

# Summerhill School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	935/6016
Unique Reference Number	124870
Inspection number	301621
Inspection dates	6 - 7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school. This inspection takes full account of the school's unique philosophy as required by the High Court Judgement of 2000.

## Information about the school

Summerhill is a democratic, self-governing school providing boarding, day education and care for 78 pupils aged 5 – 17 years old. It is situated in the small market town of Leiston, within walking distance of the town centre.

The school adopts an alternative philosophy to education based on the work of its founder, A S Neill. It is based on the notion that children should be free to decide for themselves how to spend their time in school. The proprietor, who is the daughter of A S Neill, continues to uphold these principles. The daily life of the school is governed by the school meetings, held three times a week, in which everybody has an equal vote. School meetings are used to create, confirm and amend all the school laws which form the structure of expectations for the community of staff and pupils, in which the adults and children have complete parity of status. The school's philosophy is to allow freedom for the individual, each child being able to take their own path in life and find, through experience, the things that they want to do and the person they want to be. The school proposes that this leads to an inner self-confidence and real acceptance of themselves as people. All of this is done within the structures of the school, through the meetings, self-government and the clear distinctions between freedom and licence, all elements which are at the very core of the school's philosophy and the day-to-day experiences of the pupils and staff.

The school is part of a regional, national and international democratic network and reflects the extent of A S Neill's continuing influence on the world. This is mirrored in the pupil intake. Approximately two thirds of pupils (mainly Dutch, German, Korean Japanese, and Taiwanese) speak English as an additional language. The principal and, from time to time other staff and children, go out from the school to speak to and work with other children and adults and to promote democratic education.

## Evaluation of the school

Summerhill provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. Pupils learn appropriately and make satisfactory progress in their accredited courses because effective systems of assessment, tailored to the school's philosophy, are in place and the curriculum is satisfactory and relevant to their needs. Good quality teaching supports good progress in lessons and pupils make satisfactory progress in learning outside lessons. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social

and cultural development, is outstanding and behaviour is good, mainly as a result of the good quality care, support and guidance they receive. The school meets nearly all the regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. It is relevant to the needs of pupils, with an appropriate emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills. The personal, social and health education curriculum which permeates the life of the school meets pupils' needs adequately. The curriculum also meets the needs of those pupils on the 'special attention' register including new arrivals, those with statements of special educational need and those who speak English as an additional language. A wide range of learning opportunities both within and outside lessons is available. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to take public examinations. Appropriate subject planning provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils to make progress. Pupils are able to choose and organise activities which they enjoy and find relevant. There are local community links through dance, sport and horse-riding and the school receives many visitors throughout the year on regular visiting days. Visitors are looked after by the Visitors' Committee and allowed to observe the whole-school community meeting.

Teaching is good and assessment is satisfactory overall. Relationships are very good and pupils are polite, courteous and considerate. Pupils really enjoy lessons. They are absorbed in their activities, highly motivated and focused on learning. Teachers challenge pupils' learning and provide good support to help clarify any misunderstandings. However, teachers do not set clear learning objectives at the beginning of lessons so that pupils know what they are expected to achieve, nor do they discuss with pupils how well they have achieved at the end of the lesson. One-to-one teaching is effective and small class sizes enable pupils to enjoy their learning and make good progress in lessons. There are sufficient resources which are well used by teachers to promote learning. Pupils make good use of information and communication technology outside lessons to support their learning. For example, an older pupil is learning Dutch through the exchange of emails and course work with a tutor in Holland.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall, taking account of their learning outside lessons. By comparison, their progress in lessons is good. By the time they leave school they have gained an appropriate range of qualifications including GCSE passes and certificates in the use of English as a foreign language. There were some individual examples of very good progress made outside lessons, as seen in the high quality furniture pupils made in after school woodwork activities and in the 'RedRam' film production which received much praise and was presented as a film premiere to parents and the community. Pupils clearly make progress through such out-of-class activities. For example, when pupils are engaged in the game of dungeons and dragons, they are developing literacy, numeracy sub-skills of spatial awareness, creative and aesthetic skills and physical skills. The school regularly reviews the

progress of each pupil within its own relevant assessment system. Any pupil who is deemed to be making inadequate progress is provided with additional support or guidance. When they leave school, pupils usually continue their education or training. In 2007, all pupils who left Summerhill moved on to further education or training.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. The democratic process used to manage the day-to-day running of the school, as seen in the various pupil committees and the whole-school community meeting, provides pupils with outstanding opportunities for personal development. Behaviour is good overall. Most pupils behave very well in and around the school, but a few pupils behave inappropriately. Pupils' attitudes to the school are very positive. They are rightly proud of their community and many are keen to share their positive experiences of their life in school. They are confident and articulate, with a strong sense of what is right and wrong. Their commitment to equality is seen in the day-to-day way they engage with each other. The democratic process enables even the younger pupils to reflect on issues which impact on the community, such as not clearing up sweet wrappers. Pupils have the choice whether or not to attend lessons and effective learning was observed both in and outside the classroom. A strength is the way in which pupils from different countries work together to form the school community, celebrating its international dimension. Pupils learn how to get on with each other through compromise, negotiation and communication within the community so that by the time they leave they are well rounded, confident and mature young people. Pupils develop a sound knowledge of public institutions.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is good. The dedication of the staff and the concern of the community as a whole ensure excellent support for all pupils. The school complies with safeguarding requirements. Pupils say they feel safe, and can always find someone to talk to if needed. This might be an ombudsman appointed by the school community, a member of staff or another pupil. Any instances of inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, are brought up at the community meetings and dealt with effectively. Sanctions are clear and the community decides on the level of severity, agreeing which sanction to apply. Overall, behaviour is good, with pupils and staff showing great respect for each other. The school canteen offers healthy choices, although an entrepreneurial initiative to run a junk food shop provides crisps and fizzy drinks. The community effectively promotes pupils' awareness of health and safety issues. The school does not yet meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school makes all the necessary checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises are satisfactory. The main building, housing the dining room, the art room and living accommodation for some middle-school pupils, is well-appointed. Teaching blocks, some recently improved, are situated around the perimeter of an attractive open space. Good-sized classrooms and specialist teaching areas for practical subjects such as science and woodwork provide ample learning spaces. Attractive displays, including pupils' work and interesting posters, ensure that the classrooms for younger pupils are bright and stimulating, providing positive learning environments.

Other buildings include subject-specific teaching rooms for the older pupils, further accommodation for boarders and a gym, which also doubles as a theatre for plays and films. Extensive grounds complement the spacious premises. Pupils have exciting opportunities for play, which include a tree house, the revered 'Big Beech' and large climbing frames.

Very uneven flooring in the corridor by the kitchen is hazardous, as are the worn carpet tiles in the porch when they become scuffed.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents with all the required information. Helpful resources include the parents' handbook and an informative website, which captures the spirit of the school through photographs and comments. The school fully explains its philosophy about sharing information about an individual pupil with his or her parents. This only occurs with the pupil's agreement.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school's written complaints procedure fully complies with requirements.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must do the following.

- Ensure that all flooring is safe (paragraph 5(s)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Empower young people to take even greater ownership of their learning by setting targets for themselves.
- Inform pupils what they are expected to achieve at the beginning of lessons, by setting clear objectives and review their progress against these at the end of lessons.

## School details

Name of school	Summerhill School		
DCSF number	935/6016		
Unique reference number	124870		
Type of school	Primary and secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1921		
Age range of pupils	5-17 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 40	Girls: 38	Total: 78
Number of boarders	Boys: 38	Girls: 37	Total: 75
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of children receiving day care	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,087 to £7,386		
Annual fees (boarders)	£7,086 to £12,315		
Address of school	Westward Ho Leiston Suffolk IP16 4HY		
Telephone number	01728 830540		
Fax number	01728 830540		
Email address	zoe@summerhillschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Zoe Redhead		
Proprietor	Mrs Zoe Redhead		
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy		
Dates of inspection	6-7 November 2007		