

The Cedar Centre

Lynchet Close, Hollingdean, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 7FP

Inspection dates 13–14 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All pupils, including those in the primary hub, make good progress over time from their starting points.
- Teaching is typically good. Teachers know pupils very well and plan lessons that are practical, interesting and that focus pupils on their learning.
- An increasing number of pupils gain qualifications in English, mathematics and a range of vocational subjects that prepare them well for further education when they leave school.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Relationships with adults are excellent because the school cares for its pupils very well. Pupils feel safe in school.
- The inspirational executive headteacher, very well supported by the headteacher and other leaders and managers, has driven many improvements in the last two years. These include improvements to achievement, behaviour and the curriculum.
- Governors are well informed about the performance of the school including pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and the use of additional funding.
- The federation of three special schools has helped governors to challenge and support the school robustly and has ensured that teachers can share, and gain from, the best practice across the schools.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Teachers sometimes give the more able pupils work that is too easy and they so do not always make the fast progress that they could.
- Teaching assistants are not involved as well as they could be in recording pupils' learning.
- Although there are clear and agreed procedures for teachers to set short term targets for pupils' progress and to manage behaviour, a few staff do not apply these procedures consistently in lessons. Consequently, pupils do not always make the rapid progress that they are capable of.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons, some of which were observed jointly with senior staff.
- There were insufficient responses to the online survey of parents' and carers' opinions (Parent View). The lead inspector spoke with parents and looked at the school's own surveys.
- Meetings were held with various members of staff as well as representatives from the governing body. Inspectors spoke to many pupils, met with school council members and looked at behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The inspectors looked at documentation about pupils' progress, teaching and planning. The school's documents on safeguarding were scrutinised, together with records of attendance and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and looked at their work in lessons and in books from the previous year. They also looked at recorded observations made by teachers.

Inspection team

Helen Howard, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Cedar Centre is a special school for pupils aged five to 16 years of age, most of whom have moderate learning difficulties. Some have additional complex needs including speech, language or communication needs. A few have an autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and leadership team have been appointed and the school federated with Patcham House and Downs Park special schools to form the CDP Federation. The federation is now led by an executive headteacher and one governing body oversees all three schools.
- Some pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. Primary pupils in Years 1 to 5 are taught by staff from the Cedar Centre in the primary hub, which is on the site of Coldean Primary School, situated a few miles away.
- More than two thirds of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, pupils from service families, and those in care), which is well above the national average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- Approximately one third of pupils join the school at different stages of their school career and at different times of the year.
- Many Key Stage 4 pupils attend college or vocational placements part-time at Varndean, City and Plumpton Colleges. They also attend work experience placements in a range of local businesses. A few pupils have individual timetables and are educated part time off-site by school staff.
- A range of clubs, including breakfast and after-school clubs, is managed by the governing body and run each day on the Cedar Centre site.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teachers always give the more able pupils work that is matched to their ability to help them make even faster progress
 - teaching assistants are effectively involved in recording assessments of how well pupils learn.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by checking that the agreed procedures for setting pupils' targets for the year and for managing behaviour are consistently applied by all staff.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils start school with attainment that is well below that expected for their age due to their special educational needs. Achievement has risen rapidly in the last two years in reading, writing and in mathematics, since the new leadership team was appointed. Pupils achieve well over time as a result of good teaching and high levels of care. By the time they leave school they are very well prepared for their next stage of education.
- In the primary hub, teachers have introduced a programme to help pupils learn the sounds of letters and combinations of letters (phonics) and this is helping them to make good progress in reading and writing and develop a love of books. In the Cedar Centre, reading is promoted through daily reading practice and by careful attention to key words and vocabulary in lessons across all subjects. This ensures that pupils make good progress in reading over time.
- In mathematics, pupils make good progress because teachers carefully plan lessons that build on pupils' previous knowledge and skills. For example, in a Key Stage 3 lesson about time, some pupils were learning to tell the time on an analogue clock whilst others were learning about digital displays. Each pupil was working at the level that matched their ability. They made rapid progress in the lesson and were clearly proud of their work.
- An increasing number of pupils gain qualifications in literacy and mathematics in Key Stage 4. Some pupils take entry level examinations early, in Year 10, and this helps them to build their confidence and take higher level examinations in Year 11. For the first time last year, some pupils gained level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics, representing outstanding progress from their starting points.
- A few Key Stage 4 pupils, who have not been able to succeed in schools previously, are taught off site for part of their education, in public areas such as local cafés and restaurants. Pupils who have timetables that include off-site provision are carefully monitored by the school and make the same good progress as all pupils.
- The school promotes equal opportunities well and ensures that all groups of pupils make good progress. Pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding make the same good progress as those who are not eligible. Effective use is made of the Year 7 catch-up funding to support pupils' good progress. The additional funding is used in a range of ways, depending on the needs of the pupils, including for additional literacy support and for equipment and access to activities.
- The school has a successful programme to help pupils who join the school at different times to settle quickly. As a result, they make good progress from when they start school. Pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder also make good progress because adults are skilful in including them in lessons.
- Although the more able pupils make good progress overall, they do not always make the rapid progress that they could because the work set is occasionally too easy for them.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic. This helps motivate pupils, many of whom have had negative experiences before joining the school, to enjoy their learning. The consistently good teaching in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, including in the primary hub, means that pupils make good progress overall in these subjects. There are some examples of outstanding teaching.
- Work seen in books and on video recordings shows that teachers plan a variety of activities in lessons. These include many opportunities for pupils to do practical and creative activities such as performing in a music group, acting a scene from a play, or cooking a meal. Creative tasks such as these help pupils to make progress because they are fun and memorable.
- Teachers make regular assessments about pupils' progress during lessons. Much of their

feedback is given in discussions with pupils. As pupils move through the school, they become increasingly confident in assessing their own work and that of others. In books, both teachers and pupils comment on how well the work has been completed and how it could be improved.

- Although teachers usually plan work that matches pupils' different ability levels, occasionally the most able pupils are not given work that challenges and stretches them and this can slow their progress.
- Art teaching is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy learning about different artists and applying the styles to their own work. They learn many new skills, some of which are taught in innovative ways. For example, in a Key Stage 3 lesson, pupils learnt how to use an electric sewing machine by sewing along a curved route designed as a driving track on paper. The wide variety of art displays around the school show the high quality of work achieved by pupils of all ages. These include puppets made by Year 7 and 8 pupils to enact scenes from *The Twits* by Roald Dahl and the Bhadrakali Indian goddess masks made by older pupils.
- Pupils at the primary hub are taught in their specialist class and join mainstream pupils for assemblies and play, which help them to develop their social skills.
- Most parents and carers who responded to the school's own survey agree that their child is taught well and pupils say that they enjoy lessons.
- Teaching assistants have excellent relationships with pupils and support them well in class, both individually and in small groups. They do not have enough opportunities to make even better use of their time by recording information about pupils' progress to support teachers' assessments.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- A key strength of the school is the relationships that are built over time to help pupils feel safe and secure in school. Many pupils join the school with anxieties or behaviour difficulties and adults are very skilful in helping pupils to overcome these. Pupils enjoy learning and have positive attitudes.
- The school promotes 'mindfulness' and 'calm' programmes, which help pupils concentrate on learning and build their own ability to cope with sometimes difficult situations. For example, in a Key Stage 4 personal and social development lesson, pupils were encouraged to use breathing exercises to stay focused on the current time, rather than think about the past or the future. Their very sensible approach to the technique led to excellent progress in the lesson.
- A breakfast club welcomes pupils each morning with a hot drink and food so that they quickly settle and are prepared for learning. Most pupils attend school regularly, but a few parents and carers remove their child for unauthorised absences and this impacts on overall attendance, as does the poor attendance of a small number of pupils. However, attendance is now improving because the school is working more closely with individual families.
- The sensory area supports pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder very well and helps them to manage their time in school increasingly effectively.
- There is convincing evidence to show that pupils who have behavioural difficulties improve over time and are much more able to manage their own behaviour as they move through the school. As one parent wrote, 'When I think what my son was like a year ago and what he is like now, it is like two different people. I cannot praise the Cedar Centre enough.' Leaders and managers operate a 'pod', where pupils can get additional support from senior staff during the day if they are facing problems. This is very effective in helping pupils to quickly re-engage with lessons.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and very well cared for by adults, whom they trust to help them. They are aware of what bullying is and of the different types it can take. They say that occasionally it does happen in school and that it is mainly name calling. They know what to do about bullying and are confident that when they can tell adults it is dealt with. There are very few racist or homophobic incidents because the school tackles discrimination effectively.
- Some pupils who have recently joined the school do not yet behave as well as the majority and occasionally they interrupt teachers or stop working. Teachers do not always apply the

behaviour policy consistently well for these pupils and this means that their progress in some lessons is slower.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher is an inspirational leader who has a clear vision for the future of the school. She is well supported by the strong leadership of the headteacher and her team of leaders and managers. Together with the governors, they have driven improvements in achievement, behaviour and in the curriculum since the previous inspection. This demonstrates secure capacity for further improvements.
- Leaders and managers, including subject and key stage leaders, regularly monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching across the school and provide detailed feedback to teachers about how to improve. The federation also provides additional support by helping teachers to share the best practice that exists across the three schools and this is improving the quality of teaching overall.
- The curriculum is tailored to match pupils' individual needs. The primary style approach for pupils in Key Stage 3 enables them to be able to build strong relationships with adults because they spend more time with them. After-school clubs give pupils different experiences, including sports and allotment management. Secondary-aged pupils have good information and guidance about their next stage in education. They visit local colleges, sample courses, attend part-time courses at college and receive visits from further education staff. There are very good opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through themed days, trips, assemblies and world studies.
- The school has recently received additional sports funding for primary pupils and plans to use this to improve the outside area for pupils taught at the hub so that they can participate in extra play and sports activities.
- Information and analysis of pupils' progress has improved since the last inspection. Leaders set aspirational targets for pupils over time to ensure at least good progress. In regular meetings with staff, pupils' progress is discussed and actions are taken by teachers for any that may be falling behind. Together with the improvements in teaching, this improved target setting has led to more pupils making good, and sometimes outstanding, progress.
- However, a small number of teachers do not consistently follow the target setting policy and do not set high enough short term targets for the more able pupils, which results in some pupils not making the rapid progress they could.
- The local authority provides light touch support to this good school as part of its federation support. Recently, it has provided support for personnel issues and for joint observations with senior leaders to make sure that their judgments about the quality of teaching are accurate.
- **Governance of the school:**
 - Governors are well informed about the progress of pupils and the quality of teaching across the school. They use this information to check how well the school is doing in comparison to national data and to the other schools in the federation. This helps them to hold the school to account and to support further improvements. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent and the impact that it has on pupils' outcomes. They use information about teachers' performance management to ensure that teachers are rewarded appropriately. They have rigorously tackled underperformance. Statutory duties, including those for safeguarding pupils, are met.

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	133639
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	426405
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Keegan
Executive Headteacher	Kim Bolton
Headteacher	Chris Coleby
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 September 2010
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