

Five Acre Wood School

Boughton Lane, Maidstone, ME15 9QF

Inspection dates 25–26 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Leadership and management are outstanding. Highly effective senior leaders and an increasingly influential governing body have raised standards significantly since the previous inspection.
- Exceptionally good procedures for checking how well the school is doing, and drawing out the few priorities that will improve it even more, have been instrumental in driving the school's raised performance.
- Sharing this agenda for change with staff, parents and pupils is a key factor in the school's success. Everyone associated with the school knows what leaders are trying to achieve and how it is to be brought about. The staff and parents are very supportive of the school.
- Leaders have extremely high expectations of pupils and staff. They have an unrelenting focus on maintaining the highest possible quality of teaching and they have implemented very thorough procedures for achieving this.
- Middle managers, who have responsibility for pupils with a particular type of learning difficulty throughout the school, make a very important contribution to this very strong leadership of teaching.
- Teaching is typically outstanding, with no variation in quality between sites or key stages. All members of class teams manage pupils' behaviour very well and contribute significantly to supporting their learning. Teaching enables all pupils to make excellent progress.
- The school meets the needs of all groups of pupils. Pupils make outstanding progress. Their achievement is excellent compared with pupils of the same age and starting points in other schools.
- The excellent early years provision enables children to thrive and make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. They are prepared extremely well for moving into Year 1.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are excellent. They are invariably good natured and respond positively to staff's requests and direction. Attendance is average, but this overall figure is distorted by the frequent absences of pupils with medical conditions.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. They become more confident and increasingly socially aware, which gives them the skills to interact with adults and their classmates.
- Excellent post-16 provision enables students to leave school very well prepared for adulthood. They have qualifications to pursue further education and self-help skills to live as independently as possible.
- Leaders have established a very good range of activities, which are closely tailored to support the learning of pupils with different types of learning difficulty.
- The school uses its current partnerships with other schools well to extend this range of learning activities for some pupils, but leaders recognise that there is scope to build on this further, including forming links for Key Stage 3 pupils and with colleges.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all sites and went into classes in all key stages. They observed 17 lessons, each of which was taught by a different teacher. They were accompanied by a senior school leader in all of these observations.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and the school’s previous and current improvement partner from the local authority.
- Discussions took place with five senior leaders and four middle managers. Meetings were also held with the human resources director and the human resources officer.
- The inspection team considered the views of the 27 parents who completed Parent View, the online questionnaire.
- Inspectors examined the questionnaires that 56 members of staff completed.
- Two inspectors met with a group of older pupils in order to get their views of the school.
- The inspection team looked at pupils’ work and a very wide range of documentation. This included information about pupils’ progress and achievement; attendance records; safeguarding procedures; behaviour logs; leaders’ reviews of the school’s strengths and development areas; and improvement planning.

Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Janet Tomkins

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Five Acre Wood is considerably larger than the average special school. The number of pupils has grown by more than a quarter since the previous inspection.
- It is a district provision for pupils with moderate, severe, profound and complex learning difficulties, and autism. The school calls each of these a phase, and this determines how pupils are grouped. Classes are determined by pupils' age and the teaching style that they require, based on the nature and severity of their learning difficulty. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school is situated across three sites. Pupils on the main site cover the full age range. In addition, four classes of the most able pupils and students are located in two nearby mainstream schools. One Key Stage 4 class and two post-16 classes have their own accommodation at Aylesford School Sports College. One Key Stage 2 class is based in Eastborough Primary School. The secondary link is long established, while the primary one only began in January 2015.
- Almost half of all pupils are in Key Stages 1 and 2. There are only a small number of children in Reception and all of them attend full time.
- Pupils represent a range of ethnic backgrounds, although White British pupils form more than half of the school roll. Two thirds of all pupils are boys.
- The school receives pupil premium funding for a third of its pupils, which is higher than the national average. Pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after. Only a very small number of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- The school also receives specific additional funding to support the learning of Year 7 pupils, and physical education and sport funding for primary-aged pupils.
- The school's senior leadership team was restructured with effect from January 2015 as new posts and responsibilities were established. Two heads of school were appointed, for primary and secondary respectively, and each of these is supported by an assistant headteacher who was newly appointed to that role at the same time. A third assistant headteacher is responsible for pupils' well-being.
- The restructuring process also saw significant changes to middle management. Key stage leaders were replaced by five middle managers, who are referred to as lead teachers. Four of these have responsibility for a particular 'phase', such as autism, across the school. The fifth middle manager is the lead teacher for post-16 provision.
- A few pupils on the Aylesford School Sports College site attend some GCSE classes in the main school. Apart from this, no pupils attend any other establishments regularly for any part of their education.
- The school receives termly visits from the local authority's school improvement partner.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish even better links with other establishments in order to provide additional learning opportunities for pupils by:
 - seeking more openings for Key Stage 4 pupils to be included in mainstream classes
 - investigating partnerships with local colleges and other education providers to broaden the work-related learning curriculum
 - working with the local authority to explore the possibility of establishing a base for Key Stage 3 pupils in a mainstream school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The highly effective Principal leads a very insightful and reflective senior staff team. They, and a very influential governing body, believe that nothing but the best will do and they have a shared determination to maintain the most effective provision possible. Their success is evident in the outstanding academic and personal outcomes for pupils.
- Middle managers play their part very well too. Although they are new to their current posts as lead teachers, they bring a wealth of first-hand experience of the aspects for which they are responsible. Therefore, impact of their work is already evident, such as an action plan for the phase for which each is responsible.
- Working together, senior leaders, the governing body and managers have raised the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding and are now focused on maintaining this standard. They do this through a very well structured teacher development programme, which combines coaching and mentoring with ongoing training. This is underpinned by a very thorough procedure for appraising teachers' performance that uses a range of evidence to get a rounded picture of their effectiveness.
- Leaders have an exceptionally good understanding of how well the school is doing. They monitor all features of its work regularly and critically. As a result, their findings are accurate and they identify clearly what the school needs to do to maintain the impetus of continuing improvement.
- Leaders make the best possible use of these self-review findings in drawing up improvement plans that focus on the few most important development points that will have the biggest influence on outcomes for pupils. Leaders share a summary of these points with others, including displaying around the school a version for pupils that is written in child-friendly text and supported by symbols. By involving all staff, parents and the pupils, everyone can feel they have a stake in the school's future.
- Leaders' monitoring of pupils' progress and behaviour, including that of pupils who attend other provisions, is routine and they respond very effectively to findings. They quickly put in place measures to support any pupils whose progress is less than expected. Their monitoring of all aspects of behaviour means that they very quickly identify any patterns or trends in inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour. The school is calm, orderly and very organised.
- Leaders have made sure that all staff share a commitment to equality of opportunity and a belief that all pupils have the right to work safely and uninterrupted. Excellent relationships do much to help pupils understand the importance of respect and to appreciate that people are different. Pupils are prepared well for adulthood in modern Britain as they begin to grasp these British values.
- The school very effectively tailors the range of learning activities that it offers pupils in each phase in order to meet their quite specific needs. All pupils follow a basic programme that includes literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education but the actual contents of what is taught and how it is taught are very carefully planned.
- The very good link with Aylesford School Sports College provides opportunities for a few pupils and students to learn alongside their mainstream peers, but leaders are aware that the potential advantages offered by this partnership are not yet being exploited fully.
- Pupils located on the Eastborough site are flourishing in this setting, taking advantage of the opportunity to participate in whole-school activities and join school clubs. There has not yet been sufficient time to establish opportunities for them to be included in mainstream classes, but planning is in place. However, when they leave at the end of Year 6 they will not be able to enter similarly inclusive Key Stage 3 provision, although leaders are working with the local authority to identify a suitable host school.
- Older pupils and students receive good quality careers guidance and support, which incorporates some good features of work-related learning, such as work experience. However, the absence of links with further education colleges or other external training providers limits opportunities for pupils to participate in more specific work-related training courses, such as those involving the building trade or catering.
- The school makes excellent use of the additional funding that it receives for Year 7 pupils and for disadvantaged pupils. The extent of the progress made by these pupils shows that the money spent on providing additional support has had a significant impact.
- The additional physical education funding has made an important contribution to helping pupils to develop an active and healthy lifestyle. Some was used to train staff so that they could become more effective in supporting this initiative, while other money was used directly to provide new activities, such as the ball game boccia, and to fund entry into competitions, such as indoor rowing.
- The local authority has only light-touch oversight of the school, but its designated improvement partner

provides excellent challenge to leaders and a secure external validation of the school's performance.

■ Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements and are highly effective.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is a very active contributor to the school's success. Its influence has been transformed since the previous inspection. It provides an excellent check on the school's performance, by balancing support for senior leaders with a determination to hold them to account.
- Governors are able to do this because of the significant improvement to the way in which they gather information on the school's work and use this to question leaders and seek clarification. They now have very secure knowledge of the school from their frequent visits to classrooms, meetings with leaders and managers and reports that they receive.
- As a result, they know about the progress that pupils make and are very aware of pupils' behaviour and attendance, including information about incidents and physical interventions.
- Very effective governance ensures that all statutory requirements are met. All aspects of safeguarding arrangements are especially secure and their effectiveness in practice is reviewed regularly.
- The ways in which additional funds are spent is monitored closely, and a recent presentation by an assistant headteacher provided the governing body with detailed information about their impact.
- The governing body has a comprehensive view of how teachers' performance is managed. Its members have a very good understanding of how Teachers' Standards are used rigorously, how good practice is rewarded and how underperformance would be tackled.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Many pupils behave in an exemplary way, and even though the nature of some pupils' learning difficulties can result in occasional episodes of disruptive behaviour, these are exceptionally well managed. The school has not had the need to exclude any pupils since the previous inspection.
- Pupils get on with each other very well. They take turns and listen to what others have to say. Many are very willing to work with their classmates, such as when making pizzas and discussing what an alien might look like.
- Disruptive behaviour very rarely interferes with learning. Pupils follow classroom routines and tackle their work enthusiastically. Their very positive attitudes to learning and keenness to do well contribute much to the excellent progress that they make.
- Pupils behave equally well outside lessons. They move around the school sensibly and interact amicably with adults and other pupils at break and lunchtime.
- Staff are unanimous in their view that bullying is not an issue, and the pupils themselves confirm that instances of unpleasant behaviour are dealt with straightaway. The overwhelming majority of parents expressed no concern about bullying.
- Attendance is broadly average when all pupils are included, but it is high when those with acute medical conditions that necessitate frequent absence from school are excluded from the figures. All pupils go to school when they are fit to do so.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school consistently reinforces traditional British values, such as celebrating differences and tolerance of others as individuals. Consequently, pupils learn about right and wrong, what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. All staff take the view that pupils are safe in school, and virtually every parent agrees. The pupils also agree that they are safe and that they know who to speak to if they have a problem.
- Leaders and the governing body have implemented very rigorous procedures to safeguard pupils. They have ensured a very secure building and rigorous recruitment procedures for staff. They are vigilant in updating staff training in areas such as child protection, first aid and safe restraint techniques.
- Comprehensive risk assessments ensure pupils' safety in school and when they are off site. Staff do all that they can to prevent incidents that may result in harm to pupils.
- A significant number of pupils have complex conditions that require staff to deal with their personal hygiene needs. Staff maintain pupils' dignity by carrying out these tasks sensitively. Pupils are handled

and moved with compassion.

- The school does all that it can to teach pupils about how to remain safe when not in school, including explaining to them the potential harm of inappropriate use of the internet and social media.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The teacher support programme run by leaders together with their very high expectations have had a great impact on raising the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. It is now typically outstanding across the school.
- The most prominent feature of teaching is the way that it meets the very precise needs of the four different phases. Planning, the arrangement of classrooms, the use of different communication systems, behaviour management approaches, props and other aids to learning, and the learning activities are all very carefully tailored to promote the most effective learning within each phase.
- All teaching is characterised by adults' skilled use of a range of communication approaches. The staff's effective use of systems such as symbols, signing and picture exchange ensures all pupils' full participation in learning, as they can express their views, indicate preferences and demonstrate new understanding.
- Classrooms are very well managed. All members of class teams know in advance what is expected of them and the pupils know the routines. Therefore, time is used very efficiently.
- Adults rarely need to deal with instances of disruptive behaviour in lessons because pupils generally follow these well-established routines and they know class rules and expectations. On the very few occasions when staff have to deal with the potentially disruptive actions of a few individuals, they manage this behaviour extremely well.
- Pupils are so well behaved because teaching makes learning enjoyable. Staff within each phase use their knowledge of pupils' attainment and their understanding of how they learn most effectively to provide tasks and exercises that are set at just the right level of challenge. As a result, pupils experience success and, because staff check their learning all of the time, they are quickly given further work that builds on these small gains in learning.
- The impact of teaching assistants has improved greatly since the previous inspection. They are now important contributors to the overall quality of teaching by providing very effective learning support to individuals and small groups. They demonstrate a good balance of giving pupils time to think and do things for themselves, and prompting and guiding them.
- Teaching in all subjects encourages pupils' language and literacy skills very well. English lessons develop particular skills very effectively, and this includes the teaching of phonics (recognising the sounds that letters make) to the most able pupils. However, staff also make the most of the opportunities that other lessons provide to promote pupils' emerging literacy skills, such as sequencing the steps in a recipe.
- Teaching provides many opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce their numeracy skills. Very good mathematics teaching provides pupils with the basic skills, and staff then build on this in all subjects. For instance, they invariably use opportunities that present themselves for getting pupils to count and they always recognise moments when they can develop mathematical language, like more/less and bigger/smaller.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Pupils who enter the school in Year 1 or later are working at levels that are significantly below average. Pupils in all phases make excellent progress from these low starting points, although their attainment when they leave school is still below that which is typical for the age group.
- A very high proportion of pupils make or exceed the progress that is expected of pupils of the same age and starting points, with many of them surpassing these national expectations. As a result, their achievement is excellent when compared with pupils of the same age and starting points in other similar settings.
- Pupils' outstanding progress in English and mathematics means that by the end of Years 6 and 11 they have begun to narrow the gap between their attainment and that of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in English. The most able pupils make very good progress in developing their reading and writing skills as these are promoted throughout the day, in all lessons. Those who have not yet acquired these skills still make excellent progress as communicators, using their

preferred communication approach.

- Pupils' progress in mathematics leads to the same excellent achievement as in English. They make particularly good progress in their understanding of number and mathematical vocabulary. They show a growing awareness of space, shape and measures, and the most able pupils achieve very well in using and applying their mathematical skills in different situations, such as weighing ingredients.
- The few older pupils, including the most able, who follow courses in the mainstream school achieve very well because they are extremely well supported by Five Acre Wood staff.
- There are no differences in the quality of different groups of pupils' learning in lessons, and all groups perform equally well over time. Boys and girls make similar progress, and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well.
- Disadvantaged pupils who are supported through additional funding do as well as their classmates in both English and mathematics. This indicates how effectively this funding is being used to raise their achievement.
- Leaders' development of the Together Every Achievement Matters (TEAM) project is an increasingly important contributory factor to pupils' progress. This excellent initiative involves a small team of staff whose prime focus is to work with pupils' families to encourage and enable them to support their children's learning in the home.
- The work of therapists employed by the school also contributes significantly to pupils' progress. They work closely with class teams to develop and implement class-based programmes that reduce the barriers that prevent some individual pupils learning as quickly as their classmates.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Outstanding leadership and management are responsible for this highly effective provision. Excellent liaison with children's families and with the nurseries that children arrive from ensures a smooth transfer into Reception.
- Children enter Reception with starting points that are significantly below what is typical for their age. No time is lost in producing individual learning plans that are based on very careful assessment of what the children can do already. Therefore, the children flourish once they have settled.
- They make excellent progress from these starting points. They achieve especially well in becoming better communicators and in aspects of their personal development, such as accepting change and interacting with other children and playing alongside them. Their behaviour is excellent. As a result, children are prepared very well for moving into Key Stage 1.
- Outstanding teaching is responsible for this excellent progress. Staff have very high expectations of what children can achieve, and so adult-led activities are pitched at a level that stimulates and challenges each child. All adults record children's learning meticulously.
- A very good range of free-play activities are available both in the classroom and in the outdoor learning space. These activities stimulate children's curiosity and encourage them to explore freely, but they are closely monitored by staff who take every opportunity to question and provoke children's thinking.
- Staff are very vigilant in maintaining children's safety when they are in the classroom and when learning outside.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- Excellent leadership and management have produced this outstanding provision, which is very well organised to meet the needs of the age group.
- The planning of learning opportunities is a key factor in the provision's effectiveness. These focus on areas such as skills for life, personal and social development, vocational studies and physical activity.
- These learning opportunities are extended very well for a few of the most able students on the Aylesford site. They attend classes in the mainstream school in order to take GCSE courses in subjects such as design and technology. However, these opportunities are limited and leaders are aware that the school could make more of the potential that this partnership has to offer.
- Teaching is excellent. Staff plan activities that promote the development of students' basic skills, not in isolation, but in a practical way that helps to prepare them for leaving school. Therefore, students are given activities that encourage them to acquire mathematical skills like budgeting, using money in shops

and reading bus timetables. Excellent teaching promotes literacy skills in a similarly practical way, such as reading recipes, understanding street signage and following instructions to assemble flat-pack furniture.

- Students' achievement is excellent in courses that give them accredited qualifications, such as in literacy, numeracy and food technology. They also make outstanding progress on programmes that give them invaluable life skills, such as travel training to prepare them to use public transport independently, first aid, work experience and an annual residential experience in self-catering accommodation.
- Students behave extremely well and they develop into personable and mature young people with a positive and optimistic view of the future.
- Students' excellent achievement and growth in personal development prepare them very well for the next stage in their life. A small number of leavers go into sheltered accommodation and a few move into employment, but the vast majority transfer to college. The school's tracking of these leavers shows that they successfully transfer and sustain their learning and personal skills in a new setting.
- Staff take every precaution to ensure students' safety. Work-experience placements and all visits into the community, such as part of the travel training programme or to buy food for cooking, are risk assessed and supervised.

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	119055
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	449479

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Ananicz
Principal	Peggy Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 January 2012
Telephone number	01622 743925
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