

# The South Downs Community Special School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114692
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	357588
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robert Ellis HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	115
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs G Temple
<b>Headteacher</b>	Remo Palladino
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 July 2008
<b>School address</b>	Beechy Avenue Eastbourne BN20 8NU
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They observed 14 lessons taught by 14 different teachers, and held discussions with groups of pupils, staff, parents and carers, representatives from partner organisations and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at development plans, curriculum planning, the school's tracking data showing pupils' progress, teachers' lesson plans and pupils' work. In addition, they analysed the questionnaire responses of 30 parents and carers, 48 staff and 39 pupils, and took their views into account.

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

- The extent to which sensory elements are embedded in all curriculum areas.
- The performance of different groups of pupils including those with autism, moderate or profound learning difficulties and those who have complex needs.
- The systems used to assess, record and evaluate the academic progress and personal development of pupils.

## Information about the school

South Downs is a small school based on two sites that provides for pupils of primary school age who have autism, communication and associated learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many pupils have complex needs. The school has Early Years Foundation Stage provision which is located at the West site. In addition, the school supports the needs of learners with speech, language and communication difficulties in local mainstream schools through an outreach service. Pupils come from a variety of communities across East Sussex and most are transported to school by taxi. Most pupils are White British and more than one in five are known to be eligible for free school meals. There are approximately three times as many boys as girls. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Because of the nature of the provision, pupil mobility is high. Most pupils transfer to one or other of two special schools at the end of Year 6. The school has recently entered into a partnership arrangement with another local special school. The school is accredited by the National Autistic Society for its work with pupils with autism.

**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?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

- In this outstanding school high expectations and outstanding care, guidance and support underpin the excellent progress that pupils make.
- Pupils are looked after very well and kept safe. The positive relationships between staff and pupils contribute to pupils feeling very safe and enjoying learning.
- Very strong links with parents, carers and other agencies support pupils extremely well in both their learning and in their personal development. The school can provide many examples of where effective partnerships with a wide range of agencies and therapists have helped pupils overcome personal difficulties and significant barriers to their learning.
- Pupils' achievement in relation to their starting points and abilities is outstanding and pupils are prepared well for the next steps in their education.
- Pupils behave very well and most enjoy school and attend as regularly as they are able to.
- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Excellent use of assessment supports learning extremely well.
- The high-quality curriculum is reviewed regularly and it is extremely responsive to the needs and aspirations of individual pupils.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is promoted particularly well, but pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop a thorough understanding of other faiths and cultures that are not represented in the school community.
- Senior leaders have an ambitious vision for the school. Leadership and management at all levels are at least good and often outstanding.
- The governing body ensures that statutory responsibilities are met, but governors recognise that they need to be less reliant on information provided by the school when holding the school to account.
- The school's accurate self-evaluation and significant progress in key areas of its work since the last inspection indicate an excellent capacity for further improvement.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on improvements to governance so that the governing body can be more independent and therefore more robust in supporting and challenging leaders and managers at all levels.

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- Ensure that pupils have increased opportunities to develop a better understanding of faiths and cultures other than their own.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

Many pupils have complex medical needs and/or profound or severe learning difficulties. Consequently, since the cognitive abilities of many pupils are severely restricted inspectors did not make a judgement for achievement. Scrutiny of the school's assessment information and pupils' work show that most pupils make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and abilities. Pupils in lessons were seen to enjoy school and make better than expected progress due to the highly personalised approach to learning that is a key feature of the school. The level of pupil engagement in all lessons is high and pupils respond positively to the appropriately challenging tasks and activities that they are presented with. Most pupils attend school regularly, but medical needs sometimes limit the attendance of some pupils. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally of a high standard. Skilful behaviour management, particularly of pupils who sometimes exhibit challenging behaviour, ensures that little if any learning time is lost due to inappropriate behaviour. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils also contribute strongly to learning. Relationships with parents and carers are excellent and parents and carers are encouraged and enabled to be fully engaged with their children's learning. Pupils say that they feel very safe and they are confident that adults are approachable and will help them overcome their problems. Pupils enthusiastically take up responsibilities as far as they are able and their spiritual, moral and social development is promoted well. Arrangements to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of other faiths and cultures beyond the school are less well developed. The school has a strong focus on developing core skills and exemplary transition arrangements. This ensures that pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their education.

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

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 and other adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They know their pupils extremely well and they are able to ensure that tasks and activities are closely matched to the needs and interests of each individual child. High-quality use of questioning is used to gauge pupils' understanding and consistent use of manual signing and visual symbols enhances communication. The good range of activities and resources used in lessons ensure that pupils have the necessary opportunities to develop their senses and motor skills.

The curriculum is carefully designed and very relevant to the pupils' needs. There is a good range of enrichment opportunities which includes use of the local environment, residential opportunities in the Brecon Beacons, extended provision during the school holidays, and a range of school clubs. Teachers go to great lengths to ensure that the curriculum is personalised to individual pupils by linking activities in class to their personal interests. Provision for speech and language development and the use of information and communication technology are woven seamlessly in to the curriculum.

Parents and carers speak very highly of the quality of support that they and their children receive and inspectors judged that the school provides outstanding care, guidance and support. The school is a very welcoming and safe environment where all pupils are valued

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and cared for extremely well. The school adopts a multi-agency approach to supporting pupils at school and in the home. All aspects of pupils' learning and development are closely monitored and reviewed regularly and systematically. Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and there are comprehensive risk assessments for the many different aspects of the school's work including feeding, therapy, physical handling and the impact of medical conditions. Parents and carers say that they are very well informed about how they can support their children and have regular updates on their child's progress.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have been very effective in building a strong team of very capable teachers and support staff who share a common sense of purpose. Monitoring of all aspects of the school's work is rigorous and systematic and performance data are analysed effectively. Consequently, leaders and managers have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. The senior leadership team is not complacent and constantly seeks to improve provision and outcomes for all pupils. The governing body supports the school and ensures that statutory duties are met. Although governance is good overall and members of the governing body have productive links with leaders and managers, governors are too reliant on information provided by the school and this limits their ability to challenge the school rigorously to improve. The school demonstrates a strong commitment to working in partnership with others and takes a lead role in developing partnerships which not only benefit its own pupils but also support pupils in mainstream schools through the outreach work that the school does. This is a very inclusive school where highly effective steps are taken to promote equality of opportunity and eliminate differences in outcomes for different pupils. The school regularly reviews safeguarding arrangements and ensures that pupils and staff are kept safe. In this highly cohesive community leaders have been particularly successful in promoting community cohesion within the school and its local community. The impact of its work in the wider community is less evident, but it is developing.



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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Most children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make exceptional progress, in relation to their starting points and abilities, in all areas of learning and personal development. Children's enjoyment of learning and enthusiasm to participate make a strong contribution to their outstanding progress. There is a good mix of child-initiated and adult-guided learning so children develop the ability to make choices and cooperate with others. A multi-sensory approach to learning provides very good opportunities for children to explore their own senses, abilities and their environment. Effective development of communication and social skills underpins learning for these children. Adults know the children well and ensure that they are provided with a rich and varied range of learning experiences that are closely tailored to their individual needs. Policies and procedures to ensure children's safety and well-being are applied consistently and effectively. Assessment is accurate and children's experiences and achievements are recorded systematically and communicated to parents and carers regularly. The Early Years Foundation Stage team is led very well and highly effective partnerships between teachers, teaching assistants, parents and carers and other professionals enable children to make progress that exceeds the normal expectations for their ages and abilities.

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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

## Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire and those who met with inspectors expressed very positive views about their children's experiences and the quality of support and guidance that they receive. Parents and carers said that they are fully involved in making decisions about their children's learning and well-being. Several parents and carers commented that their children's progress had surpassed their expectations and there was overwhelming praise and support for the teachers and support staff who, as one parent said, 'are always prepared to go the extra mile to support us and our children'.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at South Downs Community Special School 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 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 115 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	60	10	33	2	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	73	7	23	0	0	1	3
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	70	8	27	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	60	11	37	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	70	7	23	2	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	63	10	33	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	53	13	43	1	3	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)	23	77	5	17	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	73	6	20	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	63	10	33	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	63	10	33	0	0	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	18	60	11	37	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	67	9	30	1	3	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](http://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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



14 July 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of South Downs Community Special School, Eastbourne BN20 8NU**

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school. My particular thanks to all of you who took time to fill out our questionnaire or to talk to us about your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing how hard you work. We found that yours is an outstanding school. You work well in lessons and make excellent progress. It was good to see how happy you are in school and you told us you feel very safe. The school is particularly good at making sure you are well cared for. It was good to hear about all the different activities you are involved in. Your teachers and the other adults who help you know you very well and they work hard to make lessons interesting and exciting.

We have asked the school to do some things to make the school even better.

- All the adults who check on how well the school is doing are asked to make sure that they get the best information available to help them decide if the school is running smoothly and continuing to improve.
- We would like you to learn a bit more about what other people in different parts of the country believe and how they live their lives.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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