

**Ochil Tower School
Auchterarder**

25 June 2002

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Ochil Tower School Auchterarder

1. Introduction

Ochil Tower was inspected in March 2002 as part of a national sample of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. The subjects included in the inspection were communication and English language, numeracy and mathematics, environmental studies and personal and social development. HM Inspectors also evaluated the quality of support for pupils, including arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils, child protection, and support for learning. In evaluating how well the school was managed, HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. The inspection did not focus on any aspect of residential care and welfare.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents and took account of the views of education authorities placing pupils in the school. They met the Chairperson of the Council of Management and a group of parents.

2. The school

Ochil Tower is an independent, non-denominational school in Auchterarder. At the time of the inspection the roll was 37, with an age range from 9 to 19 years. Ten pupils attended on a daily basis and 27 were on a residential placement.

The school provides primary and secondary education for pupils with moderate to severe and complex special educational needs. Some pupils had social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All pupils had been placed in the school by local authorities, usually jointly by both education and social work departments. All had Records of Needs.

The work of the school is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, which was adapted by Karl König, the founder of the “Camphill movement”, to address the needs of children with special educational needs. The approach is called “curative education” and is practised in a network of schools world-wide. Children’s special educational needs are addressed through complementary programmes of social care, education and therapy. A “Core Group” is responsible for managing the school on a day-to-day basis.

Parents’ and guardians’ views

Just over half the parents responded to the questionnaire. Those who responded were very positive about the work of the school.

All felt that:

- their children enjoyed being at school;
- there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils;

- staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children; and
- the school involved them well in reviews of their children's Record of Needs.

About half the parents who responded felt that they did not always receive regular information from support services. A small number felt that the school could do more to explain how to support their children with homework.

Ethos

The school had a very good ethos. The atmosphere was calm and supportive and was very well suited to addressing the special educational needs of the pupils. Pupils and staff strongly identified with the school. Relationships were very positive and members of the school community treated each other with mutual respect. Teachers made good use of praise to build up pupils' self-confidence. Weekly assemblies were well used to foster a sense of school community, to celebrate achievement and for religious observance.

School and community

The school communicated well with parents. The school handbook was very informative. Parents received very good information about their children's life in the school through regular telephone calls and home-school diaries. Annual reports and twice-yearly review meetings gave parents clear information about their children's progress. Written reports to parents were informative, but could have done more to explain their children's achievements within the curriculum.

Links between the school and the community were very strong. Features of these positive links included the following.

- A well-established partnership between the school and its Council of Management.

- A productive educational link between the school and a local secondary school.
- Very good use of the local and wider community for educational visits.

Accommodation

The school occupied a secluded position within seven acres of parkland in the centre of Auchterarder. The extensive and attractive grounds were a major asset. They provided a very good context for a range of educational activities.

The quality of accommodation was good overall. Each class was taught in a small, attractive classroom and had access to additional rooms for individual tutorials and craft activities. The school used its a large hall for school assemblies and as a gym. There were insufficient signposts in the school grounds to direct visitors to the school office.

Staffing and resources

The school was well staffed. The Core Group and community residents were supplemented by a large number of other staff. These additional staff included co-workers from European countries who came to work at the school on a one-year or two-year basis. The school employed further staff to undertake teaching, administrative and domestic duties. The balance of experience in the staff group was good. All class teachers were trained in curative education. A few had also undertaken additional qualifications in special educational needs.

The quality of resources for learning and teaching was fair overall. Resources for gardening and for practical and craft activities were good, but the supply of modern text books and other materials for teaching language and mathematics was insufficient. There were a few modern computers which were used mainly in the secondary stages. Younger pupils would have benefited from

greater access to computers and appropriate curricular software. There was insufficient specialised communication equipment for some pupils.

The school budget was managed well. All teachers were able to request specific resources from the main school budget. In recent years an increasing proportion of the budget had been well used for staff development activities.

3. How well are pupils achieving?

Overall quality of achievement

Most pupils were making very good progress in developing aspects of self-confidence and mutual respect for all residents in the community. However, the overall quality of pupils' achievement was fair.

In general, pupils performed well on the tasks they were given in class. In some cases, these tasks were insufficiently challenging. All pupils had individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Overall progress towards targets was variable. For some pupils, the targets in their IEPs were not fully appropriate. As a result, they were not making as much progress as they might be.

Communication and English language

Overall, the quality of pupils' achievements in communication and English language was fair.

At the primary stages and at S1/S2, most pupils were able to listen to adults. They could follow simple instructions and take turns when *talking* and *listening* in groups. Some pupils were able to express opinions. Pupils' skills in *writing* were generally limited and many required further assistance to overcome difficulties. In *reading*, some pupils were making insufficient progress. Pupils' skills in reading for information and enjoyment were also limited.

At S3 to S6, pupils were gaining confidence in talking to each other and to adults. Overall, they were making insufficient progress in developing reading and writing skills.

At all stages, pupils with more complex difficulties were learning to communicate effectively through the use of symbols.

Numeracy and mathematics

The quality of pupils' achievements in mathematics and numeracy was fair overall.

The majority of pupils were making some progress against the targets which had been set for them. Most pupils had individual targets set for them in *number, money and measurement*; few had targets in *information handling* or in *shape, position and movement*. For most, targets which were set were insufficiently challenging.

Most pupils at the primary stages and at S1/S2 could identify numbers up to ten, match and sort simple shapes, and identify coins. Some older pupils were able to add and subtract numbers up to 100, and carry out simple calculations involving multiplication and division.

At S3 to S6 some pupils had a good grasp of money and were able to tell the time using both analogue and digital watches.

At all stages throughout the school, pupils with more complex difficulties were developing effective skills in basic numeracy and understanding and relating to the environment.

Environmental studies

The quality of pupils' achievements in environmental studies was fair overall.

Most pupils were acquiring some worthwhile knowledge of the world around them through regular educational outings. At all stages, pupils showed some appropriate mapping skills appropriate to their stages of development. In all classes, pupils engaged purposefully, with appropriate adult support, in food preparation and processing. They were developing positive attitudes to the environment particularly through first-hand experience of working in the school grounds.

Almost all pupils in the secondary stages were making good progress overall in their work-based organic farming activities. This included a developing awareness of aspects of sustainable development. However, work in most classes was not always well matched to individual needs of pupils or sufficiently focused on clear learning outcomes. As a result, pupils were not making as much progress as they might have in environmental studies. Pupils' information and communications technology (ICT) skills were not well developed.

Personal and social development

All pupils had individual targets for personal and social development. Overall, they were making very good progress in achieving these targets.

At all stages, pupils were developing skills to very good effect in looking after themselves and in interacting with each other. At meal times, they demonstrated very well developed social skills. They treated other members in the community with respect and showed sensitivity towards each others' needs. Some pupils had particular targets which were set around keeping their behaviour under control. With appropriate support, most pupils with these targets were making good progress.

4. How good is the curriculum?

Overall, the quality of the curriculum was fair.

The school's curriculum had been adapted from the standard Steiner school syllabus. It was well structured. The 'main lesson' of each day was a class lesson which generally focused on some aspect of social subjects or personal and social development. The 'second lesson' of the day focused on individualised teaching sessions for communication and English language, and numeracy and mathematics. Afternoon lessons focused on expressive arts activities, craft lessons and practical skills including cooking and gardening.

The curriculum covered key areas and provided an appropriate balance. However, most programmes did not progressively develop individual pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Some aspects of the curriculum required to be broken down into smaller more achievable targets to meet the learning needs of pupils with complex learning difficulties. The school was developing a clear emphasis on work experience and independent living skills. It had recognised the need to develop a range of provision of National Qualifications (NQ) at Access level to further meet the needs of the pupils from S3 to S6.

Communication and English language

The programme for communication and English language was fair overall.

At the primary stages and at S1/S2 the programme placed a strong emphasis on listening and talking, including talking in groups. However, it lacked sufficient structure to ensure the continuous development of pupils' skills in reading and writing. Staff paid too little attention to providing regular opportunities for reading for enjoyment.

At S3 to S6 the programme provided opportunities for pupils to listen and communicate with others. The

programme for developing pupils' reading and writing skills needed to promote better progress in learning. The school should make more use of ICT to develop writing skills. It now required to move forward with its plans to develop certification for pupils.

At all stages the programme was benefiting from very good contributions from the speech and language therapist. However, staff required further advice about the use of symbols in developing communication skills.

Numeracy and mathematics

Overall, the school's programme for numeracy and mathematics was fair.

At all stages, it was insufficiently broad and focused mainly on developing pupils' skills in aspects of number, money and measurement, and shape, position and movement. Pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to develop their skills in information handling and problem solving. Generally, the programme did not build on pupils' prior learning or ensure that knowledge and understanding were developed systematically.

Opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical understanding through practical activities were good. However, these required to be more closely linked to pupils' individual targets.

The programme at S3 to S6 included some use of ICT. At other stages, teachers made insufficient use of computer software to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding.

At all stages, pupils with more complex learning difficulties were given appropriate tasks aimed at developing understanding of number.

Environmental studies

The school's programme for environmental studies was fair overall.

Teachers provided a wide range of opportunities for pupils to experience the local environment and wider community. They enabled pupils to acquire some relevant knowledge of people, places and events of the past and present.

The programme placed a strong emphasis on developing pupils' positive attitudes to the environment through their participation in a range of practical activities within the school grounds. In particular, there was a very well structured and work-based organic farming programme for pupils at the secondary stages. It contained an appropriate focus on sustainable development. The products of this work contributed significantly to the school's food supply. Pupils at all stages had some opportunities to develop practical skills in science and technology. Overall, however, the school had not yet devised a sufficiently detailed programme of study in environmental studies to ensure that pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills were developed systematically. Appropriate NQ units at Access level should be introduced at the secondary stages. Greater use should be made of ICT to allow pupils to enhance the programme.

Personal and social development

The programme for personal and social development was good overall. It was well-balanced and generally matched pupils' individual needs. At all stages, it covered the development of ideas of right and wrong, appropriate aspects of nutrition and healthy eating, hygiene, and healthy relationships. At the secondary stages it included appropriate topics such as first aid, road safety and drug awareness.

The programme would benefit from more attention being given, at the primary stages, to aspects of personal safety and for individual pupils' targets to be stated more clearly. Planned activities worked well to encourage pupils to develop mutual respect and co-operative working. The programme included a wide range of

activities outwith the school to promote good social skills.

5. How good is learning and teaching?

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was fair. The majority of lessons seen were good. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in Appendix 1.

Features of learning and teaching included the following.

- Teachers generally prepared their ‘main lessons’ well. However, planning by most teachers did not focus sufficiently on the needs of individual pupils.
- In lessons, teachers generally used a limited range of approaches and did not provide a wide enough variety of tasks to meet the range of pupils’ needs.
- Teachers were very patient with pupils.
- Pupils were often well engaged and motivated to complete their individual tasks. They were less engaged during ‘main lessons’.
- In most classes, pupils co-operated well with each other.

Teachers kept records of pupils’ progress in various aspects of the curriculum. However, assessment did not focus clearly on learning outcomes which had been set for individual pupils. A promising start had been made to developing assessment and record keeping at the upper secondary stages. The school had not yet used National Tests to confirm their judgements of pupils’ attainments.

6. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare

The school had very good arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of its pupils. The quality of pastoral care was high. Staff knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to their individual needs. All members of staff were fully informed about the school's clear policies and procedures for child protection and health and safety. Appropriate arrangements were in place for vetting all staff.

Support for learning

Provision for supporting pupils experiencing learning difficulties was good. Pupils' individual educational programmes (IEPs) were generally of good quality, but in some cases individual targets should have been more clearly stated. The school was in the process of re-developing its format for IEPs to enhance the co-ordination of care and education plans. Procedures for admitting new pupils into the school were very good. Pupils received additional support in class from co-workers. In most cases, this support required to be targeted more specifically to the needs of individuals.

All pupils had a Record of Needs and the school had very good procedures in place to maintain and review Records. The school had good links with a range of external agencies which were able to provide valuable advice on supporting pupils with particular learning difficulties. Protocols with local authorities over speech and language therapy were not fully developed. As a result, some pupils were not able to access this facility.

7. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The school was managed by the Core Group which was made up of experienced, permanent members of the community. A series of inter-related committees were accountable to the Core Group. There were no promoted posts in the conventional sense, although six joint co-ordinators had responsibility for managing the committees. Ultimate responsibility for the school lay with the Council of Management and with the Core Group.

Overall the quality of leadership was good. The Core Group had focused well on developing good practice in the school. A range of important policies and procedures, including particularly good admissions and health procedures, had been developed. Strong links had been created between the school and local authorities. The Core Group also had developed positive links with a local secondary school. Members of the Core Group were beginning to look outwith Ochil Tower for examples of good practice which they could use to develop the school's work. The Core Group now needed to ensure that the curriculum and aspects of learning and teaching were further developed to better meet the needs of the pupils.

Staff development and review

Good use was made of senior staff expertise to provide a structured programme of in-house training for recently appointed co-workers. All staff had opportunities to further develop their skills and understanding of curative education through training at the University of Aberdeen. In addition, some teaching staff were involved in a range of relevant professional developments organised outwith the school. Regular teachers' meetings provided some opportunities to discuss learning and teaching approaches. However, there was a need for more focused attention to

be given to the development of skills required by all staff to teach pupils with special educational needs. Progress of new co-workers was regularly reviewed by senior staff but there were no formal arrangements in place for reviewing teaching staff.

School development planning

The school development plan was good. An appropriate set of aims underpinned the work of the school and a comprehensive audit of the school's strengths and development needs had been carried out. From this a number of appropriate action plans had been identified. The school had prioritised these within its plans for the forthcoming three years. Good progress had been made in implementing the action plans from the previous year.

Approaches to improving quality

The school was developing good approaches to self-evaluation and improving quality. Teachers had used performance indicators to take a broad view of the school's provision. They had conducted an extensive survey of parents' opinions, had started to collect the views of external agencies and had plans to collate the views of pupils and co-workers. Teachers formally reviewed pupils' individual progress every six months. They met regularly to discuss and review the curriculum. There was no formal system in place to monitor learning and teaching.

8. How well does the school perform overall?

Ochil Tower School provided a good quality of education overall for its pupils. Pupils were happy within the school's positive, nurturing atmosphere and were making very good progress in their personal and social development. The Core Group had a strong commitment to developing the educational components of the school's

provision. The school should now build on its broad curriculum and strengths in care and welfare to further develop aspects of programmes and learning and teaching.

Key strengths

- The very good ethos.
- The staff's concern for the care and welfare of all pupils.
- Pupils' progress in personal and social development.
- Links with parents and with the local and wider community.
- The care taken with admission procedures and onward placement of pupils.
- The use of the school grounds for educational activities and the organic farming programme for the upper school.

Main points for action

The school and the Council of Management should act on the following recommendations.

- The school should improve the quality, organisation and use of educational resources.
- The programmes for communication and English language, numeracy and mathematics, and environmental studies should be improved, to take account of the points raised in this report.
- Teachers' planning and approaches to teaching should be improved. Plans should clearly focus on learning outcomes for individuals and groups.
- Assessment and recording procedures should be improved at all stages.

- The Council of Management and school should work together to improve the effectiveness of staff and procedures for staff development and review. They should develop a more rigorous system for monitoring and reporting on the quality of learning and teaching with a view to improvement.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Morag Gunion
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Western Division

25 June 2002

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix 1

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- The school's ethos
- Links with other schools, agencies, employers and the community
- Pastoral care
- Personal and social development
- Implementation of SEN legislation
- Placement of pupils with special educational needs

We judged the following to be *good*

- Communication with parents
- Partnership with parents and the Council of Management
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Provision of staff
- School management of devolved finances
- Self-evaluation
- The development plan
- Implementing the development plan
- Effectiveness of leadership

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Provision of resources
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- Structure of the curriculum
- Quality of teachers' planning
- Quality of the teaching process
- Quality of pupils' learning
- Use of assessment to guide the teaching process
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff
- Staff development and review

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 4% of cases, good in 50%, fair in 42% and unsatisfactory in 4%.

Appendix 2

Councils funding the placement of day and residential pupils in the school at the time of the inspection.

Angus Council
Argyll & Bute Council
Dundee City Council
East Dunbartonshire Council
East Lothian Council
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Glasgow City Council
Inverclyde Council
North Lanarkshire
Perth & Kinross Council
Scottish Borders Council
Stirling Council
The City of Edinburgh Council
West Lothian Council

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the Council of Management and school staff, Directors of Education placing pupils in the school and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our web site:
www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

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