

Charters Ancaster College

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy 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 2002¹, 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.

The inspection of registered provision³ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.⁴

This was a light-touch inspection which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Charters Ancaster College is a co-educational primary and nursery school located just outside Bexhill on Sea. It was set up by a parents' committee in 1996 and is owned by a charitable trust. The school currently provides for children aged 2 to 11 years and has approval to extend this up to age 13 in 2010. The school aims to 'create a happy, stimulating environment with a family atmosphere in which the children feel secure and motivated to strive for the highest standards of learning while having fun'.

At the time of the inspection there were 42 full-time pupils in the school and 54 children on the register in the Nursery, including 33 in the registered nursery provision who receive nursery education funding. There were no pupils on roll with a statement of special educational needs or recorded as speaking English as an additional language. The school was last inspected in January 2007 when it met all the independent school regulations. Since then, it has undergone a period of change. For two years the management of the school was carried out by a leadership team of four who held joint responsibility. Following some reorganisation, the posts of headteacher and deputy headteacher were reinstated in September 2009. The current post-holders were appointed from within the existing management team.

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

³ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

Evaluation of the school

Charters Ancaster provides a good quality of education both in the main school and in the Nursery. The school achieves its aims well, particularly with regard to creating a family atmosphere in which the pupils can enjoy their learning. Curricular provision is good; pupils are well motivated and make good progress overall as a result of good teaching. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding and promotes good behaviour. Pupils enjoy, and are proud of, their school. As one boy said, 'It's about all the opportunities we have and how much we learn out of lessons as well as in them.' The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. Arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of pupils are adequate, but the break in continuity in the management of the school has resulted in some lack of rigour in the recording of routine procedures and updating of policies. Lines of accountability are not always clear.

The quality of education was judged to be good in the last inspection. Since then the school has addressed the suggested points for development to a large extent. Increased opportunities for staff to see other schools in action to further share good practice have been created through a mixture of formal and informal links with other schools and attendance at cluster group meetings. The school has made a good start on developing a more concise central record of assessments of pupils' progress and the headteacher and her deputy headteacher are clear about the next steps required in order to fully achieve this. The school meets most of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education, including the curriculum, is good. Basic skills are developed well and links between subjects are effectively supported. For example, pupils in Year 6 enjoy reading *Carrie's War* while studying the Second World War and learning about the lives of evacuees; traffic lights being made in design and technology link well with the study of electric conduction in science and to a computer programme being used in information and communication technology.

Careful display of pupils' work is evident throughout the school and this presents pupils with a rich and stimulating environment for learning. Provision for physical education, music and drama is strong and the teaching of French throughout the school adds to pupils' achievements. A good feature of the provision is the number of visitors and the wide range of educational visits. (Pupils came up with a list of 60 such events!) These add immensely to pupils' enjoyment of their education and help to bring the curriculum to life. Lunchtime and after-school lessons and clubs further enrich the curriculum, developing skills such as independent self-help and cooperation. This is evident even in the very early opportunities provided by the Nursery for pre-school children.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. Pupils are keen to learn and make good progress; some make very good progress. High-ability pupils benefit from the flexibility in class groupings which allows them to work with older pupils where appropriate. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and, as a result, pupils are very responsive to instructions, confident to ask and answer questions and to offer their views. Behaviour in lessons is good and lessons for older pupils keep a brisk pace. Work is consistently marked and increasingly good use is made of individual learning targets to help pupils know how they could improve their work. Subject teachers have good curricular knowledge, they mostly plan lessons carefully and support is targeted effectively. The mixed-age classes caused by small numbers in Years 1 to 4, however, pose a particular challenge for teachers, and planning for the whole class does not always incorporate sufficiently different tasks or activities for pupils working at different levels.

Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning and progress over time is thorough. Day-to-day assessment is less strong. Staff know pupils very well and have high expectations. However, sometimes too much reliance is placed upon teachers' knowledge of pupils, rather than a more formal ongoing evaluation, to measure objectively how well pupils are doing in lessons.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. The pupils enjoy school a great deal. Parents are overwhelmingly pleased with what the school provides and there is a strong sense of family and community involvement. Pupils have a good understanding of what is expected of them; they are very willing to help each other and respond well to the school's ethos. As one girl said, 'You never get left out. There's always someone there for you.'

Pupils participate enthusiastically in organising activities, such as those connected with Red Nose Day and raising money for a number of charities, including supporting children who have leukaemia. They also participate in a number of local events, including Hastings Festival, and visit historical and important landmarks, such as Hever Castle, as well as learning about establishments such as the Houses of Parliament. Through these experiences pupils are helped to understand the types and roles of public services and institutions in England. There is very good provision to raise awareness of other countries and lifestyles and this is reflected in the vibrant displays of artwork generated from study of a number of different cultures. Within a predominantly White British school population, all pupils are successfully encouraged to celebrate difference and diversity. This enhances their understanding and tolerance of different cultures and traditions, as well as ensuring that they respect their own.

Every care is taken to provide each pupil with an opportunity to find something they can excel at. As a result, pupils' attendance and behaviour are good. Pupils show respect for one another, their teachers and other adults and demonstrate increasing

self-confidence. They are well prepared for the next phase of their education. One prefect demonstrated a maturity of approach shown by many when she said, 'We're always improving; we learn by our mistakes.'

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The overall quality of the provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to safeguard pupils' safety and welfare, but responsibility for monitoring the impact of these has become unclear. As a result, although procedures and recording are generally compliant with regulations, some slackness is evident in some areas. Procedures for ensuring the suitability of staff on appointment have recently been tightened up. However, the school has only recently introduced processes for ensuring the medical fitness of staff and staff records did not comprehensively show that this had been completed for all staff appointed from September 2003.

The quality of supervision around the school is good and pupils feel safe. Responsibility for child protection is currently being transferred from the previous post-holder to the headteacher, who is waiting to attend relevant training. All staff undergo regular training to keep up to date with child protection matters. There are very few bullying incidents and the school has robust procedures for dealing with these. Staff are aware of how to implement the school's behaviour policy, but sanctions imposed for unacceptable behaviour are not systematically recorded or held.

There are ample opportunities for pupils to take part in indoor and outdoor exercise. All pupils, including children from the Early Years Foundation Stage, benefit from the recently installed all-weather sports pitch. Opportunities for outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are more restricted for the children in the Reception class than in the Nursery. Older pupils clearly enjoy their annual adventure week away. A number of pupils commented on how much they enjoy the school food and they were able to describe what a healthy lifestyle might consist of. Health education is effectively supported by well-planned elements within the curriculum.

First aid policies and procedures meet the regulations and risk assessments for educational visits are in place. Fire tests and practice records, while meeting the regulatory requirements, contain the minimum of information so that monitoring of the process is difficult. The school's complaints policy does not fully comply with requirements. There is no suitable plan in place showing how the school intends to improve facilities for adults and pupils with disabilities.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Children appear to enjoy their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage very much. They achieve well in the Nursery, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Progress overall is less rapid in Reception.

There is a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. All areas of learning are generally covered well, although coverage is more consistent in the Nursery than in the Reception class. Good use is made of assessment, and record-keeping is consistent across both the Nursery and Reception. The individual needs of the children are planned for well and good use is made of resources. Staff training is effective in the Nursery, but, due to a recent change of staffing, not all staff have the same high level of knowledge and skill in implementing the requirements across the whole of the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result of some systemic weaknesses at the whole-school level, safeguarding is satisfactory. However, welfare, health and safety are generally promoted well within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Policies and practices are implemented consistently and rigorously and the requirements of the childcare register are fully met. Children conduct themselves very safely both indoors and outside. The indoor learning environment is generally good in both settings. However, use of the outdoor area is much more developed in the Nursery than in Reception. There are some opportunities for children to make a contribution and they respond well to the chance to do certain jobs for their community, such as helping to set up some activities. They benefit from good opportunities to gain awareness of staying healthy. Staff discuss food issues during the school day and parents are kept well informed if there are any concerns. Good care is taken to ensure that children are well prepared for the next phase of their education.

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Managers are well placed to ensure that the team as a whole continues to improve so that best practice is consistently evident.

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:

- maintain a written record of sanctions imposed on pupils for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8)).

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

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out and recorded to confirm their medical fitness (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that the complaints policy and procedure:
 - state that one person on the panel hearing a complaint is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
 - stipulate that a copy of the findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and that a copy be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher (paragraph 7(i))
 - provide for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended in 2002, the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁵

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that the leadership and management of the school, including the directors, implement a thorough system for monitoring and reviewing policies and practice
- ensure that individualised planning and assessment for learning are implemented consistently across the school
- in the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently high and that provision for outdoor learning in Reception matches that of the Nursery.

⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

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 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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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?		✓		
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?		✓		
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?		✓		
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Charters Ancaster College		
DCSF number	845/6042		
Unique reference number	131279		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY343756		
Type of school	Preparatory and nursery school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1996		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 26	Girls: 16	Total: 42
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 25	Girls: 29	Total: 54
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 12	Girls: 11	Total: 33
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,080		
Annual fees (childcare)	£513 - £6,032		
Address of school	Charters Ancaster College Woodsgate Place Gunters Lane Bexhill-on-Sea East Sussex TN39 4EB		
Telephone number	01424 216670		
Fax number	01424 223525		
Email address	office@chartersancaster.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Miriam Black		
Proprietor	Mr Per Thorkildsen		
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI		
Dates of inspection	5 November 2009		