



**Ochil Tower School
Auchterarder
Perth and Kinross
1 April 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how children and young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support children and young people. We also comment on how well staff, children and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children and young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk.

¹ Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Ochil Tower is an independent, non-denominational residential school. It provides education for children and young people aged five to 18 years with a range of additional support needs, including autism spectrum disorders. The school is situated within seven acres of parkland in the centre of Auchterarder. The work of the school is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolph Steiner and uses an approach called curative education to address the needs of children and young people. All co-workers, including those who are joint coordinators, are directly involved with the care and education of the children and young people. The roll was 38 when the inspection was carried out in February 2009. Ten young people attended on a daily basis and 28 were on residential placement.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The strong sense of community and the climate of trust, respect and confidence.
- Effective approaches to promoting children and young people's personal and social development and to ensuring they feel secure and well cared for.
- Success in promoting children and young people's awareness of healthy living.
- Productive partnerships with the community, local high school and other agencies to support children and young people's development.
- Effective use of the school's grounds and local area to promote children and young people's wider achievements.

3. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Most children and young people are motivated and participate well in activities. They respond well to opportunities to make choices in classes and within the houses. Children and young people enjoy taking responsibility for aspects of their learning when given opportunities to do so. They benefit from taking part in regular outings and a broad range of physical activities. These experiences are helping children and young people to understand more about the environment and to develop healthy attitudes. Children and young people make good use of digital cameras to record the experiences they take part in during the school week. Co-workers discuss the photographs in detail with children and young people and this helps them to see the progress they are making. Children and young people have a good awareness of their progress in becoming more confident and responsible. They communicate this understanding clearly and effectively through preparing and delivering presentations at their six-monthly reviews of progress. Children and young people feel safe, included and respected and think that they have good opportunities to give their views on life at the school. Within the residences, children and young people have regular opportunities to make choices, including what they would like to do after the school day finishes. Where appropriate, young people have good opportunities to build their confidence and feelings of independence through opportunities to visit local shops and cafes.

Children and young people are making very good progress in developing personal and social skills. They are developing confidence and self-esteem. In class, and in the residences, children and young people get on well together. They show respect and caring attitudes. Most participate well as team members in a range of physical activities. They are developing independence in taking care of themselves. Children and young people are building awareness of the environment through a range of activities such as gardening, looking after farm animals and aspects of organic farming.

At all stages, children and young people were gaining basic skills in preparing food.

They were developing skills in archery and in folk dancing. Some, with support from co-workers, use computers to help them with aspects of their work.

Overall, children and young people are making satisfactory progress in learning. At all stages, they can communicate their feelings and needs. A few make effective use of specialist communication systems, such as Makaton signs or Boardmaker symbols to express themselves. They listen well to each other and to adults. Young people in the senior class are confident in talking to an audience about their experiences and favourite activities. Across the classes, children and young people are making limited progress in reading and writing. Most have some basic skills in aspects of number, money and measurement. However, at all stages, children and young people are capable of achieving a wider range of skills and understanding in numeracy and mathematics and language and literacy. At the senior stages, some young people have gained national qualifications at Access Level for achievements in personal and social development, home economics and independent living. Overall, young people have too few opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications to recognise and extend their achievements. They are not sufficiently aware of their strengths as learners.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum is based on the Waldorf education approach and places an emphasis on developing thinking, feeling and willing, using artistic, practical and craft activities. The school provides children and young people with a range of suitable experiences across care, education and therapies to develop their personal and social skills. These experiences are successfully helping children and young people to become confident individuals. The experiences of community life within the school are supporting them to become responsible citizens. However, the curriculum does not adequately support all children and

young people to achieve their full potential. It needs to provide children and young people with a broader set of well structured learning experiences that enable children and young people to achieve relevant knowledge, skills and understanding across the different aspects of learning. Young people in the senior class have appropriate opportunities to prepare for life beyond school. They can experience living independently within the school and learn key basic skills to get them ready for living on their own. They take part in work experience, mainly related to gardening and farming, within the school estate.

Teachers and other co-workers take positive and effective steps to address children and young people's social and emotional difficulties. Children and young people have a key worker who helps to support them across all aspects of school life, including within the classroom situation. Co-workers have established a nurturing environment for learning but they do not always ensure that activities and teaching approaches are well matched to children and young people's needs. The speech therapist provides valuable support for individual communication and language needs. However, staff need to ensure that the most appropriate ways of communicating with children and young people are used consistently. Each young person has a joint care and education plan. Learning targets within the plans are not always sufficiently challenging.

4. How well do staff work with others to support children and young people's learning?

Co-workers keep parents well informed about their children's progress and wellbeing. Children and young people who attend the school on a daily basis take home a report every day to inform parents about their experiences. Parents are successfully encouraged to attend, and take part in, the formal reviews of children and young people's progress which take place every six months. The school shares its sexual health programme with parents and gives due regard to their wishes. Parents give very good support to the school. The school is

developing partnerships with the local community, including the local secondary school. These links are extending opportunities for young people to work together and promoting their independence. Staff work well with other agencies to support children and young people's health and disability needs. The school has effective arrangements for working with local authorities to ensure that children and young people are well supported when coming to the school at first and when leaving school. Parents and other agencies are positive about their involvement with the school. The school has appropriate approaches for addressing any complaints.

5. Are staff, children and young people actively involved in improving their school community?

Children and young people are positively involved in contributing to decisions about their care and individualised learning plans (ILPs). They have regular opportunities to make choices about the activities they take part in. Parents have had some opportunities to give their views on aspects of the school's work. All co-workers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice. The core group of permanent co-workers meet regularly to share their experiences and views on practice. Co-workers studying curative education complete research projects that help to develop aspects of practice within the school. While all individuals show a strong commitment to self-evaluation, the school, as a community, needs to have more rigorous approaches to identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The school does not have clear arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching.

6. Does the school have high expectations of all children and young people?

The school has established a strong sense of community in which young people feel secure, happy and valued. Throughout the school, co-workers, children and young people have very positive relationships

and demonstrate trust and respect for each other. Co-workers provide positive role models and successfully encourage children and young people to behave well and show consideration to others. They have suitably high expectations for children and young people's behaviour but expectations for their achievements in learning are not high enough. The school has well considered and effective arrangements for children and young people's care and welfare. Co-workers are clear about their responsibilities in keeping children and young people safe and healthy. They have received appropriate training in child protection issues. The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy attitudes and healthy lifestyles. Children and young people eat a well balanced diet and participate regularly and willingly in a variety of physical activities. They have frequent opportunities to develop spiritual awareness through participation in Christian celebrations and weekly services.

7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

A core group of four joint coordinators carry out their management responsibilities effectively. They are highly committed to the school and its community. They use their range of skills and experience to efficiently manage the school's finances and resources, staff deployment and development, and care provision. The joint coordinators successfully promote the school's vision and values and foster a supportive working environment. Co-workers share a sense of responsibility and are encouraged to take on leadership roles. A Council of Management supports the core group in directing and overseeing the work of the school. However, there is no clear leadership for learning. The school's chosen areas for development do not give sufficient focus to improving learning, teaching and outcomes for children and young people. Its arrangements for planning for improvement do not make effective use of information from self-evaluation and quality assurance to identify the key priorities that need to be addressed.

8 What happens next?

We are confident that, with the support of the Council of Management, the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in the light of inspection findings. As a result we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and Council of Management.

- Develop the curriculum to give children and young people better breadth, progression and relevance in their learning experiences.
- Improve learning and teaching to meet the needs of children and young people more effectively and to help them achieve their full potential.

Care Commission issues from previous singleton inspection

The school is implementing its action plan in relation to three recommendations made at the last Care Commission inspection in September 2008. The recommendations include further work on: engaging children, young people and parents in its plans for improvement; producing an annual report for families on its achievements and progress on its improvement plan; and making best use of national advice in its quality assurance processes.

Requirements

- The school is required to provide written risk assessments of premises and activities, including outings, which are reviewed regularly to reflect current circumstances.

This is in order to comply with Scottish Statutory Instrument 2002/114 regulation 4 (1) (a) - a duty to make proper provision for the health and welfare of children.

- The school is required to ensure that co-workers and other staff are appropriately trained in the school's own child protection policy and procedures.

This is in order to comply with Scottish Statutory Instrument 2002/114 regulation 13(c) (i) - a duty to provide staff with training appropriate to their work.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication '*How good is our school?*'. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Ochil Tower School.

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	weak
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

Norma Wright
HM Inspector

Rachel Gillespie
Care Commission

1 April 2009

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If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website at www.spsso.org.uk.

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses