improvement. Assessment information is used particularly effectively to help students make the right choices for their post-16 education. Indeed all students are encouraged to reflect on where they consider they are achieving well and where they require extra support. Additional lessons or alterations to provision are made to ensure students have the necessary basic skills for the next stage of their education or employment.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development is outstanding. Students really enjoy coming to school, and their attendance is good. Provision is very good at boosting students' self-esteem and self-confidence. The school is a socially cohesive community with agreed systems for managing behaviour which ensure each student is respected and valued. A unique feature is the way the whole school comes together at the beginning and end of each day to share and shoulder each others' needs and aspirations. Such activity contributes to the further development of the school and has a positive impact on improving students' attitudes to learning, behaviour and self-esteem. The students are highly effective thinkers and are very skilled at understanding and assimilating other people's points of view. Regular discussions about school matters and worldwide events engage students' interest, and help them acquire a sense of fairness in a way that promotes equality, harmony and tolerance. The regular philosophical enquiry lessons encourage students to reflect on life, particularly their own feelings and values. Activities help students gain an understanding of world faiths and cultures different to their own. Behaviour is outstanding. The principles of right and wrong are often debated and are well understood.

Students' contribution to the local and wider community is strong. For example, they are involved in community projects that make a difference, fundraise for good causes and manage the catering at the local farmers' market. Students also contribute effectively to school life, for example, preparing meals at lunchtime and undertaking light cleaning duties at the end of the day. These experiences ensure that the students are suitably prepared for the future. As one parent wrote, 'It feels like being part of a highly functional family, supporting students and creating an inspirational and motivational environment.'

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for welfare, health and safety is good. The school has been thorough in ensuring that all regulations for this standard are now fully met. All of the required child protection training has been undertaken to ensure students are safe and are well cared for. Responsibilities are distributed effectively for ensuring the safety of students while on the school site and when undertaking visits off site. Supervision of students at playtimes and lunchtimes is satisfactory. Attendance and admission registers are kept in accordance with requirements. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Behaviour and anti-bullying procedures are implemented effectively. Students say that they are free from harassment and are well cared for.

This was summed up in the words of a student: 'The school is good – everyone cares about each other and teachers want nothing better than for the children to learn.'

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out all of the required checks on the suitability of staff and others to ensure that they are suitable to work with students. All of the required information is recorded in the single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. They are safe, in satisfactory decorative order and suitably support students' academic and social development. There is a small kitchen for cookery, and students use the facility to prepare food for the whole school. There is a well-stocked library, and a good range of well-thumbed books in all classrooms. There are areas for relaxation and good resources for students to pursue their interests in music making. The science, art and photography dark rooms are managed safely by the subject specialists. There is sufficient outdoor space for play and recreation.

Provision of information

The school provides, or makes available, all of the required information. Parents and carers agree that they are provided with clear, accurate and up-to-date information about their children's attainment and progress.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets regulatory 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.

- Complete the mapping of provision in mathematics, information and communication technology and physical education for Key Stage 3.
- Use the information on students' academic abilities more effectively in Key Stage 3 lessons to address gaps in learning and ensure students achieve well.

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	Secondary		
Date school opened	1982		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 4	Total: 15
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 2	Total: 3
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Minimum voluntary contribution £1,050		
Address of school	Fore Street Hartland EX39 6AB		
Telephone number	01237441672		
Email address	smallschoolhartland@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Maya Buckley		
Proprietor	Stephen Massingale		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

27 January 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of The Small School, Hartland, Devon EX39 6AB

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed meeting you. I appreciated that you were prepared to talk with me and tell me what you thought about school life. I found the school to be providing you with a satisfactory education, with some aspects being particularly strong. I have listed my findings below.

- The opportunities you all get, no matter what your age, to share in experiences and activities together are impressive. This leads to you all developing and demonstrating outstanding consideration and tolerance of others.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and provision for your personal development is outstanding too.
- The sound support you get from your teachers in lessons helps you all have a voice in your own learning and develop a good capacity to tackle and solve problems. These are skills that will help you make the best of your future.
- Some aspects of your curriculum are good, particularly for a school of your size, and there is a broad offer for those studying for GCSEs. The school agrees with me that it needs to better record the provision that is made in the lower and upper school (Key Stage 3), particularly in mathematics, information and communication technology and physical education.
- I want staff to make better use of the academic information that they have, to inform their planning, in order that you make better academic progress and any gaps in your learning are quickly rectified.

You enjoy school, this was evident during my visit and from your questionnaire responses. I did notice that most of you do not present your work neatly and clearly. This is something I think you could seek to improve, not least because it helps avoid unnecessary mistakes. I wish you all the best in your futures.

Yours sincerely
Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector