

# Holme Court School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	820/6020
Unique Reference Number	108886
Inspection number	322273
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

Holme Court School is a small, independent, co-educational, day, special school set in a rural location near Biggleswade in Bedfordshire. The school opened in January 2005 as a non-profit making organisation and, along with two independent schools in Cambridge, this is one of three schools owned by the Sturdy family. The school offers a specially tailored educational programme for pupils with dyslexia and associated difficulties. It provides short-term intensive programmes for pupils who stay, normally for between one and three years, after which they are expected to return to their previous school or move on to a new setting. There are currently 26 pupils on roll aged 8 to 13, 11 of whom have a statement of special educational need. The school has its own psychology research team, funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Economic and Social Research Council. Research to evaluate current support for pupils with dyslexia is being undertaken in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University and Cambridge University, and the school uses the findings from this to inform its own provision. This is the school's second inspection. It was first inspected in February 2006.

## Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality education and pupils make good progress. The quality of teaching and the curriculum is good, and the school has good assessment procedures in place. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are well prepared for moving on to the next phase of their education, and the school successfully meets its aim to raise pupils' self-esteem and engender in them a renewed sense of confidence. It makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school is a welcoming, relaxed yet purposeful community, and parents and pupils alike are overwhelmingly positive about its work. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection and the school meets all of the independent school regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and improving, and the school has made good improvement in this aspect since the last inspection. The curriculum is kept under constant review through a detailed whole school development plan and separate plans in each subject. Appropriate policies and good schemes of work ensure that learning opportunities are matched well to pupils' needs and interests.

The main focus of the curriculum is the teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy because it is in these areas that pupils need the most support. The daily provision of intensive individual and small group sessions to address pupils' difficulties in English and mathematics is an outstanding feature of the school's work. A wide range of other activities ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. These activities include cookery, film-making, Spanish, organic gardening, touch-typing and music. In order to improve their coordination, pupils take part in a daily physical exercise programme, devised by a physiotherapist, and learn martial arts, as well as taking part in regular sports and swimming instruction. The school recently introduced the International Primary Curriculum which covers the teaching of humanities, personal, social and health education, citizenship and learning skills through cross-curricular topics.

A wide variety of educational visits, including some residential opportunities, is provided and the school has strong links with the local community. It is in the process of introducing the Young Enterprise Scheme to further enhance this aspect of its work, and already has links with the County Fire Service and the City of London Police. The school benefits from a collaborative relationship with its sister schools in Cambridge for sports fixtures, shared trips and the development of an International Curriculum. Weekly trips to the International School in Cambridge expand older pupils' social horizons as well as providing opportunities for them to use the school's science laboratories. Good procedures are in place to prepare pupils for the world of work and pupils at Key Stage 3 receive effective careers guidance. The school is working towards Healthy Schools status and the Quality Inclusion Mark.

Teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to outstanding, and the school has made good improvement in this aspect since the last inspection. Small class sizes ensure a personalised and flexible approach to each lesson, and teaching in the intensive support sessions in literacy and numeracy is outstanding. Whilst provision ensures that pupils achieve well overall, there are instances of pupils making exceptional gains in their basic skills. All the teachers are trained, or being trained, as specialists in specific learning difficulties, and the staff benefit from additional weekly training through the research project that is based on the site. Teachers are skilled in asking questions that probe pupils' thinking and provide ample opportunity for them to develop their speaking and listening skills. Teachers and learning support assistants are all very encouraging to pupils and, as a result, pupils are confident to express their ideas and to take risks. Teachers have good subject knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. The school is well resourced and teachers make good use of commercial resources as well as those they have made themselves. Learning support assistants are kept well informed about what is expected in each lesson and they make a good contribution to pupils' learning. In outstanding lessons, teaching is highly focused and dynamic, so that all pupils are absorbed and actively involved. Where teaching is satisfactory, learning objectives are not always clear to pupils and they are not reminded of their individual targets or the need to take responsibility for their own learning.

The assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is good and the diagnosis of their specific difficulties is outstanding. On entry, each pupil is thoroughly assessed by the school's resident psychologist to inform their individual education programme, and targets are reviewed termly with pupils and parents. Pupils' attainment is charted through standardised testing twice a year in reading, spelling and numeracy, and additional tests are used where appropriate. Pupils receive much verbal feedback about how well they are doing and teachers regularly check pupils' understanding in lessons. They also record pupils' attainment in individual subjects and in the specialist programmes they are following. The school annually assesses pupils' National Curriculum levels for use when they move to their next school. Senior staff track pupils' attainment across subject areas but the school is at an early stage in measuring pupils' progress to evaluate its overall effectiveness or to check the impact of new initiatives or aspects of provision. Limited attention to measuring how much progress pupils have actually made, led the school to judge pupils' progress as only satisfactory. Data collected during the inspection showed that progress is good overall with instances of outstanding progress for some pupils.

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

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties means that they typically enter the school with very low self-esteem and a fear of failure. The school judged this aspect of its work to be good, rather than outstanding, but discussion with pupils revealed the profound impact the school's work has had on their sense of self. Their comments reflected the fact that the school's greatest strength is the way it makes pupils feel valued and, therefore, ready to learn. Relationships between pupils and teachers are mutually respectful, and pupils very much appreciate the help they are given with their work. They say that they enjoy school a great deal and feel confident because 'the teachers understand each child'. Attendance is good and many pupils who were previously school-phobics have made outstanding improvement in their eagerness to attend school. There is no unauthorised absence and pupils often choose to come into school early and stay late. Although a few pupils' difficulties can lead to challenging behaviour, the behaviour of many individual pupils is outstanding. Behaviour is good overall and the school is calm and orderly. Pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and they respond very well to the many opportunities to be physically active. The school council meets weekly and pupils say that they feel listened to. They readily take on responsibility around the school, for instance collecting eggs from the chickens and helping with gardening, as well as contributing to a wide range of fundraising events. The school's focus on an international curriculum ensures that pupils are developing a broad awareness of cultural and social issues. Through citizenship, pupils gain a general knowledge of public institutions and services in England. Furthermore, the warm family atmosphere and strong sense of community within the school increase pupils' awareness of their place and responsibilities in society.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school judged this aspect of its work to be good, but inspection findings show that provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. The school now meets all the regulations in this respect, and places great emphasis on meeting pupils' individual needs through a heightened sensitivity towards their learning difficulties. The fact that this is a very small school with a staff ratio of one adult to three pupils also means that pupils are supervised exceptionally well. Pupils' well-being is underpinned by a comprehensive range of effective policies, and the school has thorough systems of rewards and sanctions in place to promote good behaviour. It keeps detailed records of any incidents and pupils say that any difficulties between them are quickly resolved. Staff assess risks around the school building and prior to outings to avoid any potential hazards. Pupils are taught how to be safe and healthy living is strongly encouraged. Pupils grow and eat their own organic produce and undertake physical exercise on a daily basis. Individual needs are carefully taken into account when placing pupils in teaching groups for all lessons or for a specific subject if they are more or less advanced than their classmates. The school takes steps to ensure that pupils' medical needs are met and has thorough procedures in place for first aid. Strong attention is placed on pupils' emotional well-being and pupils are clearly very happy and feel secure and protected. Sound fire risk assessments are regularly carried out. The school is fully inclusive and meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Staff provide training to other establishments in meeting the requirements of the Act and voluntary outreach support to increase others' understanding of dyslexia.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Appropriate recruitment procedures are in place to ensure that all staff and volunteers have undergone the necessary checks to confirm their suitability to work with children. A central staff register has been implemented and training in safeguarding pupils has been undertaken by the headteacher in line with the latest statutory requirements. All staff and proprietors have had the required enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school is located in an Edwardian house, set in seven acres of landscaped and wooded grounds. The premises and accommodation are in good condition and enable effective learning. They are well maintained and teaching areas are clean, tidy and suitably decorated. Classrooms are of an appropriate size for the number of pupils using them. Furniture is arranged well to suit the style of teaching which supports effective dialogue between teachers and pupils. There are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill. There is good specialist accommodation for information and communication technology, art and physical education. The expansive grounds provide excellent facilities for sport and gardening, and the peaceful location makes a substantial contribution to pupils' personal development.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers receive detailed and comprehensive information about the school's provision. The school brochure, regular newsletters and the school website ensure that parents are fully informed about the school's aims and ethos, and are aware of its policies. The school works very closely with parents as partners when pupils are admitted and when they move on to other schools. Parents receive good quality written reports on their children's progress and the school is in regular contact with parents to keep them suitably informed about their child's education. Parents express a very high level of satisfaction with the school's work and the school operates an open door policy for parents. It regularly conducts surveys to gather their views and many parents are closely involved in the life of the school, supporting with special activities and fundraising events.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets the requirements. The school has had no complaints in the last year.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

## 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 teachers consistently promote a sense of responsibility in pupils for their own learning through reminding them of their individual targets and sharing learning objectives with them
- measure the impact of new initiatives, as well as on-going provision, by evaluating their impact on pupils' academic progress and personal development.





## School details

Name of school	Holme Court School		
DCSF number	820/6020		
Unique reference number	108886		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 2005		
Age range of pupils	5-13		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 5	Total: 26
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 8	Girls: 3	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£13,185		
Annual fees (boarders)	N/A		
Address of school	Great North Road Biggleswade Bedfordshire SG18 9ST		
Telephone number	01767 312766		
Email address	info@holmecourt.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Julia Hewerdine		
Proprietor	Dr D Sturdy and Dr H Sturdy		
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild		
Dates of inspection	21–22 May 2008		