

**AGENCY OF EDUCATION  
Barre, Vermont**

**TEAM:** School Finance

**ITEM:** Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general and special education independent school approval, to serve a maximum of 25 male and female students in grades 1-12 within the disability categories of Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Specific Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Speech or Language Impairment, Developmental Delay, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, to Manchester Village School, Manchester, VT?

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general and special education independent school approval, to serve a maximum of 25 male and female students in grades 1-12 within the disability categories of Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disabilities, Specific Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Speech or Language Impairment, Developmental Delay, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, to Manchester Village School, Manchester, VT. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2021.**

**Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Department of Education whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration, during the approval process.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** Title 16 V.S.A., Section 166 (b)  
State Board Rule: 2228 et. seq.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Founded 17 years ago, the Manchester Village School operated under the name of Great Expectations School until 2011. It was named Manchester Village School to emphasize it being a school, first and foremost. The school is dedicated to providing an educational and therapeutic environment that fosters academic, as well as social and emotional growth. Honoring the dignity of each student and his/her individuality as it relates to growth and learning is the hallmark of the school. The school serves male and female students in grades 1-12.

Manchester Village School was granted renewal of general and special education independent school approved by the State Board of Education in November, 2011 through June 30, 2016.

On behalf of the Agency of Education, Brian Morgan visited Manchester Village School on May 18, 2016.

## GENERAL EDUCATION REPORT OF FINDINGS

### 1. Description of facilities

Manchester Village School is located in a two-story building in Manchester Village. The ground floor includes five classrooms— two for high school, one for middle school, one for elementary school, and one for art. There is also an airy and spacious kitchen and lunchroom. The second floor has been remodeled since the last approval and now contains a spacious conference room, where the staff meets for its daily after-school meetings, a basic kitchenette, a small office, and much closet space. The original idea of converting the walk out basement/garage was abandoned as impractical because of insufficient headroom. The school sits on two acres, and there is ample room for outdoor activity during recess time. Since the building predates the issue of Certificates of Occupancy by the Village of Manchester, the equivalent document from the zoning authority is on file approving its use as a school.

### 2. Minimum course of study as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. §906:

The minimum course of study as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. §906 is provided and adapted to the age and readiness of the students. Manchester Village School is an academically focused, clinically informed choice for families and local education administrators. The school strives to be as “mainstream” as possible, developing self-confidence and enabling students to feel as though they are attending a real school. This approach certainly helps students reintegrating back into their local school districts. The curriculum is provided using a variety of modalities for instruction: differentiated instruction, small group and independent instruction, direct instruction, and computer-based instruction. Each student is provided with Chrome Books equipped with IXL software, which is widely used, especially in math. The school has the requisite support services to carry out its program. On the day of the visit there were fourteen students enrolled.

### 3. Staffing: adequacy; qualifications; professional development

The school has 4.5 F.T.E.’s in its educational staff. One of the Directors teaches a full teaching load, as well as overseeing the other teachers. The Director is also a VT licensed special educator. There is a full-time social studies teacher, a full-time math/science teacher, an art and physical education teacher, and a second art teacher who is also support staff for math, science, and reading. Current teachers have had anywhere from two to fifteen years of experience at this school. The staff is qualified by degree and training for their positions. In-service training days take place at the beginning of the school year for three days and in June for two days. The professional development for staff in the last two years has focused on DBT and CBT, mindfulness and trauma informed approaches to interventions.

### 4. Financial capacity and audit

The Directors of the school pay close attention to its financial situation. I reviewed the 2015 profit and loss statement with the Directors and discussed their current financial status. An accompanying notarized statement certified that the school’s fiscal health is sound. The Directors rent the property at a reasonable rate. Student tuitions are paid by sending school districts. There has been an increase in enrollment since the application

was filed. The Directors anticipate a pay raise for teachers for next year. Teachers with whom I spoke reported that they are fairly paid. Every indication leads to the conclusion that the school's financial status is stable, that the school employs a philosophy of fiscal prudence and sound financial management, and that there is no immediate threat to that stability.

5. Student attendance records. Fire drill records: Operating schedule. Number of instructional hours

This reviewer reviewed records for attendance and fire drills and found them to be impeccably maintained. The operating schedule and the number of instructional hours are included in the application and are acceptable.

6. Policies: admission, discipline, harassment/hazing/bullying

Manchester Village School has developed policies for admissions and discipline. These policies are to be found in the school's comprehensive handbook and are found to be fully appropriate. The school's policy on prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying is as stringent as the Agency's model policy.

7. School improvement plans

The school is experiencing an increase in elementary enrollment, which will likely necessitate the switching of the high school and elementary classrooms in the near future. The Director is also eyeing a building for rent across the street, which would serve as an ideal school office.

8. Summary and recommendation

Manchester Village School is a vibrant, active school. The students were engaged and confident, and two older students, especially, expressed deep gratitude for what they had accomplished during their time at the school. The school leadership believes – and this reviewer concurs – that the earlier one can intervene in a youngster's unstable life, the better off that youngster is and more able to advocate for him/herself in mainstream situations. I recommend that Manchester Village School be renewed for the next five years.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION FINDINGS

Manchester Village School is seeking re-approval as an independent day school in the areas of Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, Development Delay, Other Health Impaired, Specific Learning Disability, and Speech-Language Impairment.

Manchester Village School is located in Manchester, Vermont, and provides an academically focused, clinically informed choice for students in grades 1 through 12. Manchester Village is currently serving ten students who qualify for special education services.

Manchester Village School is dedicated to providing an educational and therapeutic learning environment that fosters academic, social, and emotional growth. Both the therapeutic and academic elements were quite apparent in this visit and should be commended. The clinical focus is very trauma-informed, which has created an environment that allows the students to be

available for learning. Students at Manchester Village School, in fact, have made tremendous academic gains.

Most special education services are delivered by a licensed special educator; when it is more sensible for another of the school's faculty members to do so, then the licensed special educator supervises the teacher and provides the materials in accordance to the students' IEPs.

Tracy Harris, an AOE Special Education Consultant, visited Manchester Village School on May 2, 2016. The site visit included a tour of the facilities; interviews with the school's Executive Director and Clinical Director, the Education/Special Education Director, a social studies teacher, and a student; observations of student and staff interactions, and review of student files and IEPs. The school building was clean, welcoming, and exceptionally calm and orderly. The amount of space was more than appropriate for the number of students enrolled and organized as needed for the individual needs of students. All staff members were cooperative, professional, and conveyed a sense of passion for the work they do and the students they serve. There was ample evidence of positive and collaborative working relationships with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) families, and the broader community.

The following rules were reviewed for compliance:

2228.3 – MET – Observed written policies and/or procedures in the areas of: (1) admissions, (2) least restrictive environment, (3) discipline, (4) graduation, (5) faculty qualifications, and (6) faculty-student ratios.

2228.3.1 – MET – Clear evidence of maintenance of (1) educational records and coordination with LEA and parents through data and file review, (2) participation in evaluation and IEP procedures through IEP review, and (3) implementation of IEPs through progress reporting and behavioral data.

2228.3.2 – MET – the special educator was hold a VT Educator's License endorsed in special education. All current staff has completed the requirements outlined in Rule 4500 as related to training for staff involved in restraint and seclusion protocols *but it should be noted that there have been no physical restraints administered at Manchester Village School in the past 17 years.* Based on the rules for Special Education Approval for Independent Schools, Manchester Village School has met the requirements for independent school approval.

**COST IMPLICATIONS:** none

**STAFF AVAILABLE:**

Cassandra Ryan, Finance Analyst  
479-8545