

Continuum School Somerset

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Steffi Penny 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

Continuum School Somerset is an independent special school for students with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is sited in a rural location near the village of Westport in Somerset and opened in April 2008. It is registered for boys and girls aged from 10 to 18 years. There are currently five students on roll aged from 14 to 16 years. All of these students are looked after by their respective local authority and four live in homes provided by the Continuum Group. Two students have a statement of special educational needs. Most have a history of failed placements in local authority care or fostering settings. All have experienced severe psychological trauma and, as a result, present frequent and openly challenging behaviour. In addition to the education offered at the Westport site the school also provides an outreach service, whereby students are taught in their home locality but this was not in use during this inspection and so was not inspected. Students attend vocational courses at a local college as well as on the school site. The school was last inspected in June 2008. The school aims to provide for the individual needs of students, enabling them to succeed in learning and to grow both socially and emotionally.

Evaluation of the school

The Continuum School Somerset provides a good education for its students and meets its aims. All aspects of the school's work and provision are good, including the arrangements for safeguarding. This is a great improvement from the last inspection where all were judged to be satisfactory, with the exception of the welfare, health and safety of students, which was judged as good. As a consequence, students now make good progress in their academic studies and in their social and emotional development. The school now meets all the regulations for registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. The curriculum is good and all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered for each key stage. At the time of the

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

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

last inspection the quality of curriculum planning was too limited. Schemes of work now ensure progression through careful mapping which is monitored by senior staff. The school has a well-targeted programme of externally accredited courses which all students follow. These programmes are personalised to individual student's needs, interests and requests.

Work-related learning is part of the curriculum for all students whether they have chosen a vocational qualification or not; for example, work placements. The outdoor education programme provides students with opportunities to undertake external accreditation; for example, in surfing which can lead to employment as surfing trainers. Other preparation for future employment is developed at school through 'work ready' awards in 'first aid at work' and 'food hygiene' certification.

Parents and carers have noticed the differences that the school has made to the young people in their care through the changes in the curriculum, particularly over the last year. They feel that the use of BTEC awards alongside GCSEs has helped to increase enjoyment as, 'students find it a great way of learning in areas that they have an interest in'. The hair salon has been a great success and has helped young people gain a qualification in hair and beauty as well as increasing their self-esteem and future employability. The school has begun to develop effective cross-curricular links between subjects and other activities. It rightly says that more still needs to be done to improve the curriculum for individual students and in particular the use of 'hands-on' activities including the use of modern and technologically advanced materials in science, childcare and food technology.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Students now make good personal and academic progress. As they gain an understanding of the benefits of what a good education can offer, they demonstrate a determined effort to progress with some very good examination results in both GCSE and BTEC. Students use their skills in mathematics, literacy and computers well to solve problems through practical activities that have relevance to their future lives, enhancing their understanding of the courses they are following and the world around them. In spite of previous failures in their education students now want to do their best.

Assessment procedures have been improved since the last inspection. They are good and consistent across all subjects. Teachers use the assessment information to plan the next steps in a student's learning. Students know how well they are doing and how to increase their rate of progress. This is because teachers indicate, in their marking, the National Curriculum or BTEC level the student is working at. Students' performance is now effectively monitored because this information is shared with parents and carers and is used to set challenging targets, which are subsequently reviewed.

Staff have high expectations of students. As part of developing respect for themselves and others, students learn to value their work and develop good working habits in school. They are helped to do this by a reward system that teaches them to accept constructive criticism and to be self-evaluative about their behaviour, how

hard they have tried and how well they have succeeded. At the end of each day students and staff gather together and the positive outcomes of the day for each student are shared. This helps to increase levels of motivation, self-belief and trust.

Classroom resources are good and have improved since the last inspection. There is now less emphasis on the use of worksheets. Students are supplied with the appropriate textbooks and equipment for use in school and in their home. During the inspection teachers used a good variety of resources including video clips and the internet. As stimulus materials, these resources made the learning more interesting. The use of different activities, at an appropriate pace, also helped to provide support and reinforcement of learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A major strength is students' good behaviour which demonstrates the impact of the implementation of the school's policies and their shared ethos by staff. When behaviour slips or an issue arises, students reflect with an adult about the situation and what might be done in future to prevent it. The use of these interviews and the caring for small animals on the school site help students to learn empathy and compassion for others.

Teachers effectively challenge students to think about issues relating to equality and diversity. During the inspection this involved a good debate about the beliefs and viewpoints of people from various religious sections of British society. A few of the students found understanding, valuing and considering the views of people from different cultures and belief systems extremely hard. Nevertheless, all made a positive contribution to the discussion and stayed on task throughout the session because of the relationship and trust that they had with the teacher. Opportunities to develop students' social and emotional skills are woven effectively into the timetable as well as shared mealtimes and the use of journey times on trips such as the weekly visit to the gym in Bristol.

School records and data clearly demonstrate that students' attitudes to learning improve over time in the school. Attendance has continued to improve over the last year and is now good. Students say that they now appreciate school. This was echoed by one carer who commented: 'They enjoy coming to school now on a regular basis and it is fantastic from our point of view that we do not have any problems in the young people getting up in the morning. School is a big part of their lives and they thoroughly enjoy attending.'

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Students' welfare, health and safety are good. All staff are trained in first aid, restorative justice, de-escalation techniques and manual handling. All staff, including the child protection officer, are appropriately trained in safeguarding. Students are well supervised in school and on trips.

Students understand how to keep safe and have a good understanding of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Students at risk are identified and clear, effective support plans are put in place. Students understand that all actions have consequences through the good procedures for conflict resolution and any issues are appropriately recorded. Rewards and sanctions are relevant and have a positive impact on improving behaviour.

All policies and procedures, including regular risk assessments, are thorough and all comply with requirements. Policies are annually reviewed to ensure that relevant changes are made to the school procedures. Fire and other safety arrangements meet requirements, including those for small animal care and husbandry. The school complies fully with the requirements of the Equality Act, 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the checks to confirm the suitability of staff and proprietors are carried out by the Continuum Group's human resource department and meet requirements. Evidence of these checks and when they were made is clearly recorded in the school's single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The converted farmhouse building provides a pleasant and effective, safe learning environment with comfortable recreational and social areas. Part of the land attached to the building is used to house small animals which are instrumental to the formal curriculum and development of students' social and emotional needs. There is an attractive outdoor garden area for students to stroll and play in. The school also makes appropriate arrangements for students to use specialist sports facilities. Facilities for students who may become ill meet requirements.

Provision of information

Parents and carers receive all the required information. Good daily communication exists between the school and the student's parent or carer culminating in a weekly review. Good quality contact is maintained with the placing authority and accounts are submitted annually by the school. The school also provides detailed written reports for the reviews of students, their care plans and statements of special educational needs.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets all the requirements. It is set out clearly and can be easily followed by parents, carers and others.

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.

- Develop the curriculum by refining the links made between the different subjects.
- Increase the amount of hands-on activity and the use of modern and technologically advanced materials in science, childcare and food technology.

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	Special		
Date school opened	April 2008		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 2	Total: 5
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,800		
Address of school	Westport House Langport Road Westport Hambridge Somerset TA10 0BH		
Telephone number	01460 281216		
Email address	Swavek.Nowakiewicz@continuum.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Swavek Nowakiewicz		
Proprietor	Continuum Group		

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.



23 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Continuum School Somerset, Westport, TA10 0BH

I came to your school in September to see how well you were learning and how well adults help you. I watched you in your lessons and listened to you talking about your work. Thank you for being so polite and helpful to me when I made my visit.

You go to a good school and all aspects of it are good. The curriculum is designed to make sure that you have good opportunities to do GCSEs and vocational qualifications. It is adapted to suit your interests, needs and requests. Because of your good behaviour, determination to work hard and good teaching you are making good progress. You also learn to know the consequences of your actions and how to think about and care for others.

You work with caring, thoughtful adults who are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be. In order to help the school improve further I have suggested that staff continue to develop the links between different subjects and activities so that what you study is linked even better to your needs.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best.

With my very best wishes for your future.

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector