

# High Close School

Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, RG40 1TT

**Inspection dates** 22–23 January 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- High Close values all the individuals that are members of its community and works with the 'whole child' to enable them to succeed. Pupils gain confidence and self-esteem.
- The school leaders and managers have made significant improvements to teaching and the tracking of the progress pupils make since the previous inspection.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well from their low starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Those who need extra help with reading also make good progress.
- Teachers and all adults working at the school are knowledgeable about pupils' individual needs and are very skilled at teaching in a way that makes sure they do well.
- Pupils, despite the significant difficulties some have with managing their behaviour, are polite and considerate and work exceptionally well in lessons. They feel safe and secure.
- Parents say that the school transforms the lives of their children particularly after difficult experiences in previous schools.
- Pupils say it is 'the best school in the world', and they know because they 'have been to lots of schools'. They thrive on the excellent range of enjoyable activities that are provided to develop and widen their experience and teaching that motivates and enables them to succeed.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers in Key Stages 3 and 4 have clear information about pupils' progress in reading, writing and communication skills so that these can be developed through work in other subjects as well as English.
- Governors do not hold the school to account enough for how well it performs when compared to similar schools nationally.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 18 lessons or part lessons taught by 14 teachers, of which 10 were joint observations with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior managers, groups of pupils, a governor and a telephone call was made to the children’s services manager at Barnados.
- The team looked at school documents, including information relating to assessment and pupils’ progress, planning for school improvement and records about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- There were 10 responses to the on-line questionnaire Parent View. There was a telephone discussion with a parent and the inspection officer took responses to the questions on Parent View from two additional parents. The team considered a recent parental survey undertaken by the school.

## Inspection team

Janet Dinsmore, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Pollitt

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- High Close is a non-maintained special school with some boarding provision that is one of the Barnados' family of schools. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs, the vast majority for emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and over half also have at least three other identified needs including speech, language and communication, autistic spectrum conditions, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other medical needs.
- The primary unit was started in February 2011 and has 12 places for Key Stage 2 pupils, three of whom are currently resident. The remaining school pupils are in Key Stages 3 and 4, 28 boarders and 38 day pupils. The boarding provision is subject to a separate inspection.
- Pupils have been placed by 18 different local authorities and many have experienced considerable changes in education and home life.
- The proportion of pupils looked after by local authorities and those known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. The school does receive some pupil premium (additional government funding) but not for all pupils that are eligible.
- There is no alternative provision used by the school.

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

- Improve the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - ensuring that teachers in all subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4 know how much progress pupils are making in reading, writing and communication skills so that the information can be used to best effect to accelerate their learning and progress still further across all subjects.
- To enable governors to better hold the school to account, governors should receive appropriate training and information so they gain a better awareness of how well the school performs compared to similar schools nationally.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils arrive at the school having experienced significant disruption to their education. Their abilities are assessed accurately and they make good progress in English and mathematics from their starting points. There are examples of some pupils making outstanding progress because staff have an excellent understanding of their individual needs.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress because the individualised learning provided enables them to extend their communication skills and apply writing skills across a range of subjects. They make rapid gains in learning they have missed in previous schools. For example, pupils were highly motivated to write a newspaper report about a shopping centre and worked together as a group to achieve this.
- Pupils in Key Stage 3 develop good numeracy skills, for example by applying their knowledge of measuring and drawing angles accurately, and use good number skills for calculations. In Key Stage 4 they build on this by applying all their mathematics skills to achieve a GCSE. The school does not operate an early entry policy for GCSE examinations. In Year 11, the gap for this group narrowed at a faster rate, particularly in mathematics, than that for their peers nationally. Pupils demonstrate good information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Pupils in Year 10 design and build websites and demonstrate good skills in evaluating other pupils' work, making accurate suggestions for improvements. Pupils in Key Stage 3 used computers well for research about travel and for a presentation for Year 6 pupils transferring to the school.
- Pupils make good progress with reading. For example, pupils in Year 7 enjoyed reading a play script and showed maturity in discussing the feelings of the characters. Pupils in Year 11 had good understanding of the characters in 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', could sequence events and recall and apply their knowledge to write a formal letter. Those who have particular difficulties are supported well with individual teaching that makes sure they are able to read.
- All groups of pupils make good progress including those that are supported through the pupil premium. The average points scores (APS) of these pupils is similar to other pupils in the school. There is equality of opportunity for all as pupils' individual and complex needs are met very well and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. This enables them all to succeed not only in their academic learning but also in developing personal skills in communication and resilience that will equip them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have an excellent knowledge of individual pupils and structure learning well so that pupils know what they have to do to improve. For example, in mathematics a teacher reminded pupils of what they had learnt about angles and through questioning enabled pupils to accurately measure and construct angles and lines.
- Teaching in the primary department is an example of innovative practice. Learning is well planned and structured to meet individual needs. Pupils are involved in developing their own plans with teachers. These often follow pupils' interests and are effective at maintaining high levels of motivation, concentration and enthusiasm. Pupils have different 'learning jobs' to complete each day and they extend these further because of the encouragement, questioning and direction provided by teachers.
- Teachers use questioning very well to develop pupils' understanding. For example in Year 11, pupils with complex needs were able to identify the features of movie posters because of the individually directed questions. This enabled pupils to develop their communication skills and complete coursework for entry-level qualifications.
- Teachers know the level at which each pupil is learning in their own subject and plan activities that will reinforce and develop pupils' understanding and independence. Other adults are well trained and contribute well to learning because they skilfully question and enable pupils to stay

on task in lessons.

- By Years 10 and 11 pupils have been taught a good range of skills and strategies that prepare them well for further education, training or employment.
- Not all teachers at Key Stages 3 and 4 know individual pupils' progress in reading, writing and communication skills. This lack of information prevents teachers planning and providing tasks and activities that could further accelerate pupils' learning across different subjects of the curriculum.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- Pupils are exceptionally engaged in learning in lessons considering the disruptions to their education and lives that they have previously experienced. Improvements in behaviour are significant and impressive over time. Pupils clearly understand and are motivated by the school's monitoring and reward system for behaviour. Points gained lead to opportunities to purchase items in the school shop. Pupils are keen to receive certificates for 'green days' when they have shown consistent high standards of behaviour throughout the day.
- Pupils report that bullying is very rare, 'because it's a small school, everyone knows everyone else' and any incidents are reported to adults who deal with them swiftly. The school has very robust systems for recording all forms of incidents or poor behaviour. This is monitored by senior staff so that any changes with particular pupils or groups are quickly identified and result in action being taken to make rapid improvements. For example, when pupils first arrive there is often an increase in incidents for them as they settle in; the school checks these carefully and provides support for pupils and they quickly reduce.
- Relationships throughout the school are very strong, characterised by mutual respect, sensitivity and understanding. Pupils learn to understand their own behaviour and reactions to others and by the time they leave they are much more able to control this. Care staff are fully involved in the daily life of the school at breaks and lunchtimes and older pupils enjoy independence in preparing snacks and playing pool or relaxing. Day pupils also have a 'unit' to go to at these times and after their sometimes long taxi journeys to school in the morning. There is no difference in the behaviour or attitudes between day and boarding pupils during the school day.
- Pupils feel exceptionally safe and valued at the school and understand the previous difficulties they have had and how adults are helping to overcome these. 'Teachers understand you and give you time, they don't shout' said one pupil. Attendance is above average for schools of this type and average compared with mainstream secondary schools, demonstrating that almost all pupils enjoy coming to this school and for many this had not been their previous experience.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The senior leadership team has made the changes necessary identified by the previous inspection and this shows there is capacity to make further improvement. Leaders have tackled weaker teaching and robust systems are now in place to track pupils' progress from their starting points. The school is now using this information to plan further developments so that pupils' progress can be accelerated further.
- Teachers' additional training happens weekly and is clearly targeted to improve practice in the classroom and means that they are well equipped to teach the pupils that are arriving at the school with increasingly complex levels of special educational needs. Teachers value and welcome this training and its effect is seen by the strong climate for learning in lessons. Teachers' performance is managed exceptionally well and the headteacher has the full support of the governing body in ensuring that the best teachers are paid appropriately.
- The school has strong partnerships with local colleges and other parts of the local community and there are many opportunities for pupils to participate in performance, fundraising and activities that extend their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding, for example orchestra and choir. 'Activities are the best thing about the school', say pupils.

- Parents are extremely appreciative of the work of the school and the changes that are made to their children's lives as a result. They say that staff enable their children to succeed in many ways that had not been previously possible and this means that there is also much less tension at home so the whole family benefits.
- The children's services management at Barnados provides support for the school for the performance management of the headteacher and has representation on the governing body. The school has links with the local authority through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and in the provision of training for newly qualified teachers. The school is not dependent on this support to secure further improvement because the leadership team has good plans as a result of accurate checking of the school's performance.
- The pupil premium funding is clearly targeted for specific pupils to provide support or access to extra activities that raise self-esteem and have had a demonstrable effect on individual pupils' progress. There is no difference between the attainment of pupils in receipt of pupil premium and other pupils in this special school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

Governance provides support and challenge to the school in maintaining excellent safeguarding practice for vulnerable young people, ensuring financial stability and premises that are well maintained and fit for purpose. Members of the governing body have a good range of skills particularly for financial management. Although the governing body understands how the school is now measuring the progress of pupils, it does not yet have enough information and expertise in order to evaluate how the school performs when compared to similar schools nationally. The governing body has a good grasp of the quality of teaching in the school and has ensured that teachers' pay is directly related to their performance and has supported the headteacher with necessary decisions to accomplish this. They know how teaching has been improved since the previous inspection. They are aware of how pupil premium funding is spent to promote equality of opportunity for all and how accelerated progress is measured for the pupils for whom it is used.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110181
<b>Local authority</b>	Wokingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	405271

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	75
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	31
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Hugh Ashton-Moore
<b>Headteacher</b>	Zoe Lattimer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14–15 June 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01189 785767
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