

Beech Lodge School

Top Farm, Honey Lane, Hurley, Berkshire, SL6 6TG

Inspection dates 29–31 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Good teaching engages the pupils and enables all to make progress in literacy and numeracy that is in line with or greater than national expectations.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive because teachers help pupils to build their confidence and self-esteem by ensuring they experience success.
- Staff provide excellent role models which support pupils to develop their social, communication and leadership skills.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities to learn outside the classroom so that pupils participate in a wide range of activities.
- Strong leadership encourages innovation in pursuit of the shared vision for improving pupils' academic and personal achievements.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teachers do not always plan far enough ahead to enable the more able pupils to make better progress.
- The curriculum planning for the mixed-age teaching groups does not always provide sufficient challenge for the more able pupils.
- The leadership's capacity to continue the rate of development of the school is limited by heavy teaching commitments.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 13 lessons, including one from the forest schools' programme. Pupils were heard to read and their work was scrutinised. All full-time staff and three part-time practitioners were observed.
- The inspector had discussions with the proprietor, staff, pupils, and parents. Seven staff questionnaires and a letter from a parent were received. The views expressed were taken into account.
- A wide range of the school's documentation, including records of attendance, achievement and behaviour, was examined. School policies were checked against the independent school regulations.

Inspection team

Angela Cook, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Beech Lodge School provides alternative education for pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties, often as a result of trauma when they were young. The school is located in rural surroundings close to the village of Hurley, Berkshire. It is adjacent to the Berkshire College of Agriculture, which permits the school to use a range of its amenities, including its science and sports facilities, and provides some specialist teaching on-site, for example in science, careers guidance and animal care.
- The school is registered for 10 boys and girls aged between 7 and 14 years. Currently the school is full, with six boys and four girls. Three have statements of special educational needs, and two of these are funded by the local authority. All students are full time. The majority of pupils have experienced disrupted education. Some were taught at home prior to joining the school.
- The school was first registered in March 2013. This inspection was the school's first.
- Beech Lodge School aims to 'create a happy, secure and supportive learning environment, rich in creativity and challenge'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve planning for each individual to ensure that every pupil is challenged effectively in all lessons.
- Further improve the curriculum by:
 - ensuring detailed subject planning for the mixed-age groups consistently challenges the more able pupils
 - improving the schemes of work for French and art by showing the continuous development of skills so that pupils can make even better progress.
- Increase the headteacher's capacity to make teaching, learning and the curriculum outstanding by enabling her to spend more time out of the classroom, so that she can:
 - develop areas of responsibility within leadership and management
 - provide professional development for those staff taking on new roles.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good overall and in some cases outstanding. Baseline testing undertaken when the pupils first arrive indicates that most are below and some are well below the national average for their age. The baseline is set in conjunction with information from the pupils' previous educational provision. Some of the pupils have had periods of home tuition and most have felt failures in their previous schools. Developing pupils' belief in themselves as learners has been the first stage of re-engaging them with formal education, and for some this initial period has taken time. The school data for literacy and numeracy shows that since it opened 11 months ago all groups of pupils are now making progress which is in line with or greater than national expectations. Those with statements of special educational needs make similarly good progress. Almost half of the pupils are making greater than the national expected rate of progress. The school's self-evaluation accurately assesses pupils' progress as being good. The current levels of attainment as seen in the pupils' work books accord with the school's data.

As a result of the settling and challenging influence of the school, the younger pupils are beginning to decipher accurately the language used in mathematical problems. Older pupils are confidently developing their mental arithmetic skills. Anxieties about reading or writing have been effectively overcome. Pupils are able to select interesting articles designed for their reading levels and self-assuredly answer a series of comprehension questions. Their handwriting shows much improvement. All are able to communicate effectively, including those who had found it difficult to interact with others prior to joining the school.

All of the pupils have additional learning needs of some kind, though not all have been formally assessed. Almost half have suffered trauma in their early years. Many find it very difficult to form friendships and to integrate socially. Detailed case studies indicate that many pupils' achievement in terms of the development of their communication and social skills has been outstanding.

The good progress that pupils make is as a result of consistently good teaching and a curriculum that is tailor-made to match each pupil's needs. Although pupils' progress has been rapid since joining the school, which for some was only a few months ago, there is not yet enough data to show that this rate of progress is sustainable over time.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils behave well and their attitudes to their learning are positive. They willingly engage in lessons and readily comply with their teachers' requests. Their good behaviour in class and around the school contributes strongly to their progress. School rules are minimal and effective, the first being that pupils respond to an adult's direction on the first occasion. Pupils try hard to adhere to this rule. Class rules, drawn up with the pupils, are similarly few in number and helpful in promoting a calm environment in the classrooms. Pupils are aware that their behaviour affects others and the great majority are very considerate of their peers. Staff provide strong role models that support pupils to develop good leadership skills. Pupils are careful when debating not to cause offence to those with different views. They are able to praise each other for their achievements and thank each other for their kindnesses, for example sharing a scooter.

Many pupils when they first arrive at the school exhibit their emotional and social difficulties through their behaviour. Initially some find it very difficult to engage with adults or pupils. Through the development of trust, all pupils are supported to integrate into the community. Building empathy among the pupils and encouraging friendships to develop are seen as very important. A wide range of formal and informal opportunities are created to enable the young people to develop

their social skills. Regular monitoring captures the stages in each pupil's personal progress. Excellent guidance supports pupils to become more independent and builds their self-esteem. Attendance is good.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They display a strong moral code and clearly know what is right and wrong. The curriculum provides good opportunities for the pupils to learn about British history and its institutions. Pupils reflect on their learning effectively and are developing a good understanding of different religions and traditions, particularly those represented in the school. The forthcoming trip to France is being used to develop an appreciation of differences in language. Awareness of different cultures is not yet as well developed as are the spiritual, moral and social aspects of learning.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good. High-quality skilled tuition provides a supportive environment in which each pupil can make good progress. The high degree of respect shown by staff and pupils for each other underpins the excellent relationships which enable pupils to accept that making mistakes is part of learning. Teachers' high expectations, coupled with an imaginative and consistent approach to teaching, result in pupils achieving well. Tasks are broken down into manageable steps so that each pupil can experience success. The teachers' energy and enthusiasm for their subjects ensure a good pace in lessons, while their patience allows pupils thinking time and the space to make choices. Specialist part-time teachers, for example for yoga and street dance, provide well-considered and challenging lessons in which pupils develop self-awareness and powers of concentration.

A wide range of carefully selected tests is used to monitor each pupil's development in literacy and numeracy, and the outcomes provide individualised targets. Pupils know their targets and can refer to them as copies are attached to their desks. Regular assessment, for example pupils' reading speeds and comprehension, which forms part of their daily literacy programme, is used to track and evaluate pupils' progress effectively.

Teaching is not yet outstanding because teachers do not consistently plan for the mixed-age groups far enough ahead to ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged and make better progress.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good. Pupils experience a wide range of learning through a broad and balanced curriculum, with a major focus on the development of their literacy, numeracy and social skills. As the pupils become more integrated into the school, their tailor-made curriculum broadens to reflect their changing needs. The curriculum is supported by both commercial and in-house schemes of work. Much of the planning is online. History has been introduced as a discrete subject for the more able pupils, one of whom is shortly going to move to a secondary school. Liaison between the two schools has ensured that the curriculum that the pupil is currently receiving aligns with that of her next school. Pupils are mainly taught in classes according to their key stage, though occasionally pupils are grouped by ability or by interests or gender. For example, the girls wanted to have their yoga classes on their own, rather than with the boys.

All enjoy the forest school, which takes place in a circle of logs in the woods on the hill above the school. The forest school curriculum is challenging, but non-threatening. For example, the task of building animal skeletons made out of sticks, using photographs and measuring equipment to help arrange the bones and scale them appropriately, was demanding and rewarding. It developed content knowledge and understanding while building strong social skills as teams worked together.

The school avails itself of a range of amenities offered by the adjacent Berkshire College of Agriculture. These include the teaching of science by a specialist in the college, animal care, careers guidance and the use of the sports facilities, which complements the teaching of yoga and street dancing. The local partnership of businesses provides opportunities at their premises for the older pupils to participate in appropriately designed open days. The school nurse provides a specialist input in the personal, social and health programme, so that pupils are well prepared for puberty.

The curriculum is not yet outstanding because the schemes of work for French and art do not clearly show continuity and progression of skill development for the pupils. Occasionally short-term planning does not incorporate sufficient challenge for the more able pupils in the mixed-age classes.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school has complied with the independent school regulations and all the standards are met. The school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils are rigorous and the procedures for the recruitment of staff incorporate the guidance. A very small number of minor omissions, which did not adversely affect safeguarding, have now been rectified. The single central register holds all the required information about the checks made on staff working in the school. The sickroom is close to the toilets and any unwell pupil can easily be supervised. Fire risk assessments are undertaken by an external firm and the subsequent action plan has been completed. Regular checks on fire safety equipment are undertaken and logged. Fire drills are regularly undertaken with the pupils. Staff training for child protection and first aid is up to date. Pupils have learned about a healthy diet and the food they bring into school for their snacks and lunches reflects healthy eating.

School policies effectively guide behaviour management. Good supervision ensures that the pupils are safe. Proactive intervention reduces any opportunities for bullying and any issues are dealt with speedily before they develop. There have been no serious incidents of poor behaviour that required sanctions since the school opened. Pupils are happy at school. Parents say that their children now want to attend school and they also say that they have noticed positive behavioural changes at home. One parent said that the school was a 'life saver' for him.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good because the teaching and the tailor-made curriculum support all pupils to make at least good progress. The leadership of the school is a strength. The headteacher leads by example, whether she is supporting in class, teaching or providing an audience for a dance session. The effectiveness of her commitment and fervour for improving her pupils' learning outcomes is seen in their achievements, both academic and personal. The proprietor, who is also a parent, has the drive and capacity, with her fellow co-founder, to support and challenge the excellent leadership of the headteacher.

All the independent school standards are met. The accommodation is well maintained, light and airy. There is plenty of outdoor space for play, including a tarmacked area for riding scooters, a large lawn, a space for building camps and an area for the school guinea pigs and hens. Parents are provided with all the necessary information, much of which is found on the website. Reports to parents are regular and full. The school liaises closely with the local authority and provides all the necessary information for the annual reviews for those pupils with statements of special educational needs. The school provides effective staff training and professional development. It is supporting one member of staff to develop his career in education even further. The complaints procedure fully complies with the requirements.

The school's three-year development plan lays out the ways in which the school will meet its aims. Its self-evaluation astutely captures the current position of the school. A new teacher is being sought to relieve the headteacher of some of her classroom teaching, so that she can more readily move the school forward and, by effectively evaluating interventions and delegating roles and responsibilities, drive pupils' achievement up even further. All the staff responded very positively to the questionnaire about the school. They are a strong cohesive team that is passionate about developing a new approach to supporting pupils with a range of difficulties. Parents were very keen to endorse the school and share their experiences of the positive ways in which it had changed the lives of their children.

Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the headteacher's classroom commitments have until now limited her ability to facilitate outstanding learning for all groups of pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	139414
Inspection number	422863
DfE registration number	868/6021

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Alternative provision for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	7–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Daniela Szmigielska Shanly
Headteacher	Lucy Barnes
Date of previous school inspection	First inspection
Annual fees (day pupils)	£15,000
Telephone number	01628 879384
Email address	info@beechlodgeschool.co.uk

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