

# The Quest School

Independent school standard inspection report

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

The Quest School is an independent day special school for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The school has had permission from the Department for Education to change in three respects since the last inspection in 2009. First, the school has been granted permission to increase its age range beyond Key Stage 4 and now admits pupils from five years to 19 years. Second, in April 2010, it moved premises to Ryarsh, a rural village in Kent, near Maidstone. Third, the final agreed change was to increase the school's capacity to 25.

The pupils have social and communication difficulties and additional learning difficulties ranging from severe to very mild. All pupils have statements for their special educational needs and the vast majority are funded by their local authorities. Four pupils are looked after. There are currently three girls and 18 boys on roll.

The school was founded by a group of parents, carers and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) professionals in 2003. When appropriate to the pupil's needs, the school uses the ABA approach, which consists of very detailed programmes to support improvement in social communication, learning and behaviour. Additional advice, support and input are provided by occupational and speech and language therapists as required.

The school's published aims are 'to provide outstanding education and care so that pupils' self-esteem is high and they are happy and motivated to learn. Our aim is to maximise opportunities available for our pupils, and to enable them to reduce their dependency on adults now and in the future.'

## Evaluation of the school

The Quest School provides an outstanding quality of education and meets its aims very well. The curriculum and the quality of teaching and assessment have all improved since the last inspection and are now outstanding. Consequently, the pupils' make outstanding progress from their starting points. The pupils' behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remain outstanding. The

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective and the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All of the regulations are met.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It takes close account of the very wide range of pupils' ages and special educational needs. Educational practice is very well supported by suitable policies and schemes of work based on the National Curriculum, examination boards' syllabi and associated guidance. As is appropriate for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, there is a strong emphasis on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy together with extensive strategies to develop pupils' communication skills. All pupils are working towards the point where they can learn in group settings while taking turns and sharing with others. The content of individual programmes remains largely focused on literacy, numeracy and communication skills, supplemented by thematic work which includes all other subjects of the curriculum.

The curriculum is suitably adjusted to meet pupils' specific needs and ages and to the requirements and objectives specified in their statements. In Key Stages 1 to 3, pupils study the full National Curriculum suitably modified. The principles of ABA are applied throughout with pupils working at lower and pre-National Curriculum levels, (P levels). For pupils working at P levels, much of their learning is provided on a one-to-one basis and occasionally, two staff are deployed where the pupils' needs demand extra support. In Key Stages 4 and 5, there is an increasing emphasis on accreditation according to ability and preparation for life after school. Where appropriate to their needs, pupils take and achieve GCSE's or Entry Level examinations in English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and science. Other courses include 'life and living skills' and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards at different levels. Throughout the school, there is a comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) which has an excellent impact on developing pupils' social, emotional and personal skills. Appropriate careers education is also provided from Year 9 onwards.

Typically, the Key Stage 5 provision is for those pupils who are deemed not to be yet ready for a full course at a college of further education, employment or training. These pupils pursue suitable courses that include shopping and cooking as part of 'life and living skills' accredited courses. They also benefit from part-time attendance at further education provision.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. Teaching is characterised by teamwork, thorough planning, secure subject knowledge, including communication methodologies such as signing, symbols and picture exchange. Teachers also have high expectations, for example, in a Key Stage 3 English lesson, pupils were encouraged to consider 'mise-en-scene' and explain how directors use lighting and positioning to convey ideas. In Key Stage 4 poetry, pupils role-played as poets and described the imagery and meaning they used to engage the readers. This well-

chosen activity based on 'Nothing's Changed' by Tatamkhulu Afrika, develops the pupils' confidence to speak out loud and also helps their understanding of injustice, racism and prejudice. In physical education, pupils studied clips of their own tennis stroke performance and made comments for improvement. In one-to-one sessions, the youngest pupils matched shapes and identified colours in response to requests. In addition to teachers, there are professional ABA tutors who make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching, particularly in support of individuals and small groups. Excellent use is made of 'reinforcement' whereby the staff provide targeted rewards in recognition of achievement.

Assessment information is used very well to inform the provision of relevant learning opportunities for all pupils so that they make outstanding progress academically and in their personal development. Staff utilise the latest guidance for assessment and target setting. They have a thorough knowledge of the pupils with whom they work and keep meticulous records of behaviour and academic progress.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The pupils are afforded very high levels of respect by staff and the pupils clearly enjoy the wide range of activities on offer. Pupils' attendance is above average and in lessons they show a commitment to learning and willingness to engage as well as possible. School rules are clearly displayed and state staff expectations in positive terms. For the majority of pupils it is the consistent reinforcement by all staff of desired behaviour. This works effectively so that behaviour is outstanding and all pupils make great strides in the tolerance of others and improved behaviour to the point where they can access the curriculum and social settings in the community.

Pupils' behaviour and responses are meticulously recorded as is the feedback given by staff. This practice is rooted in the school's philosophy of ABA and contributes to the improvement of pupils' behaviour and an increasing ability to relate to peers and adults. As a result, pupils increasingly accept learning in groups when typically they have only managed previously to be taught individually.

Pupils' understanding of the wider world is very well promoted by visits to and from the local community, for example, the local police, the magistrate's court and the fire service. The development of life skills and preparation for their future lives are very well promoted through shopping and cooking. In addition, the older pupils enjoy work experience and an annual residential trip that develops their life skills very effectively. Support for local, national and international charities is a regular feature of the pupils' contribution to life within and beyond the school and pupils have an input into which charities should benefit. Theme days have included Indian culture and there is a wide range of opportunities to visit places of worship, including local synagogues, temples and churches. The provision has enabled pupils to gain a good understanding of their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All of the required policies meet requirements and recent amendments ensure that they are informed by the most recent national guidance. Safe staff recruitment is ensured by close adherence to up-to-date policies and training. The designated senior member of staff for child protection and her deputy have been trained to an appropriate level.

Teamwork is a strong feature at the school and links with external agencies are very effective and well established. There are sufficient qualified first aiders in school and detailed records are kept of all accidents and incidents. The policy for the promotion of positive behaviour and social norms is implemented effectively by all staff and is fundamental to the school's purpose. Staff training in ABA and signing up to the school's code are instrumental in improvements to the pupils' capacity for independence and improve pupils' life chances. Personalised risk assessments of pupils and activities assist to maximise the opportunities for pupils' participation in the curriculum.

Regular checks are made to ensure the school complies with all regulations related to electrical and fire safety, for example, fire drills and other tests are properly recorded. Staff pay the highest attention to personal hygiene, ensuring pupils develop appropriate toileting while respecting their dignity at all times. The pupils' health benefits from staff vigilance to food allergies and regular exercise on site. The staff recognise the benefits of a breakfast club although one has not been started. The limited outdoor provision is supplemented well by regular access to the local village and wider community for play and sports facilities, including swimming and horse riding. The pupils are well supervised at all times, although at lunchtimes, opportunities are missed for the staff to model good dining habits by eating alongside the pupils. The school fully meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school has implemented robust procedures for the recruitment of staff. All of the required checks are carried out on proprietors, staff and prospective members of staff and others. These checks are recorded in a single central register, as required.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school's premises and accommodation are adequate and suitable for the number of pupils on roll. The fabric of the building is in good order and is well maintained. The staff make best use of the available space for small teaching groups. The limitations of the outdoor provision are compensated for by regular use of the local community for play and sporting activities.

## **Provision of information**

The combination of the school's recently revised prospectus and the informative website ensures that clear, accurate and up-to-date information is made available to all interested parties, including parents, carers and placing authorities. The school provides detailed annual reports of the pupils' academic and behavioural achievements. The school also fulfils its duties to annually review pupils' statements of special educational needs and contributes to local authority reviews of children who are looked after. In the pre-inspection questionnaire and evidence taken from phone calls during the inspection, the overwhelming majority, parental, carer and local authority satisfaction with the school's work is high. Typical comments included: 'Fantastic provision tailored to my child', 'My son's confidence and self-esteem have risen dramatically since starting at Quest' and 'Without this school, my child would have been in residential long ago.' A small minority would welcome closer links with the school. The school works to engage with parents and carers but recognises that more can always be done. Home-school daily diaries are used to provide regular feedback which both parties welcome.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has clearly written complaints procedures, which meet 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.

- Consider the introduction of a breakfast club.
- Encourage the staff to dine with pupils at lunchtime so that they may model good social skills at the table.

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special		
<b>Date school opened</b>	September 2003		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–19		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 18	Girls: 3	Total: 21
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 18	Girls: 3	Total: 21
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£38,000 – £43,500		
<b>Address of school</b>	Ryarsh Park Roughetts Road Ryarsh Kent ME19 5RP		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01732 522700		
<b>Email address</b>	anne.martin@questschool.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anne Martin		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Quest Limited		

25 June 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of The Quest School, Ryarsh, Kent ME19 5RP**

Thank you so much for the welcome you gave me when I came to inspect your school. The school provides you with an outstanding education and all government requirements are met. These are some of the things that I liked most.

- Your lessons are very well matched to your needs, especially helping you to develop your literacy and number skills. These skills help you to do well in lots of other lessons, in examinations and for life after school.
- All the staff work very hard to help you express your thoughts and feelings so that you can relate as well possible to others.
- You told me that you feel safe and that you enjoy your lessons. I could see that your teachers are outstanding and are good at helping you to become more confident and succeed.
- I really enjoyed seeing you decorate your flowerpots and I was very impressed to hear your thoughts on poetry and the importance of treating people fairly.
- I can see that the staff know a lot about you and always look to improve things for you in order that you achieve extremely well.

So, in order to help the school to be even better I have asked the headteacher and proprietor to:

- consider having a breakfast club so that you can enjoy a snack when you arrive at school after your taxi journey
- encourage staff to have their lunch alongside you at lunchtime.

You can all help by maintaining your outstanding attitudes to learning and school life. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell  
Lead inspector