

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002**

Name of school:	Mereside school
DCSF number:	356/6030
FOCUS number:	211
Inspection team::	Reporting Inspector: Cecile Corfield Supporting Inspector: Dr. Martin Bradley Lay Inspector: Philip Hutchinson
Dates of inspection:	12 – 15 May 2008

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Mereside School

Address of the school: 237, Didsbury Road, Stockport. Sk4 2AA

Telephone number: 0161 975 9323

Fax number: 0161 432 7991

Proprietor: Mereside Educational Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr J Simpson

Name of Senior Teacher: Mr C Platford

DCSF number: 356/6030

FOCUS number: 214

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 29 Girls: 20

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 4 Girls: 6

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:
Boys: 1 Girls: 0

Annual fees: Nil

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Cecile Corfield
Supporting Inspector: Dr. Martin Bradley
Lay Inspector: Philip Hutchinson

Dates of inspection: 12 – 15 May 2008

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Mereside School is an independent day school situated in Stockport which caters for pupils aged 11–18 years. It is affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust and follows its policies and principles. The school opened in its present premises in January 2008 having moved from Sale, Manchester. Pupils come from families of the Brethren community and admission is non-selective. There are 49 boys and girls of compulsory school age on roll, one of whom has a statement of special educational need. Ten pupils are above compulsory school age. Several pupils have been identified by the school as having additional learning needs and/or difficulties. The school aims to *'provide our pupils with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum in a caring and secure Christian environment. We strive for excellence'*.

Summary of main findings:

The quality of education provided by Mereside School is good overall. The curriculum provides a suitably wide range of subjects extended by interesting out of school visits. It enables pupils to make good progress over time. Teaching is good overall as is the pupils' behaviour. Whilst the trustees and senior teacher have a clear view of the overall development of the school, the implications and effects of some decisions have not always been sufficiently clear to those affected. Procedures to ensure that pupils are safe are thorough. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

What the school does well:

- it has managed the move into the new premises effectively and pupils have settled quickly;
- its quality of teaching is good overall reflecting the experience of the staff;
- its pupils' behaviour is good and they have positive attitudes to their learning; and
- its provision for pupils with additional learning needs or difficulties and for the pupil with a statement of special educational needs, is good with particularly well organised individual education plans and targets for pupils to improve their work.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- inform parents of pupils and prospective pupils of the availability on request of details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Although the school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002, it must ensure that the stated intention that primary age pupils have access to specialist facilities is met.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall. It enables the pupils to make good progress over time. The school offers pupils in key stages 3 and 4 seven academic subjects (English, mathematics, science, modern languages, geography, history and citizenship) and two creative subjects (music and art). Technology is taught through craft, design and technology (CDT), cookery and textiles. The curriculum is extended effectively with office skills, Bible Studies and sporting activities. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is integrated with other subjects satisfactorily and taught as a discrete subject to Year 7 only. Provision for information communication technology will commence in September 2008. Meanwhile, the pupils learn keyboard skills with word processors. No options are offered in Key Stages 3 or 4, except that more able pupils can study German as well as French.

A new Sixth Form curriculum was introduced in September 2007 which enables pupils in Year 12 to study either 4 AS subjects or 3 AS subjects with BTEC. Their curriculum is extended with Bible Studies, music, current affairs, games, CDT (boys) and cookery/textiles for girls. At present, pupils must take AS English and from September 2008, AS mathematics will be compulsory, providing a B grade is achieved in General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE). However, pupils state that they find the way in which the optional subjects are grouped constrains their choice. The curriculum for Year 12 focuses on academic subjects, with fewer opportunities for award-bearing practical and vocational courses to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities and aptitudes. This has arisen as a result of limited accommodation, and the school is in the process of addressing this matter. Pupils in Year 13 study on a part-time basis combined with employment. In French, law and mathematics, they work with the Year 12 pupils. They undertake an OCR Level 3 accounts course.

Provision is good for the eleven pupils identified as needing additional support and for the pupil with a statement of educational need. Individual educational plans are thorough and planned with care. The pupils are given sufficient individual support to enable them to make good progress.

The time allocated to subjects has been carefully analysed and is appropriate. However, a significant amount of time is wasted at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions when teaching often starts up to ten minutes late.

The quality of subject planning varies from good to inadequate and overall is just satisfactory. Account is taken of Focus Learning Trust guidelines, the National Curriculum and guidance from examining bodies. The pro forma provided for staff limits the amount of detail to be given and in the best practice seen, teachers have devised their own format to provide a wide range of detail on what is to be taught, when and how. The poorest examples provide just a sentence to cover provision for a term or a unit. Planning does not indicate how units will be taught in half-terms of varying length.

There is a very popular and over-subscribed art club, now extended to three lunchtimes a week. The homework club was well attended earlier in the year and prior to examinations. The curriculum is enriched by out-of-school visits which extend the pupils'

areas of study. The art work resulting from a visit to the Imperial War Museum is outstanding. The pupils' understanding of the ravages of the Black Death was promoted with a visit to Eyam, and in economics, a visit to the Ford factory enabled pupils see labour practices in operation.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall. However, it does not always build upon the good behaviour and responsible attitudes of the pupils to enable them to achieve higher academic standards. Not all staff use a common lesson plan, and insufficient attention is paid to providing work matched to the full range of abilities in the classes, including the most able. Despite this, the experience of many teachers promotes pupils' learning, at least satisfactorily and often to good effect. In some years, pupils are broadly grouped by ability. This enables teaching to be more closely matched to pupils' levels of attainment, often with additional support for individual pupils. This is effective, especially for the less able pupils. The assessment of all pupils by the Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinator is impressive and has laid the foundation for support not only of those with additional learning needs and/or difficulties, but also potentially for identifying gifted and talented pupils. Where pupils have Individual Education Plans, these are detailed, practical and up to date. They offer clear guidance to teachers, often with the support of the SEN coordinator.

Resources are adequate and the school's recent move to its current premises has enabled more specialist teaching rooms to be developed. The school is aware of the continuing need to develop its resources.

Pupils' progress from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 11 is good. GCSE results show that overall pupils achieve above both the local authority and national average levels. Levels of achievement are good for the more able pupils. Whilst less able pupils achieve at satisfactory levels, this reflects good progress from their starting point in Year 7. The small numbers in each year group lead to variations in progress and attainment from year to year.

Systems for tracking and assessing pupils' progress within each year group and each Key Stage have recently been developed. They are not yet fully in place for all subjects. Assessments do not consistently provide sufficiently rigorous judgements on the levels of pupils' attainment. Progress through each year and each Key Stage cannot be accurately assessed using the present data. Targets identifying National Curriculum levels for each subject reflect previous assessments whose accuracy has not been confirmed. Inspection evidence supports the view of the rigorous SEN assessments that some pupils' attainment, especially in Key Stage 3, is below that identified by several subjects, where the level is based on Key Stage 2 assessments in the core subjects. Most teachers mark work regularly and the best examples provide comments on how the pupils might improve their work.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils is satisfactory overall. The Christian foundation contributes effectively to pupils' spiritual and moral development. The good Bible Studies lessons and twice daily Bible readings and prayers led by trustees provide clear support for pupils' spiritual development. However, this is not consistently promoted in other aspects of the school's work, such as in assembly or in other curricula subjects. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong and are able to take responsibility for their own behaviour which is good. Pupils are generally keen to learn and participate well in lessons. Through the School Council they are able to voice their ideas and contribute to the school community as well as managing a termly budget. The work of the Council also forms a central part of Year 10 Citizenship coursework. Fundraising for worthy causes is given great emphasis and this year, Lifeboats (RNLI) is the popular choice. Collections for charity and fund raising through selling store vouchers provide opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of issues in the wider community.

Social development is good and pupils co-operate well with one another. They readily help each other in class. PSHE and cultural awareness is mainly taught through a range of subjects, notably business studies and citizenship, with issues such as alcohol awareness being developed through science. This approach is satisfactory, although the balance of the overall programme requires monitoring to ensure that the PSHE elements are addressed as well as more subject-specific aspects. The pupils develop a broad knowledge and understanding of public services.

Preparation for pupils' economic well being and understanding is good, particularly amongst the older pupils. The work experience programme in Years 10 and 11 usefully develops their awareness, although in some placements the work offered has been limited.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school has made good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. There is a range of appropriate policies, which have been implemented effectively; these include anti-bullying, welfare, health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour and child protection. The named child protection officer has had appropriate training and all the staff are up-to-date with current training. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to managing behaviour and the pupils' behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. All pupils' activities both on and off the school site have had thorough risk assessments. The senior teacher assumes overall responsibility which he carries out diligently.

Both the science and PSHE curricula place appropriate emphasis on the pupils' health and encourage them to take care of their bodies and keep safe. Healthy eating is promoted and drinking water is available throughout the day.

The school is vigilant in ensuring fire safety and all fire risk assessments and checks have been carried out thoroughly. The school has held two fire drills since opening in January and details have been recorded correctly. Health and safety practices are taught in all practical lessons, such as cookery, art and technology. Good provision

is made for First Aid with trained staff and well-stocked First Aid boxes located where needed. Pupils are effectively supervised at all times when they are on school premises. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002. However, the school must ensure that its stated intention that primary age pupils will have access to the range of specialist facilities is met.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school carries out conscientiously checks on identity, medical fitness and professional qualifications of staff prior to appointment. The school's Single Central Record contains details of the checks required by regulations for all adults who work with the pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school moved to its present premises, a former maintained school, in January 2008. It has substantial grounds with hard and grass surface playing areas. The accommodation provides good facilities for the current age range, with a hall and specialist teaching rooms for most subjects. In addition it has a support room for pupils with additional learning needs and/or difficulties, and a medical room for pupils who are unwell. The library is centrally located in the school and is a useful resource. Specialist rooms are generally appropriate, although at times music lessons affect work in the adjacent office skills room. Maintenance is satisfactory and the school has conducted appropriate fire checks.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school provides parents with detailed information about its work, keeping them well informed about developments at the school in addition to their children's progress. The Parent and Pupil Handbook is an effective document for informing parents about the school and its aspirations. It conveys all of the information to meet the requirements for registration except for the number of formal complaints received. The school ensures that ongoing communications are maintained effectively with parents and through the school's interesting '*Mereside Bugle*' newspaper.

Two reports each year are sent to parents and provide useful subject comments and an overall comment from the Senior Teacher. Whilst these reports are useful, some comments do not provide clear guidance as to what the pupil has to learn next or contain comments which are unclear.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

- *inform parents of pupils and of prospective pupils of the availability on request of details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).*

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has adopted the FLT complaints procedures and practices and these have been formally adopted by the Trust. This fully meets the requirements. The Parent and Pupil Handbook provides a helpful reference to this procedure and states that a copy is available on request from the School Office.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school is controlled by a Trust comprising nine trustees who meet on a monthly basis with minutes and action responsibilities noted. These are confirmed or amended at subsequent meetings. Each trustee has a designated responsibility which should be clarified to specifically include a responsibility for 'legal compliance' and 'pastoral care'. In addition there is a Management Team comprising two trustees, the Senior Teacher and two teachers. These meetings deal with day-to-day administrative matters and are not minuted. The school has recently moved into new premises which serve the organisation well. Accommodation for primary age pupils in Years 3 - 6 will be available in September 2008.

The school organisation is good and the attention given to the ethos is a strong point in the overall organisation. There is a staff reorganisation exercise in progress which is designed to improve the quality of teaching. However, this has reduced staff morale considerably. The leadership of the trustees and Senior Teacher are developing a strategic vision for the future of the school, but major elements of decisions such as staff reorganisation, curriculum planning and primary implementation have not always been communicated clearly to those affected by them, nor have they been fully understood. Behaviour management is successfully achieved but pastoral care could be improved by a specific trustee taking on this responsibility, especially during this period of major change.

Administrative records are available as required, with satisfactory communication between trustees, the school and parents.

The school is supported effectively by a number of volunteers from the community.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The planning and monitoring systems initiated by the Senior Teacher to raise the quality of teaching and for curriculum development should be pursued rigorously.

The following are areas where specific improvements could be made and on which the trustees are asked to consider implementation:

- formal meetings of the Management Team should be minuted and actions as noted followed up; and
- at present the school has not defined how the management of the primary department will operate within the structure of the whole school. This, along with other aspects of staff responsibilities and reporting, needs clarification.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the Focus Learning Trust website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk