

Cuckmere House School

Eastbourne Road, Seaford, BA25 4BA

Inspection dates 6–7 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Cuckmere House provides an exceptionally safe place for pupils to learn. Constructive relationships with adults help pupils to behave and achieve exceptionally well.
- Pupils make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics from low starting points. As a result they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Pupils who have not coped well with school in the past do particularly well as soon as they have settled in.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers know their pupils very well and ensure that activities inspire and motivate them. Teachers are passionate about their work and all adults provide excellent role models for pupils.
- Pupils behave really well in lessons in view of their difficulties. After each lesson they assess their behaviour accurately with their teacher and they are very keen to improve. They feel very safe in school.
- Leaders and governors are very ambitious to maintain the excellent standard of education provided. Since the previous inspection they have made sure that pupils continue to achieve exceptionally well and that teaching is of high quality.
- Parents and carers highly value the support that is provided for them and their children, saying that their children are 'much happier and different people' after coming to this school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 19 lessons taught by 16 teachers, of which four were joint observations with the head of school and assistant headteacher. In addition short visits were made to other lessons and inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of school, senior and middle managers, the Chair of the Governing Body, a parent governor and a group of pupils.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but the team took account of feedback from parents' and carers' meetings and questionnaires undertaken by the school.
- The team looked at school documents, including data relating to assessment and pupils' progress, planning for school improvement, monitoring of teaching and learning and records about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Janet Dinsmore, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Carol Vant	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is special school for boys with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. It is similar in size to other schools of this type.
- The school is part of a federation with two other special schools providing education for pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and has a shared governing body and executive headteacher.
- A much higher than average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals and is looked after by the local authority. Both of these groups are entitled to additional funding through the pupil premium, so the proportion in receipt of this funding is much higher than normal.
- There is a much higher than average proportion of pupils who arrive and leave at times other than would normally be expected throughout the academic year.
- There are up to 16 part-time places for boys and girls in the 'Flexible Learning Provision' for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. A number of these pupils may have a statement of special educational needs for emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and may be at further risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream primary school. They remain registered at their mainstream schools.
- There are six places in the Special Activities Unit for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who require highly specialised support.
- The school has residential places for 12 pupils which are subject to a separate inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there are more opportunities for outstanding practice to be shared between the primary and secondary departments to quicken progress, particularly for pupils who stay at the school from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils in Key Stage 1 apply their knowledge of phonics (the sounds letters make) very well in their writing, for example when they were writing about a visitor who came to show them how a cello works. They also use these skills well in their reading, remembering the sounds they learnt the previous day. They learn to concentrate well and enthusiastically record the rewards they receive when they try hard and complete their work.
- The majority of pupils in Key Stage 2 make exceptional progress in reading. They enjoy books and read widely for pleasure as well as enjoying the books they read together in class. They use these skills well when interpreting the writing in advertisements, for example, and show good understanding of vocabulary and the way words are used to exaggerate or persuade.
- Key Stage 3 pupils used drama in one lesson to create a story through sounds when preparing to read a mystery story. They confidently explained why they like stories with suspense and understand how the author creates this. In another lesson, pupils used a good range of vocabulary, language and creative skills to develop names and slogans for an anti-bullying mascot.
- At Key Stage 4 all pupils study for GCSE courses in English and mathematics. They show maturity and understanding, for example, in a lesson where they discussed issues of racial discrimination and loneliness. Pupils use reading skills well to find reasons to back up their opinions about a character. Pupils in the Special Activities Unit also showed great resilience in completing pieces of coursework about their study of *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Key Stage 4 pupils have ambitions to continue into education, training or employment and staff support them very well with this, providing courses that will help them achieve their goals. Pupils learn life skills as well as making outstanding progress in developing personal qualities.
- Progress in mathematics is good throughout the school and pupils develop their understanding and skills well. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils used their skills well to describe two-dimensional shapes, Key Stage 3 pupils developed knowledge of fractions and Key Stage 4 pupils used calculation and number skills well to find the value of angles. Pupils make good progress in science, completing practical tasks with care and accuracy through well-structured teaching.
- Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 use computers well, for example to record and mix tracks in music technology. Pupils in Year 9 collected data about heart rates in physical education lessons and presented the information in spreadsheets and graphs. They discussed what the data showed about their fitness and interpreted it well in response to skilful questioning by the teacher.
- Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children do as well or better than their peers. Pupils in the Flexible Learning Provision also achieve exceptionally well because of the accurate assessment of any gaps in their learning and skilful teaching that ensures they make rapid progress.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers are highly skilled in their subjects and understand the barriers pupils face so that activities are extremely well planned. Learning in each lesson is designed with every individual in mind. Teachers vary activities in each lesson so that the pace of learning is brisk and pupils' interest and motivation are maintained at all times.
- Teachers use resources very well to interest pupils in what they are learning. For example, film excerpts, songs and unusual adverts are all used creatively. Teachers also explain things clearly using drama and role play. For example, pupils in Year 2 acted out lifeboat rescue calls and pupils in Year 10 gained great understanding about life in America in the 1930s by watching film clips from *Of Mice and Men*.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questions very well to gauge how well pupils understand. Pupils are encouraged to talk about what they know and to explain what they are learning. Year

10 pupils explained how to prove that the angles of a quadrilateral added up to 360 degrees and those of a triangle 180 degrees. The teacher reinforced the relevance of the learning by explaining how this was important in building construction.

- Teachers make it very clear to pupils how to take the small steps in learning that will enable them to succeed. This is done equally well in all lessons, whether showing pupils how to write interesting sentences in English or when pupils in the Special Activities Unit are learning about building and construction outdoors. No opportunity is missed across all subjects to ensure pupils meet their targets for behaviour and make rapid progress with learning.
- Pupils who attend part time in the Flexible Learning Provision also make rapid progress because the school works extremely well with their mainstream primary schools. Consistent approaches ensure that there are no breaks in pupils' learning. Staff know exactly how well pupils are doing and share this information with pupils and between schools.
- Frequent visits, residential activities and visitors provide a wide range of real-life, hands-on experiences that promote social and practical skills. For example, on a trip to HMS Belfast and various buildings in London, Year 7 pupils explored the history involved and also developed responsibility for managing their behaviour outside school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils get on exceptionally well with each other and show respect for other pupils and adults. Although pupils sometimes find it hard to behave well, this never interrupts the learning in lessons because teachers and support staff are highly skilled in knowing exactly what to say and do. Pupils are very well focused and can explain clearly how their behaviour affects learning. As one said, 'We need to concentrate so that we get a good education.'
- Pupils assess their behaviour in every lesson and so have an excellent understanding of how it is affected by their reactions to situations. They fully understand that some pupils have difficulties with controlling anger and say that this is dealt with very well by staff so that bullying incidents are rare. School staff are vigilant and always involve parents and carers when dealing with the rare incidents of cyber bullying as these usually occur when pupils are not at school.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of different forms of bullying. Personal, social and health education lessons provide valuable opportunities for pupils to discuss how to deal with it. In one lesson, pupils were challenged to come up with ideas for games and slogans that promote understanding of bullying. Pupils defined bullying as 'if you leave people out' and developed slogans such as 'Bullies Offer Bother But Ignore Them'.
- Pupils feel extremely safe at school. They feel confident to talk about and deal with difficult previous experiences and they learn to trust adults. Attendance is above average in the primary department and steadily improving in the secondary department because of the rigorous attention to pupils' individual circumstances. The school uses its residential provision flexibly to excellent effect to support pupils and families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school is highly valued by the local authority as a model of excellent practice. The partnership between this school, as part of the federation, and the local authority is very strong, although the local authority needs to provide only light touch support. The school and its staff provide training and an example of outstanding practice that is recognised at a national level through specialist school status.
- Training for partner primary and secondary schools ensures that the excellent practice and systems of behaviour management are shared effectively. This is particularly important for pupils who attend both the Flexible Learning Provision and their own primary school and ensures highly effective, consistent approaches for the benefit of the pupils.
- Systems for checking teachers' performance are individually tailored for each teacher, depending

on their experience. Points for further development are followed up rigorously. Although teachers in each part of the school observe each other's lessons in order to share good ideas, there are not enough opportunities for teachers in the primary and secondary parts of the school to observe each other's work in order to ensure greater consistency of approach for pupils who stay on into Year 7.

- Pupil premium funding is used well to extend opportunities for pupils and provide specific support for individual needs. For example, it enables pupils to experience out-of-school activities, which has helped to improve attendance. It also funds an additional reading scheme, which has led to a great improvement in reading for primary aged pupils, and a mentor to support pupils as they move into further education or training after the age of 16.
- The executive headteacher of the federation supports the head of school in Cuckmere House very well. The expertise across all three schools is used well, for example in comparing pupils' work to ensure assessment is accurate and comparing pupils' progress between the schools. Resources such as specialist music teaching are shared effectively, enabling joint performances and enhancing the quality of cultural education for all the pupils.
- School staff have excellent relationships with many supporting agencies, including the youth justice team, police community support officers, clinical and educational psychologists and social care, so that pupils and their parents and carers receive as much support as possible to overcome barriers to learning and social development. As a result, many pupils who were once anxious and fearful grow amazingly in confidence, self-esteem and maturity.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has reorganised itself to combine the governance of all three schools in the federation. It is efficient and focused on ensuring the best possible experiences for the pupils. The governors are highly experienced and at the forefront of developing practice in the governance of federations of special schools. This has been recognised at a national level. Governors are well informed about all aspects of the school, particularly the pupils' learning and progress, because they visit regularly and receive regular detailed reports. They meet all statutory responsibilities, especially those for safeguarding, very well. Governors ensure that decisions on staff pay are linked closely to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They frequently ask challenging questions about how well the school is doing and ensure that pupil premium funding is spent appropriately. They are passionate about maintaining the outstanding education for the pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114696
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	402811

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Southworth
Executive Headteacher	Frank Stanford
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2008
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