

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:	Sceptre School
DCSF number:	820/6019
FOCUS number:	308
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Cecile Corfield Mr Peter Jones Mrs Eileen McAndrew Lay Inspector: Mr Philip Hutchinson
Dates of inspection:	2 nd – 4 th March 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of the school: Sceptre School

Address of the school: Ridgeway Avenue
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU5 4QL

Telephone number: 01582 665676

Fax number: 01582 665900

Email address: sceptre@focus-school.com

Proprietor: Sceptre Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Martin Magee

Name of Secondary Headteacher: Mr Stephen Brown

Name of Primary Headteacher: Mrs Susan Kesseru

DCSF number: 820/6019

FOCUS number: 308

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust (FLT)

Age range of pupils and students: 7 - 18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 86 Girls: 89
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 16 Girls: 20

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

Annual Fees: No fees charged

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley
Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Cecile Corfield
Mr Peter Jones
Mrs Eileen McAndrew
Lay Inspector: Mr Philip Hutchinson

Dates of inspection: 2nd – 4th March 2010

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:

Sceptre School is an independent day school with two primary sections and one secondary section. The primary and secondary sections located in Dunstable near Luton are the subject of this inspection. The primary section in Northampton is registered separately with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and was not inspected at this time. Sceptre is a school with a distinctive Christian religious character and is affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust (FLT). Pupils are drawn from a wide catchment area of about 50 miles radius, and the great majority travel to school by bus.

The school was originally established as a tuition centre for pupils who were otherwise being educated at home and was first registered as a school in 2003. The school's mission statement states that it is 'committed to providing quality, first rate education to young men and women who are devoted to Christian beliefs and morals'. At the time of the inspection there were 175 pupils on roll. No pupil has a statement of special educational need.

Summary of main findings:

The school provides a good quality of education overall. The curriculum is of good quality and meets the pupils' needs, enabling them to develop high levels of skills. The provision for pupils' personal and social education is good. The quality of teaching in the secondary section is good overall and some is outstanding; in the primary section it is satisfactory and occasionally outstanding. Assessment has developed significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The school is aware of the need to keep this under review. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory with some good features which reflect the Christian values of the school. Pupils are attentive in lessons and behave generally well around the school, although a number of parents and pupils expressed concerns about behaviour in the secondary section. This was not evident during the inspection. A significant number of secondary pupils felt that their views were not taken into account and a greater proportion felt that they were not sufficiently valued. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory with some good features. The school has most policies and procedures in place, although the policy for safeguarding children has not been well monitored in the past and does not fully meet the requirements as it has not been updated to reflect current practice. The school does not fully comply with the requirements for staff appointments as, although staff and volunteers have all been checked with the

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) the school has not maintained evidence of all of the checks conducted on staff. The information provided for parents is appropriate and comprehensive; the primary and secondary sections have different approaches to grading pupils' attainment. Contacts between the primary and secondary sections have improved following the appointment of the present secondary headteacher. The school and the Trustees are aware of the need to promote this relationship.

What the school does well:

- its curriculum is interesting and relevant to its Christian aims;
- in the secondary school the teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding; and
- when given the opportunity the pupils are conscientious, enthusiastic and highly motivated learners.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- ensure that the written policy for the welfare and safety of children and the current practices are accurate, match one another and are monitored; and
- undertake and record full checks on staff prior to confirming their appointment.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:

- the school fully meets the requirements.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The overall quality of education is good and the curriculum is also of good quality. It is broad and balanced, well planned and is suitable for all the pupils. It ensures that pupils acquire good skills in speaking and listening, as well as in literacy and numeracy. Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE), and for citizenship, is good and owes much to the school's Christian values. The curriculum is well designed to help pupils learn and make good progress, and gives them a firm grounding for future life.

The primary curriculum follows the National Curriculum and is supplemented by specialist teaching in French. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum gives a good range of experience across the key areas of learning, still broadly following the National Curriculum, including PSHE and citizenship, with the addition of Bible Studies, typing skills and learning skills. This is a well balanced curriculum, giving suitably broad experience which contributes effectively to pupils' learning and prepares them well for Key Stage 4.

In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum continues to ensure sufficient breadth while allowing pupils some focus on their areas of interest. A compulsory core continues to address learning needs across the key areas. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) two-year course option choices are made from a small but suitable range of humanities, technology and business-related courses. The curriculum in Year 11 includes work experience, and careers education tailored to need which continues into Years 12 and 13. There are plans to extend Year 10 options for next year to enable pupils to select more than one practical or humanities subject.

The sixth form curriculum is also good. A core curriculum appropriate to the aims of the school includes physical education, information and communication technology, Bible Studies, current affairs and singing. The sixth form curriculum makes flexible provision for choice, reflecting the likely destinations of pupils and caters effectively for differing abilities and aptitudes. There is suitable range of options from vocationally-oriented courses as well as conventional academic subjects. The school makes good use of a link with local further education provision to allow sixth formers to take a BTEC National Diploma in Business. The school is alert to the continuing need to monitor the progress of pupils on this course where provision is not entirely within the control of the school itself. Some sixth-form pupils on the non-examined construction course say that they do not always have a clear idea of what is planned from week to week, and that they have not had the promised opportunities to develop skills beyond bricklaying, for example in woodworking and plumbing. The school is aware of this problem and is putting in place more suitable examined provision from the start of the summer term. The school is also planning to extend the choice of courses further for next year's Year 12 through the addition of GCSE Art, Advanced Subsidiary (AS level) Design and Technology and AS level Chemistry.

The school's provision for pupils with special needs is under review. The current arrangements for individual education plans in the secondary section do not provide enough detail and are not pupil-specific enough to provide targeted learning support.

Provision for secondary pupils identified as having additional learning needs has recently been revised and these proposals are now to be fully implemented.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching overall is good. In the secondary section it is good overall with a significant proportion, including lessons in English, music, geography and French, being outstanding. In the primary section teaching is satisfactory and occasionally outstanding.

In the best examples of good and outstanding lessons in the secondary school teachers' strong subject knowledge and their expertise in planning contributes significantly to the quality of teaching. Teachers identify precisely what is to be learned, ensuring that all pupils are aware of what they are intended to know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson. The subject matter is skilfully planned to be intrinsically engaging, stimulating and likely to maintain pupils' interest. Teachers are adept at drawing out what pupils already know so that new learning builds effectively and securely on previous knowledge. The pace of lessons is well judged to match the task. For example in a Year 10 English lesson the teaching allowed time for genuine reflection and the absorption of complex ideas and meanings in poetry. Subtle questioning enables pupils to think critically, taking advantage of the small groups to give pupils the opportunity to hypothesise, to think aloud, and to clarify and refine their responses. These significant factors develop and foster original, creative thinking. The use of the specialist vocabulary of the subject is planned and emphasised so that pupils become increasingly accustomed to using the technical terms of specific subjects accurately and effectively.

In the primary school, teaching improves from satisfactory to outstanding when planning moves from the routine to the imaginative, as when pupils were given the opportunity to work creatively on a range of learning activities. These included planning recipes using wartime rations; using the interactive whiteboard to explore designs after the style of Clarice Cliff or making a working Jack-in-the-Box. Pupils' excitement, energy, concentration and motivation were palpable and their learning and achievement of a high quality.

Relationships between staff and pupils are almost always good: teachers encourage pupils to become responsive and confident learners able to contribute to their own and each others' learning. Where pupils have opportunities to work collaboratively in groups, as for example in an excellent lesson on Kenya, they respond with willingness and maturity, contributing to their own and each others' learning very effectively. The small number of pupils in each class allows teachers to get to know individual pupils' strengths and needs very accurately and gives them the opportunity to support pupils effectively during lessons. Pupils are lively and enthusiastic learners, able to concentrate, persevere and take satisfaction from their achievement.

In both sections, where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, some weaknesses are evident. Insufficient planning results in some lessons lacking a clear focus so that pupils cover topics they already understand. In the same way, where lessons rely too heavily on course books or are not adequately planned to meet the needs of a particular class, pupils' active participation is not securely engaged, the pace of the lesson slows and progress is adversely affected.

A strong emphasis on speaking and listening from the primary school upwards contributes significantly to pupils becoming increasingly articulate and confident speakers. All pupils have opportunities to tackle tasks which require them to recall previous learning, explain their reasoning to others or express an opinion. Presentation and handwriting are accorded a high priority, resulting in a generally good standard across the school. Pupils have an increasing range of opportunities to write at length for a variety of purposes but the use of photocopied worksheets needs to be monitored. In some subjects they limit the scope of pupils' responses and give teachers little information about what individual pupils have learned. Pupils' skills in numeracy are well developed.

Resources are generally satisfactory. However the collection of books, particularly good quality fiction, is sparse. Much of the existing stock needs to be weeded and where possible updated. The same is true in the primary school where pupils have a limited choice of books to read especially for guided reading. Pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to use and borrow books.

Systems for assessment are satisfactory. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The school has an agreed marking policy, but practice, though improving, is not yet consistent across all subjects. There are examples of very effective marking in history and geography, for example, which make explicit to pupils which aspects of their work are good and identify precisely what they need to do to improve further. The headteacher of the secondary section has an effective strategy in place to monitor and improve the quality of marking and help to ensure consistent practice. The headteacher of the primary section is also monitoring teachers' marking of work.

The primary school carries out a range of tests to establish a baseline on entry, but essential details are not recorded so they do not yet establish a reliable basis from which to measure progress over time. In the primary school regular assessments of pupils' progress are carried out alongside standardised tests in English, mathematics and reading. In the secondary school all teachers record pupils' marks or grades and these, together with the termly assessments in the core subjects contribute effectively to the reports for parents and to discussions of pupils' progress at parents' evenings. In discussion with pupils in Key Stage 3 all those asked were able to talk informatively about their achievement in terms of their levels of attainment in relation to the National Curriculum. This helps pupils to be increasingly aware of the next steps needed for improvement and contributes to their ability to assess their own work accurately. Cognitive ability tests are carried out at regular intervals and are particularly useful to teachers, pupils and parents for their predictions in relation to individual pupils' likely attainment at the end of key stages and at GCSE level. The school collects a range of data on the progress and achievement of individuals allowing them to track an individual pupil's progress over time. The imminent implementation of a computerised programme is intended to facilitate this process.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is satisfactory and has some good features. Most pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their good

attendance. In most lessons, pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and are respectful to their teachers. Generally, behaviour is good in lessons and around both sections of the school, although staff have to manage this rigorously at times. Behaviour in lessons is closely linked to the quality of the teaching. The school's clear behaviour management policy and procedures are known by all and implemented effectively. A significant number of parents and pupils state that they feel that unacceptable behaviour is a problem in the secondary section, but not so in primary. A considerable number of secondary pupils in the pre-inspection questionnaire state that their views are not listened to and an even greater number feel that they are not valued. The oldest pupils in the school would like to have further responsibilities and to be involved more in the day-to-day management of the school. Sixth-formers have a pastoral role in each year group and help in the primary section.

Pupils' spiritual development is good and is promoted through the school's Christian ethos, Bible Studies, assemblies and, particularly, in singing. Singing lessons develop community spirit.

Pupils are prepared appropriately for their future economic well-being by regular emphasis on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, careers advice for older pupils and two weeks' valuable work experience for pupils in Year 11.

The pupils contribute positively to the school and the community in several ways. The school council meets regularly, but would like its suggestions to be considered more quickly by staff and Trustees. Pupils fund raise for charities generously. The pupils in the primary section have collected for the neo-natal clinic at the local hospital and for the Air Ambulance. Pupils in Year 11, as part of their citizenship course, raised money for local projects. The school production, at the end of the summer term, is fully appreciated by the community.

Appreciation of the pupils' own culture and other cultures is developed effectively in a range of subjects. Older pupils study political and social topics, including the forthcoming general election and the effects of climate change. In a French lesson, pupils in Year 12 discussed confidently, in French, how and why a society makes provision for handicapped people. In Year 4, in a PSHE lesson, pupils talked sensibly about ways in which to keep babies and toddlers safe. Study and experience of aboriginal and African art enables the pupils to reflect beyond western culture. In geography, pupils in Year 8 studied carefully the cultural aspects of tourism in Kenya and the positive and negative impact of tourists on the indigenous population.

Out-of-school visits enhance cultural provision, for example, to Aldbury village to compare ancient and modern buildings and to the Houses of Parliament as part of citizenship. Pupils have an appropriate knowledge and awareness of national and local public services and institutions. The primary pupils have studied the local area and found out what it was like 100 years ago.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory and has some good features. The school has most of the necessary policies and procedures securely in place, but the policy for safeguarding has not been well monitored over time and safeguarding requirements are not met in full, because the policy has not been updated to reflect enhancements made to practice.

The school's behaviour policy provides a suitable framework understood by pupils and staff, with sanctions clearly set out. The anti-bullying policy meets requirements. There are good and comprehensive risk assessments for school visits, and there are consistent records of weekly checks on key safety features of the premises. The first aid policy is appropriate, and checks, policies and procedures for fire safety are thorough and well organised. Attendance and admission registers are correctly completed and maintained to meet regulations. The school has a suitable policy to meet the requirements of the Special Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 as amended.

The school gives pupils good guidance on how to stay healthy. Drinking water is freely available to pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all of the requirements except one.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *prepare and implement a written policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils (paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school meets all but one of the requirements for this area, as it has not maintained evidence, on file, of all checks made on staff prior to their appointment. However, all the necessary checks with the CRB are complete and recorded as required.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *For all appointments from **1 September 2003**, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), carry out checks and keep photocopied evidence to confirm identity, medical fitness, employment history, character references, and , where appropriate, qualifications and professional references. For appointments from **1 May 2007**, carry out an additional check to confirm the right to work in the United Kingdom (paragraph 4(2)(a)).*

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school occupies a purpose-built former special school with additional demountable buildings. The accommodation is used well, and includes both specialist rooms and general teaching rooms. Due to constraints of space the sixth form pupils have areas separated off in the hall and gymnasium rather than common rooms. The outdoor areas are good and include separate facilities for senior boys, senior girls and primary pupils. In particular, the Astroturf primary area is used effectively. A nearby sports field is used for boys' games as is a local leisure centre.

The three primary classes are located in demountable buildings, which are appropriate, but which cannot accommodate a fourth class. The school is aware of the pressures on its premises as the numbers of pupils in both the primary and secondary sections increase.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school provides parents with detailed information as to its work, the subjects taught and policies adopted. Newsletters and communications sent to parents throughout the year provide information about the school and its activities. Pupils receive two reports each academic year which cover progress and attainment: one report is detailed and the other is an interim short report. The interim reports in the primary section provide detailed information on progress in literacy, numeracy, science and personal and social development, and all subjects are considered in the full report which also contains pupils' targets for the following year. In the secondary school the interim reports provide grades for each subject. The full reports in both sections are detailed, informative and of good quality although the systems of grading differ between the sections potentially leading to confusions. There are also opportunities for parent/staff meetings and discussions. The prospectus has been revised to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has formally adopted the FLT complaints procedures and practices and this is stated in its prospectus and fully meets the requirements. In addition the prospectus states that a copy is available in the school for inspection by parents and carers.

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's organisation and management are satisfactory. It has primary, secondary and sixth form departments with separate heads for the primary and secondary sections. It is controlled by a Trust with nine Trustees who meet on a monthly basis with minutes taken. There is also a senior management team, comprising the secondary head teacher, the secondary assistant head and the director of studies, which meets three times a week. There are also regular meetings between the secondary headteacher and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The primary section is under the control of the primary headteacher and a primary Trustee and mainly operates as a separate entity. There is increasing contact and integration with the secondary section and the school would benefit from a whole school approach. Trustees have responsibilities that are broadly defined but lacking in detail and integration with others. All the primary responsibilities are overseen by the primary Trustee. The school has experienced changes and improvements to management and leadership.

The formal responsibility structure of the Trust lacks sufficient clarity to ensure that all the necessary functions are adequately covered on a regular and consistent basis and that Trustees' duties are properly attended to in order to maintain consistent compliance with the regulations.

The school would benefit from closer integration of the management of the primary and secondary departments as well as from improved attention to personnel management. The administrative duties of the senior school staff have been reviewed and are continuing to be a focus for discussion and adjustment.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The Trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestions:

- the improvements in systems, reporting and general overview following the appointment of the secondary head teacher should be pursued vigorously and the integrated operation of the two sections promoted further, and
- The Trust should:
 - ensure legal compliance on statutory requirements as a matter of urgency. To assist in this a named Trustee could be assigned the responsibility for legal compliance with attention to the regulatory regime;
 - detail more thoroughly and clearly the individual responsibilities of Trustees to develop their knowledge of their responsibilities in relation to policies and the legal requirements;
 - extend Trust minutes to indicate that matters where action has been indicated at a previous meeting are followed up at the subsequent meeting(s);
 - strengthen the decision-making process to support the CEO more effectively; and

- develop a whole school management approach.

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 school, or from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk.