

High Close School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110181
Local Authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	356693
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Bob Pugh

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Ashton-Moore
Headteacher	Zoe Lattimer
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2008
School address	Wiltshire Road Wokingham RG40 1TT
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Age group	7–16
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2011
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Boarding provision

Social care Unique Reference Number

SC011327

Social care inspector

Maire Atherton

Age group

7–16

Inspection dates

14–15 June 2011

Inspection number

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors and one Social Care inspector. They observed 10 lessons taught by 10 teachers. Meetings were held with parents, carers, groups of pupils, a member of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, met pupils and looked at their work files and books with them, and viewed displays and art work. Inspectors scrutinised the 19 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 46 staff and 36 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How the school has improved since the last inspection.
- How well teachers' planning takes account of the needs of all pupils and how they help all pupils to make good or better progress by motivating and challenging all groups of pupils.
- The effectiveness of school leaders in using information gained from monitoring the work of the school to drive up standards.
- Whether the curriculum prepares pupils for adult life and future economic well-being.
- The way the school's partnerships are helping pupils to make progress and ensure their well-being.

Information about the school

High Close School is part of Barnardo's childcare charity family of schools. It is a part-residential special school which offers weekly or fortnightly boarding for approximately 38 pupils as well as day provision for about 37 pupils. Pupils have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum condition, dyslexia and Tourette's Syndrome. Pupils come from 16 local authorities; some day pupils have lengthy journeys to and from school each day. The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British heritage and, for all pupils, English is their first language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than nationally. The school has gained the International Schools Award and particularly cherishes its links with a community in Goa. A new Principal was appointed in September 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

High Close School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is a welcoming community with some good and outstanding features; for example, the care, support and guidance offered to pupils in all areas of the school are a particular strength. Staff work diligently to ensure that every member of the school community feels safe, valued and respected. Leaders are ambitious for their pupils and demonstrate an increasingly clear commitment to improving pupils' achievements and to providing rich learning experiences. Staff have organised regular overseas visits for older pupils so that pupils can gain an understanding of how their fund-raising activities are having a positive effect on children's lives in another country. Pupils take part in expeditions to other areas in England and these have helped them gain a very good understanding of life for people in other communities.

The new Principal has made a good start to improving the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation procedures. School leaders have introduced systems which will provide them, as well as young people and their families, with useful information about how well pupils are doing. However, this analysis of progress is in its infancy. Teaching is satisfactory, though the information which assessment exercises have produced is not yet used productively by all teachers to help with planning of lessons. Teachers are not consistently clear about pupils' progress and pupils are not always sure about what they need to do to make good progress in lessons.

The school's provision for work-related learning is particularly good because it is highly personalised to pupils' needs, and so are the school's care planning and behaviour management programmes. This level of planning, however, is not seen in all curriculum areas; in some subjects, insufficient work has been undertaken to ensure that pupils' specific needs are adequately met. The last inspection report challenged the school to ensure that all pupils achieve of their best in English, particularly writing. There is evidence that pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in writing, with some making good progress. Similar satisfactory rates of progress are seen in mathematics. Opportunities for problem solving, individual research and investigation by pupils are not as developed due to an over reliance in lessons on learning from worksheets.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that their views are listened to when they bring their ideas to the school council. Pupils say that they feel safe at all times, well cared for and supported in classrooms and in living areas. Pupils talk about their work and what they have achieved with pride. One pupil told an inspector, 'When I came here, I was a naughty boy, but now they have helped the good boy inside me to come out.' Pupils' behaviour in class and in other areas of the school campus is usually very good. Staff deal effectively with incidents when they occur and pupils show that they understand why actions need to be taken.

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Parents and carers are very pleased with their child's experiences at the school. A typical comment was, 'My child is so safe and secure in the school environment; he is now open to learning and progressing at a fast rate.' The school works extremely well with its many partners, including careers advisers and local further education colleges, to ensure that high-quality systems of support are in place for its pupils and their families. This is especially true at very sensitive times such as when a pupil is admitted to the school or when a young person is ready to leave and move on to other settings. Given the commitment of school leaders and managers to improve pupils' achievements and the developments in pupils' learning experiences, there is a satisfactory capacity for further and sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that at least 80% is judged to be good or better by the summer term of 2012 by:
 - raising all teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of
 - ensuring that assessment is used consistently to plan lessons at the appropriate level for pupils' abilities and help pupils to understand what they need to do to make better progress
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving, independent research and investigational skills.
- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation, so that school leaders have accurate information about pupils' learning and progress so that effective measures can be taken to drive up standards.
- Move forward with planning which ensures that the school's curriculum motivates and inspires, and is carefully adapted and specifically designed to provide appropriate challenge for all pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When they join the school, many pupils have had poor experiences of education and schools. Nevertheless, when they get to Year 11, a majority of pupils gain passes in GCSE subjects while others receive accreditation in vocational and life skills learning programmes. Pupils know who to talk to if they have worries or concerns. They are polite and respectful. When talking about their work and experiences, pupils were confident and fluent, for example, describing their enjoyment of attending 'taster' courses at a local college. Towards the end of their time at school, they learn good work-related skills, culminating in extended work experience periods in Year 11. This provides them with good opportunities for thinking about their futures. Attendance is broadly average.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, including nutrition and substance abuse. They regularly enjoy physical exercise and understand the dangers of smoking and drug abuse. They know how to stay safe when using the internet.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They participate in assemblies with enthusiasm and they enjoy excellent links with orchestras and choirs. Pupils make a strong contribution to the wider community. Locally, they carry out voluntary work in homes for older people and act as trainee guide dog walkers. They learn

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about overseas communities and some pupils have the opportunity to visit a school and village in another country. This helps to provide them with knowledge and understanding of their own and the wider community, and these experiences enable many pupils to develop into confident young people.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers plan lessons in detail but sometimes insufficient attention is paid to the particular learning needs of individual pupils. In some lessons, more-able pupils are insufficiently challenged; teachers and their assistants too readily provide answers rather than pointing pupils in the direction of further investigation. In the best lessons, teachers ensure learning outcomes are very clear, maintain a lively pace and have good subject knowledge. In these lessons, teachers use questions well to move pupils' understanding forward. In less effective lessons, pupils spend too much time doing activities without being clear about what they are being asked to achieve. On occasion, the role of teaching assistants is too focused on keeping pupils on task, rather than challenging and helping them to become independent.

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Provision for work-related learning is good. For example, one pupil who followed a horticultural course gained additional skills by being encouraged to participate actively in the management of the school grounds. Overall, the curriculum lacks detailed planning. School leaders have recognised this and have plans for more focused opportunities for literacy and numeracy learning in all subjects. For example, inspectors observed one English lesson taught in the Food Technology room, where the production of a simple meal was used to teach about imperatives and instruction words. Many pupils achieve well in those subjects where planning is precise and focused on developing individuals' skills and understanding. Some particularly good art GCSE work was observed, providing evidence that pupils were challenged, inspired and motivated by the subject.

The commitment of staff to ensuring the well-being and sustaining the learning of all pupils is a significant strength. Staff know their pupils as individuals, and while this knowledge has not always informed lesson planning, their hard work to support pupils who face very challenging circumstances is deeply embedded.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have recognised that a new approach is needed if they are to gain detailed and robust information about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. Their ambition and drive for improvement has led to new systems for monitoring the work of the school. These are beginning to provide them with better knowledge of strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to set out focused targets for improvement in the school development plan. They have employed educational consultants to build on their understanding of how well the school is doing and have worked sensitively yet rigorously to ensure that key staff know what needs to be done to improve the learning of all pupils. Members of the governing body are well organised, supportive and understand the challenges the school faces. They are directly involved in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses can be tackled and the necessary improvements put in place. It is an inclusive school and systems to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination within school are satisfactory and improving.

Parents and carers are very well informed about all aspects of their children's achievements. Regular telephone calls, letters home and home visits ensure that they have accurate information about their children's experiences at school, and that their views can be taken into account in individual planning. Staff are highly committed to working in partnership; and the extremely good links between classroom and care staff result in high-quality information about individuals' needs and strengths. There is some

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improvement where the school has targeted its actions, for example, the very few exclusions highlight the positive trend in behaviour management in recent terms. The school has excellent systems in place for making sure pupils are safe. The staff's and governors' awareness of safeguarding issues is comprehensive and working arrangements with other agencies are exemplary. The school promotes community cohesion very well, by means of its active engagement in the local community, and is recognised by its International award. It has a clear understanding of how existing work can be built upon to strengthen pupils' knowledge of other communities. There are no major shortcomings evident in the use or management of resources and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Boarding provision

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. The school continues to exceed the key national minimum standards for residential special schools. Two previous recommendations have been addressed, lunchtime dining is a calmer experience for pupils and some showers have been improved as part of a rolling programme.

The health of young people is exceptionally well promoted. Staff are very knowledgeable about the health needs of young people, some of which are highly complex, and these are detailed in the comprehensive written individual health care plans. Staff are confident in administering medication; this is underpinned by regular training and clear policies and procedures. Boarders are actively encouraged to live healthy lifestyles through interesting and varied physical activities, a balanced diet and support with personal hygiene and health education. Boarders enjoy the food provided, say that they can contribute to the menus and also enjoy shopping for and preparing food.

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All staff have a thorough understanding of the range of safeguarding issues, updated by annual training, and effectively implement the comprehensive policy and guidance in place. The head of care is the designated person for safeguarding. He has a good working relationship with the local authority and is a member of the school's safeguarding forum. Senior staff have attended training on safer recruitment practices and this is reflected in the robust recruitment procedure adopted by the school.

A significant strength of the school is the thorough and positive approach to behaviour management, using an accredited framework which includes managing challenging behaviour with the main emphasis on diversion techniques. The school has in-house trainers who continually look to improve practice. They have established weekly opportunities for staff development and contributed to the framework. Boarders and staff work together to develop individual behaviour management plans, with clear targets set. Staff are consistent in working to the plan, rewarding positive behaviour and applying appropriate consequences for misbehaviour. Staff have a good understanding of the complex reasons for the behaviour difficulties displayed. Boarders' complaints are listened to and receive an appropriate response. Boarders are confident that any bullying is dealt with promptly and constructively. Health and safety is taken very seriously and is underpinned by robust policies, procedures and risk assessments. Safety matters are reinforced with boarders, through fire drills for example. As a consequence of all these factors, boarders say that they feel safe.

Residential staff are creative in their approach to provide boarders with a wide range of opportunities that support their enjoyment and achievement. This is achieved by use of facilities on site, local community leisure facilities, such as the dry ski slope, and in the wider community through trips abroad, for example the annual trip to Goa. The residential provision supports the education of boarders by having daily handovers with teaching staff, promoting homework, learning through activities and developing life skills and independence.

Boarders receive outstanding individual support from the residential staff and benefit from a key work system where a designated member of staff takes responsibility for coordinating information and leading individual work with the boarder. A boarder described a key worker as 'awesome'. Wider support comes from the school staff, the field social work team, therapists, the senior leadership team and independent visitors. A parent commented, 'We all work together to promote my son's welfare.'

Staff are innovative in the ways they enable boarders to make a significant contribution to decision making, both in their day-to-day plans and in the way boarding is run. As a result, boarders feel their opinions are heard, acted on and valued. A careful and thorough admission process includes an overnight stay as part of the information-gathering process and a probationary period to ensure that the placement is right. Care, teaching and fieldwork staff coordinate their efforts to prepare young people for moving on from the school.

Boarding accommodation is of an excellent standard and provides boarders with a comfortable, warm and homely environment. All boarders have single bedrooms, furnished appropriately. There is little damage and any that occurs is repaired promptly.

Strong leadership is provided by the head of care and the unit managers to the stable, highly committed, experienced and enthusiastic staff team in post. All regularly reflect on their practice with a view to improving outcomes for boarders. Staff benefit from regular training opportunities, both in-house and external, which they implement in practice. The

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whole staff team are mutually supportive and the formal systems such as supervision, team meetings and handovers are used to good effect. There are robust monitoring systems in place including reports written by independent visitors.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

All of the national minimum standards have been met.

These are the grades for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	1
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Views of parents and carers

Almost all of the 19 sets of parents and carers who completed questionnaires were very supportive of the school, though a very few stated that their children did not enjoy school. A number commented very positively on the school's efforts to reassure new pupils by means of good induction procedures. The caring attitude of staff was also remarked on, as was the school's safe and secure environment. Parents and carers who asked to see the inspectors were enthusiastic about all aspects of the school's provision and the positive effect that the school had on their child's progress. They were less clear about how parents and carers are consulted about the general direction of the school. Inspectors agreed with the positive views of the majority of parents and carers. During this inspection, little evidence was observed of pupils not enjoying school, either in lessons, the residential units or in meetings and discussions with groups of pupils.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at High Close to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 67 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	42	8	42	3	16	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	63	6	32	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	47	9	47	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	63	6	32	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	58	7	37	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	63	7	37	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	53	8	42	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	58	7	37	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	68	5	26	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	63	7	37	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	58	7	37	1	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	68	5	26	1	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Close School, Wokingham RG40 1TT

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. You behaved very well and were polite and helpful to us. A special thank you to those of you who met us to share your ideas about the school. It was especially helpful to be able to go through your work files with you and to listen to your views on how well you are doing. We found that your school is satisfactory overall, which means that it does some things well but there are areas that can be improved.

We think that your school cares for you very well and gives you high-quality guidance and support. Your behaviour is very good and you told us that you enjoy school and feel safe. This helps you to learn in lessons. Your families agree that the school provides you with interesting lessons and activities.

To make the school even better and to improve your progress, we have asked your school to do the following things:

- Ensure that all teaching is of the very highest quality and that your work is assessed well so that you know how well you are doing.
- Make sure that what you learn is really interesting and designed to meet everyone's specific needs.
- Ensure that your teachers and key workers have very accurate information about how you are doing so that they can plan well to drive up standards.

All of you can help by working hard in lessons and by talking to teachers about what it is you need to learn next so that you can continue to make progress.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Bob Pugh

Lead inspector

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