

Inspection report

MRCs Secondary School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 306/6089

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 11 - 13 September 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

MRCS is an independent day special school which is registered to provide education for boys aged 11 to 16 who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The school was established in 2001 and occupies two sites in the London borough of Croydon. The original school site, Lodge Road, is located in a former domestic house. In the spring of 2006 the school acquired additional, larger premises, known as Kingsdown. This site is approximately six miles away and now provides education for most of the pupils. The school is in the ownership of a limited company, McRae Residential Care Services.

Currently nine pupils are on the school roll. Most pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and all have a history of non-attendance or failure at their former schools. Pupils display a wide range of ability. Several show average or above average academic potential whilst others have learning difficulties. All function below the level expected for their age. The school is seeking approval from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for the admission of girls, one of whom is already attending.

The school aims to improve pupils' self-esteem through offering praise and encouragement within a structured and orderly environment. The school seeks to raise pupils' expectations and enable them to gain passes in public examinations. Pupils are funded by their local authorities and generally attend from Croydon and other London boroughs.

Summary of main findings

MRCS is an improving school which is extending its provision. It provides a calm environment with a strong focus on learning. There are good levels of staffing. Trusting and respectful relationships are formed between staff and pupils. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. They enjoy coming to school and as a result most gain passes in public examinations. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. The school works closely with parents and carers, which has helped improve the attendance of many pupils.

Curricular provision is unsatisfactory due to the limited range of subjects currently offered. This restricts pupils' achievement. Several staff are new in post and are working hard to extend the curriculum. The school has appropriate plans to realise the potential of the new premises at Kingsdown and to provide opportunities for pupils to study vocational and practical subjects. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have relevant subject knowledge and give praise and encouragement to help pupils

achieve and improve their self-esteem. Assessment information is not used consistently to help plan lessons and there are insufficient resources to support teaching and learning in most subjects.

What the school does well:

- it establishes trusting and respectful relationships between staff and pupils;
- it raises pupils' expectations and encourages them to succeed in public examinations;
- it provides a high level of staffing which enables pupils to receive individual support and to be taught in small groups; and
- it establishes good relationships with parents and carers, who hold positive views of the school.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- improve the quality of the curriculum and teaching as identified in section 1 of this report;
- ensure that pupils are given a knowledge of public institutions and services and services in England and that they acquire an appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures as indicated in section 2;
- provide for the welfare, health and safety of pupils as set out in section 3;
- provide further information for parents and other partners as noted in section 6; and
- improve the procedures for handling complaints as detailed in section 7.

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

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is unsatisfactory and the school is not successful in achieving its aim to provide a broad and balanced range of subjects.

All pupils have a full weekly timetable with an emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Geography has recently been introduced and games and swimming are provided by using the school football pitch and visiting a local sports centre. There are few opportunities for pupils to design and make things or to develop their aesthetic and creative skills. Although visiting speakers and school visits cover some topics during the year, systematic programmes are not in place to cover the curriculum for history, design and technology (DT), art, music, a modern foreign language and religious education (RE). The school has a programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) which includes some basic aspects of citizenship. However this programme is not sufficiently broad to meet the needs of the full age-range of pupils, or to cover topics in sufficient detail.

The school is currently developing the new premises at Kingsdown to extend the curriculum. Staff are building up resources and much has been achieved in a relatively short period of time, particularly in providing high quality ICT and science facilities. Policies are in place for basic skills in English, mathematics and science but not for other subjects. Schemes of work are available for some, but not all subjects on the current timetable, and the quality is variable. Plans do not always show how pupils will cover different topics as they progress through the school.

The curriculum currently offered by the school does not meet the requirements of pupils' statements of SEN, which specify access to the National Curriculum. All pupils have access to weekly individual sessions with the art therapist. They enjoy going to these sessions and the school reports that this has a positive impact on their behaviour.

The school's aim is for pupils to gain qualifications in mathematics, English and ICT and courses are provided which lead to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or Entry level in these subjects. Useful links with an external provider have been established which enable access to vocational courses for some pupils in Years 10 and 11, but not all have a planned programme. Recognition and certification of skills through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network has recently been introduced. This is a positive step, although the programme is not yet developed to match the full range of pupils' abilities, aptitudes and interests. Plans are in place to extend opportunities for vocational skills at Kingsdown so that in future a wider range of training can be offered.

Dedicated time in the year is given to preparing leavers for further education and training. This is in collaboration with the Connexions service and is successful in identifying and securing appropriate courses at college.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers form good relationships with pupils. The purpose of lessons is clearly set out and shared with pupils at the beginning of each session. Teachers use praise effectively to recognise pupils' effort and achievements. In the best lessons activities are varied and there is also an emphasis on the time limitation of each task. This maintains pupils' interest and helps them complete their work. An example was seen in a mathematics lesson which began with a quick mental starter, requiring pupils to find the higher and lower values of successive playing cards. The lesson then moved on swiftly to discuss fractions and ended with pupils completing calculations. Pupils' concentration was maintained throughout.

In less successful lessons, assessment information describing the individual level of ability of each pupil is not used to inform lesson planning. As a result, work is too difficult for some pupils and does not provide sufficient challenge for others, which limits their progress. There are too few opportunities for pupils to work independently and develop their own ideas.

Teachers have relevant knowledge for the subjects they teach. Several staff are new in post and are developing their understanding of the needs of pupils with SEBD. Teachers demonstrate patience and understanding when managing pupils' behaviour and a calm, non-confrontational atmosphere is generally established in lessons. However, strategies to manage the most challenging behaviour of a few more challenging pupils are under-developed. This sometimes leads to an inconsistent response when, for example, pupils leave the class without permission or fail to complete set work.

Resources to support teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. All pupils have regular access to a computer and there is equipment to support the teaching of science on the Kingsdown site. However, there is a lack of books, artefacts and equipment to support teaching in most subjects, especially in geography, history and RE. Also, music, art and DT are not currently taught and resources have yet to be developed in these areas. Staff are working hard to acquire suitable books and materials.

There are satisfactory systems in place for assessing progress. The school assesses pupils' progress against National Curriculum levels. Those who follow vocational and accredited courses have their progress recorded effectively as they complete course modules.

Pupils make satisfactory progress. They benefit from the individual support and small group teaching. Most improve their attendance and recent leavers have gained places on vocational courses at local colleges. The school places a strong emphasis on pupils achieving and gaining examination passes. To date pupils have gained GCSE passes in mathematics, English and ICT each year. However, the limited range of subjects currently provided at Key Stage 3 and the underdeveloped vocational programme at Key Stage 4 limits pupils' overall achievement.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- *support the curriculum with appropriate plans and schemes of work for all subjects (paragraph 1(2));*
- *ensure that the curriculum gives pupils experience in aesthetic and creative areas of learning (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii));*
- *ensure that subject matter is appropriate for the age and learning needs of all pupils (paragraph 1(2)(b));*
- *ensure that the curriculum fulfils the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational need (paragraph 1(2)(e));*
- *extend the quality and range of classroom resources so that they are adequate to support teaching and learning in all subjects (paragraph 1(3)(f); and*
- *establish a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and use the information to plan teaching so pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).*

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory; however, for their cultural development it is unsatisfactory.

Pupils' self-esteem is promoted through an annual residential trip to Wales where they engage in outdoor pursuits. Pupils enjoy the challenge of these activities and are pleased to recall their successes in canoeing, abseiling and climbing. The school provides ample opportunities for pupils to discuss personal issues individually with staff and almost all pupils receive regular art therapy. They also express their feelings imaginatively when they contribute to the MRCS poetry book. Opportunities for reflection and the development of spiritual awareness are underdeveloped.

Teachers and other staff provide good role models which show pupils how they themselves should act. Pupils are treated with respect, for example when teachers greet pupils with a handshake and welcome them into the class. Staff remain calm when managing pupils' challenging behaviour and in so doing show them an alternative approach to managing conflict. When dealing with some incidents of misbehaviour, a consistent strategy is not adopted by all staff; expectations are unclear and there is insufficient explanation of the consequences of such behaviour.

Pupils' social skills are developed when they eat together in the dining room. Opportunities are missed to develop pupils' social skills at break and lunch time due

to a lack of suitable games and equipment. There are too few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility in lessons and around the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Many re-engage with learning and improve their attendance after a record of failure in previous schools. Some are pleased to talk about their achievements; as one pupil commented: *'I learn more here than at my old school'*. The PSHE curriculum supports pupils' personal and social development, including such topics as how to lead a healthy lifestyle and the dangers of drug abuse. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and school lunches contain a good variety of healthy foods. However, smoking by older pupils outside the school entrance does not provide a good example for younger pupils.

Pupils develop some cultural awareness through the study of literature and by participating in occasional visits. However, provision for pupils' cultural development is unsatisfactory because the school does not have an established programme of visits to museums and cultural centres; RE is not taught systematically and cultural themes are not included in teachers' planning for other subjects. Aspects of citizenship are included in the PSHE curriculum. However, pupils' knowledge of the wider community is not developed sufficiently and there are few opportunities whereby pupils can become familiar with public institutions and community services.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- *provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d); and*
- *assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).*

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school gives high priority to pupils' welfare, although several policies relating to the health and safety of pupils need updating to meet requirements. Procedures are effective in keeping pupils and adults safe because all staff are clear about the arrangements. However, policies do not always reflect practice, including those for managing behaviour and child protection. Additionally, policies for health and safety and for First Aid do not take account of most recent guidelines and requirements. Also, procedures are not always specific to the different needs and circumstances for each of the two school sites. Senior staff are addressing this issue and are currently revising policies to reflect changes since the expansion of the school.

The school has a positive ethos and pupils respond well to the warm, caring attitudes of staff. The headteacher is particularly diligent in her overview of pupils' welfare,

providing an 'open door' and sensitive follow-up to issues of concern. Although there are moments of tension, pupils report that they feel safe and that they are able to talk to an adult if they have a concern. Records of sanctions and major incidents are kept appropriately, as are admission and attendance registers.

Fire risk assessments have been undertaken for both sites, and a fire drill has already taken place for the new accommodation at Kingsdown. The local fire safety officer has visited both sites and issues identified for action have been addressed.

The school has not yet drawn up an accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the DDA.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- *update policies, having regard to the DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' (paragraph 3(4)); and*
- *produce a satisfactory written policy on First Aid (paragraph 3(6)).*

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau, with the exception of one new member of staff. Appropriate measures are in place to supervise this member of staff until confirmation is received. Suitable procedures are in place to check evidence of identity, qualifications and previous employment history. Careful records are kept and updated as necessary.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The standard of the premises and accommodation is satisfactory. Classrooms on both sites are small but adequate for the number of pupils using them.

The main site, Kingsdown, is a former children's residential home and has been refurbished to a high standard. However, the school has only recently occupied the

premises and, at the time of the inspection, plans to adapt the building to fully support the curriculum were still being completed. There are seven classrooms, a library, a dining room, offices and additional specialist rooms for science, ICT, art and drama. Pupils have opportunities to work individually and in small groups. Rooms to provide for the teaching of food technology and vocational courses have been identified but have not yet been equipped. There are no specialist rooms for DT and music. This limits the school's ability to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects, which is a requirement of some of the pupils' statements of SEN. There is suitable space for outside play which includes a small grass football pitch. There is a small pupil common room for indoor recreation, but there is limited equipment available for pupils to use during wet play.

The Lodge Road site is located in a former residential house and provides for a small number of Key Stage 4 pupils. The premises offer two classrooms, two ICT rooms, a kitchen and a room containing exercise equipment. A lawn and concrete area for basketball provide adequate space for outdoor play.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

A particular strength of the school is the way it provides parents and carers with information about their child's progress through regular contact. However, required information about several aspects of the school's work is not made available to parents and other interested parties.

The headteacher is very successful in establishing good relationships with families as soon as a referral is made to the school. This is then built upon by key staff, who provide a range of useful information on pupils' academic and social progress. For many pupils this involves daily telephone contact between the school and their family. In response to the questionnaires issued prior to this inspection parents and carers expressed overwhelmingly positive views about the work of the school.

The prospectus includes general information about the ethos and aims of the school and about the curriculum offered to pupils. Particular emphasis is given to the school's commitment that all pupils will achieve well and gain qualifications. Each site has a separate prospectus and these are being revised to reflect recent changes to the provision. Although a range of policies and other documentation are available in school, they are not contained in the prospectus and parents are not made aware that they may request them. There is an absence of required information about how to contact the proprietor, policies for admissions, discipline and exclusions, and support for those with English as an additional language. Similarly, the school does not make it clear that other information is available on request, such as policies on discipline, health and safety and child protection, and details of staff employed at the school.

The school provides parents and carers with termly, as well as annual reports for each pupil. These reports contain a range of useful information on progress through

the curriculum and the levels of work achieved. This information is also sent to the appropriate local authority. Annual reviews and transition reviews are conducted in partnership with local authorities.

The school does not provide the appropriate responsible local authority with an annual account of income and how the money is spent.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- *provide parents with the name of the proprietor and address for correspondence during both term time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which contact may be made at all times (paragraph 6(2)(b));*
- *give parents particulars of the school's policy on discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e));*
- *explain to parents the particulars of educational and welfare provision it provides for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f));*
- *point out to parents that policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety and the promotion of good behaviour are available on request (paragraph 6(2)(h));*
- *make parents aware that they may request particulars of pupils' academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i));*
- *make parents aware that they may request details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j));*
- *make available to parents on request details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)); and*
- *provide for local authorities and, on request, to the Secretary of State, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each pupil they fund (paragraph 6(7)).*

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a procedure for parents, carers and pupils to make complaints and put forward suggestions as to how the school might be improved. The policy sets out how formal and informal complaints can be made and there is guidance on how a written complaint can be set out. However, the procedure lacks detail in several areas which are listed below.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

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

- *if parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, provide for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));*
- *where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, ensure that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));*
- *ensure that the procedure allows for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, should they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));*
- *provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations and to stipulate that the complainant, proprietor and headteacher, and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (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)); and*
- *provide for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidentially (paragraph 7(k)).*

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	MRCS Secondary School
DfES Number:	306/6089
Type of school:	Special day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 8 Girls: 1 Total: 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	7
Annual fees:	£38,083
Address of school:	112 Orchard Road Sanderstead Croydon Surrey CR2 9LQ
Telephone number:	020 8657 1200
Email address:	carole.nicholson@kingsdownsse.com admin@kingsdownsse.com
Headteacher:	Carole Nicholson
Proprietor:	Kevin Henry
Reporting Inspector:	Andrew Redpath HMI
Date of inspection:	11 - 13 September 2006

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