

# Birtley House Independent School

Fawkham Road, West Kingsdown, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 6AY

**Inspection dates** 25–27 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings

### This school is outstanding because

- The school very successfully meets its aim of ensuring that the vast majority of its pupils are ready to re-enter mainstream education when they leave the school. It also ensures that those pupils who cannot enter mainstream education are appropriately placed in other schools.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. Their level of attainment when they join the school is generally low but it rapidly improves. Progress in other subjects is either good or outstanding.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. When they join the school, they have many difficulties and lack self-confidence, but they learn very well how to deal with these and so make rapid progress.
- The headteacher and other leaders ensure that the teachers provide an excellent mixture of challenge and sensitivity which has ensured the outstanding progress of pupils.
- Teaching is of very high quality. Teachers adjust what they do quickly to meet pupils' developing strengths and weaknesses. Assessment data are very well used.
- Staff have developed excellent, fruitful relations with local authorities, visiting therapists, and parents and carers. This ensures that everyone is working together to help the pupils.

### 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 school was given one day's notice of inspection.
- The inspector attended 16 lessons, read the school's policies and other documentation and also checked the single central register to ensure that the school's recruitment procedures are carried out correctly.
- The inspector interviewed the headteacher, other staff and pupils. He also looked at pupils' written work and a sample of statements of special educational needs.
- Nine staff questionnaires and 12 parent and carer responses on Ofsted's website were taken into account. Other parents and carers wrote directly to the inspector.

## Inspection team

Paul Armitage, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Birtley House Independent School is a mixed independent day special school in West Kingsdown near Swanley in Kent. It opened in January 2011 and is registered for 90 pupils aged five to 11 years. There are currently 23 pupils on roll aged five to 11 years, including one pupil who has home schooling in the morning and who attends school in the afternoon. The school only has responsibility for the pupil's afternoon schooling.
- Pupils are taught English and mathematics in the morning in setted groups of mixed age. In the afternoons, they are taught in mixed age and ability groups.
- Pupils who attend the school have a range of disabilities including chromosome deletion disorders, epilepsy, autism, school refusal and selective mutism. Often, pupils have multiple difficulties, for example severe dyscalculia and dyslexia leading to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). A history of poor behaviour is frequently a consequence of these difficulties and all pupils have had problems attending mainstream schools. Six pupils have statements of special educational needs, but all pupils have special educational needs.
- Pupils are referred by four local authorities and by independent schools, roughly in equal proportion. Pupils' length of stay in the school varies considerably as does their time of arrival during the school year.
- Therapists with a range of specialisms attend the school weekly. Approximately half of this therapy is provided by the National Health Service and half by private companies.
- The school uses sports facilities at the nearby Brands Hatch racing circuit and it has operational links with the speech and language unit at a local primary school. It also uses local stables. A local school moderates teachers' assessment judgements.
- The school's leaders and managers believe that, despite having special educational needs, young people can succeed. In consequence, the school's aim is to address the challenges facing its pupils and their families so that the vast majority of pupils can be readmitted into mainstream education in Year 7. The school also seeks to support those who cannot go into mainstream education and to ensure that they are placed in a secondary special school which best suits their special educational needs.
- The school was last inspected in May 2011.

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

- Ensure that the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation is consistently good.
- Ensure that the thickness of felt tips used with whiteboards is such that pupils' writing and presentation are always clear.
- Organise staff files more efficiently to improve their accessibility.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

### Outstanding

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. This is largely due to outstanding teaching, including the outstanding support given to pupils to help them manage their various difficulties and enjoy learning.

The attainment of pupils when they join the school is almost always well below what is expected nationally and they have a history of very poor progress in previous schools. By the time they leave Birtley House, all have made outstanding progress given pupils' complex disabilities and the limited time that many of them have had at the school. These judgements apply across all subjects, including English and mathematics. There are variations in performance, the most obvious in the current intake is that boys are progressing faster than girls in both English and mathematics by a small margin. However, such variations differ year on year depending on who attends this small school and are not deep rooted.

Pupils with statements of special educational needs are currently doing well, although slightly less well in mathematics than other pupils. There is a small number of pupils who are working consistently at P levels but who are still making good progress given their starting points. During the inspection, some pupils were seen producing excellent quality work in design and technology, art and geography and they also had a great deal of fun in a lesson in French.

One weakness is the variability of the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation in exercise books and on whiteboards. Felt tips used with whiteboards are sometimes too thick which makes writing difficult and difficult to read.

The most important measure of the school's success is the extent to which pupils are able to re-enter mainstream education. Last year, all pupils achieved this and follow-up information indicates that the pupils have settled well. In addition, those that could not go to a mainstream school were found suitable placements. This is the achievement measure that is the most valued by pupils, parents and carers.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

### Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Staff work extremely hard to ensure that pupils settle well when they join the school, make friends and understand what good behaviour is. The work that staff do to help pupils enjoy learning and the academic success that they achieve, improves pupils' self-confidence and their image of themselves. This, in turn, contributes to improving behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to speak openly about their problems and this helps them understand themselves and others better and also supports growing confidence.

Attendance is good and in the last 12 months there have been no exclusions. There is a good restraint procedure but it has never been used. There is very little in the sanctions book because there have been very few formal sanctions.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are increasingly able to recognise the intangible especially when it relates to human beings. One excellent example seen in the inspection was when pupils analysed the love, jealousy and hatred expressed in the very mature text in Causley's *The Ballad of Charlotte Dymond*. In another lesson, pupils expressed clear moral views about the actions of Judas, although such views differed, reflecting pupils' increasing ability to see two sides of an argument. Teachers always ensure that the material they present to pupils encourages this.

Socially, pupils get on well together and frequently support one another. The odd disparaging comment is occasionally made by one pupil about another, but pupils are quick to report this to a teacher who has a clear, but quiet, word with both the offender and offended. Pupils report there is no serious bullying and none was seen during the inspection. Culturally, the pupils are knowledgeable about religious festivals of a good range of faiths; they have done some excellent work on Ancient Greece and some can talk about the current strife in Syria. Visits to such places as a local synagogue, a local mosque and the Kent Rugby Disability Festival have broadened their horizons very successfully.

### Quality of teaching

### Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teaching staff are very well trained, not only in the subjects of the curriculum but also in how best to address the special educational needs of their pupils. The last inspection judged that the school needed to monitor pupils' academic and personal progress more carefully. This is now done and teachers use the information very well to amend what and how they teach to suit the issues identified by the monitoring.

Teachers are expert in the use of available resources and make the lessons interesting and fun. In consequence, this quickly improves the attitudes of pupils to learning when they join the school. They question pupils skilfully in class and ensure that everyone has a chance to answer. If it is clear that pupils do not understand, they quickly adjust the lesson. Different work is generally set for different pupils, reflecting ability and other needs. If a pupil becomes withdrawn, they make sure that the pupil is brought back into the lesson whenever possible. Behaviour management is excellent.

Pupils' statements of special educational needs are followed very closely, but also interpreted sensibly as pupils change and progress over time. This is well reflected in the school's own personalised learning plans which are live working documents for all pupils.

The classrooms are bright and colourful with plenty of examples of pupils' work displayed. This very successfully encourages pupils to take pride in their work and to grow in confidence. Homework is used well to support work done in school and teachers liaise very well with parents who often work with their children using the guidance provided by the school in homework and home-link books.

### Quality of curriculum

### Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. It covers all the required areas of learning. At its core are the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education and a significant personal, social and health education (PSHE) element running through everything that the school does. Strong emphasis is placed on pupils' development of literacy and numeracy, but the other subjects play a significant role in pupils' education.

Particularly important is the way that the curriculum is adjusted to suit both the academic and personal needs of the pupils so that all aspects of the curriculum have a therapeutic role. A good example of this was seen in lessons in art and design and technology where pupils were being helped to develop their imagination and fine motor skills. This therapeutic approach to the curriculum is also evident in 'intervention sessions' where small groups of pupils work successfully with teachers or visiting specialists. It follows from these observations that all lessons and other activities are very well planned, with some aspects of the curriculum emphasised more than others to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.

The curriculum is enriched by many activities both during the formal curriculum and as extra-curricular activities. In the period from March 2013 to the present, 27 educational trips have been

made to such places as a local college to learn about adaptation, two residentials, a local fun park to develop gross motor skills, various museums linked to class work, riding lessons, a writing workshop and the Globe Theatre linked to the study of Macbeth. There is also an after-school film club and some fun visits such as the forthcoming cinema visit to see the Muppets.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

The quality of pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and all the regulations are met. All the required policies are in place, including those for behaviour, anti-bullying, first aid, health and safety and safeguarding, and they are understood by staff. Staff are trained in safeguarding and first aid to the required standard. All the required checks on staff, supply staff and other adults are undertaken and there is a properly constituted single central register. One small criticism is that, although the school has all the required information for checking the register, the information is stored in different places making it more difficult than necessary for both staff and inspectors to check that systems are working well. Risk assessments are thorough, including those for fire and for educational visits outside school. There are regular fire drills. The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained. Pupils are very well supervised.

The school places considerable emphasis on maintaining good health. Good arrangements have been made for a local primary school to provide the pupils with a hot meal at lunchtime. Physical education plays a significant role in the curriculum and health-related visits outside school are made. During the inspection, pupils visited a local supermarket to identify healthy and non-healthy foods as part of a project.

### **Leadership and management**

**Outstanding**

The quality of leadership and management in the school is outstanding. The headteacher and all the staff take very seriously the school's aim of ensuring that, despite their special educational needs, pupils are well placed in secondary schools. In consequence, the headteacher ensures that pupils are challenged constantly to improve both academically and in their personal development. The headteacher ensures that the challenge is made in a sensitive and very well-informed way and this ensures its success. Management's insistence on using National Curriculum assessment criteria, together with external moderation of teachers' judgements, ensures progression, high standards and smooth transfer to secondary school.

The school's self-evaluation document is accurate and is of high quality. The headteacher regularly assesses the quality of teachers' lessons and these assessments are accurate. There is an effective system of staff appraisal.

The school has excellent links with a wide range of therapists supporting all aspects of pupils' health and development as well as subjects of the curriculum such as sports coaching. There are also very close links with the placing local authorities and the school plays a full part in the review of statements. Parents and carers have a very positive view of the school and what staff are doing for their children. Some wrote to the inspector indicating how worries have been much alleviated through the excellent progress their child has made.

The school's accommodation is of very high quality. There are extensive grounds for play, including grass and hard standing and an excellent new climbing complex provided by the active Parents' Association. The complaints procedure meets requirements and the parents receive the required information.

The proprietor has ensured that all the regulations are met.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136211
<b>Inspection number</b>	443150
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6136

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary school for pupils with disabilities
<b>School status</b>	Independent School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–11 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	23
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	1
<b>Proprietor</b>	Birtley House Kent Ltd.
<b>Headteacher</b>	Emma Sillitoe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17–18 May 2011
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£11,730
<b>Telephone number</b>	01474 853192
<b>Fax number</b>	None
<b>Email address</b>	office@birtleyhouseschool.co.uk

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