

Heath Farm School

Heath Farm, Ashford, TN27 0AX

Inspection dates 21–23 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school because

- Students, most of whom have been unsuccessful in a mainstream school, become much more confident learners than previously. They achieve well during their time at the school and make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Primary-aged pupils and the few students in the sixth form make good progress. This is in line with the majority of secondary-aged students. Students are very well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education or careers.
- Staff are well qualified, committed and often highly experienced in working with a wide range of vulnerable students. The quality of teaching is typically good, and improving.
- The headteacher and the governors have ensured that requirements for the independent schools standards are met.
- The experienced and committed headteacher, with a strong senior leadership team, provides motivational leadership. They are well supported by governors who are active and knowledgeable about the work of the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and rigorously monitored. Students say they feel safe and that staff deal swiftly with any problems that may arise.
- Behaviour and attendance are good. This is because of the effective support received by both the students and their families in promoting personal development and practical life skills.
- The sixth form provision is good and students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- The rural and stimulating environment enriches the experiences of the students to enable them to reach their potential.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The new sixth form has not yet had time to fully implement its plans.
- Governors do not contribute effectively enough to staff appraisal.
- Targets to help improve students' literacy and numeracy, including using the latest technologies, are not always used consistently in all subjects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the independent school standards', and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector visited 10 lessons or part lessons, visiting all the classes. All visits were joint observations with the senior leaders.
- All of the relevant school documents and policies were scrutinised to check for compliance with the independent school standards. These included the school's website, information about students' progress, the school's own evaluation of its work, and the students' workbooks. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised. A tour of the site, including the new premises, took place.
- Discussions were held with the Chair of Governors, headteacher, all staff and students, and phone messages were received from parents and carers.
- The inspector listened to students reading.
- There were insufficient responses from the online questionnaire to parents, but the school's own survey was taken into account and all the responses from the staff.

Inspection team

Sandra Teacher, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Heath Farm School currently occupies a range of purpose-built classrooms which includes a converted farm and outbuildings in a small village near Ashford, in Kent. The school opened in December 1988 and is registered for up to 70 boys and girls aged five to 18 years, who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- At the time of the inspection, there were 61 pupils (51 boys and 10 girls) aged from seven to 17 years on roll, from 25 different local authorities. Of these, 56 have either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Just under one in five students has additional support that is funded by the local authority.
- There are 30 pupils in the primary department and 25 students in the secondary department. Six students attend off-site sixth form provision, attending either work-related training or colleges of further education at Caldecott Foundation School, Canterbury and East Kent College. These students attend these courses for three days a week, and spend two days a week at the sixth form centre.
- All pupils speak English, with most being of White British heritage. A very small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups.
- Many have additional identified learning needs, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and attachment and attention deficit disorders. Young people are grouped according to age and academic ability in small class groups with a high staff to pupil ratio. There are also 'nurture' classes for those aged five to 14 years.
- The school is part of the Acorn Care and Education Group, which owns a number of similar schools across the country, alongside several schools for pupils with autism. Most of the pupils are looked after children. One third live with their birth parents, and the others are evenly distributed between the Heath Farm Family services and other care providers.
- The school's aim is to 'meet the educational, social and welfare needs of children through the creation of a caring, supportive and stimulating atmosphere'.
- Students, particularly the most able, are entered early for GCSE examinations.
- The school was last inspected in March 2012 and judged to be good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and students' learning by:
 - making use of the latest technologies across all subjects, incorporating literacy and numeracy
 - refining systems for checking pupils' progress across the school, especially in the primary department
 - establishing formal appraisal arrangements to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement
 - implementing the newly devised plan for the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The committed headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared by staff, parents and governors. Considerable energy and hard work in challenging circumstances have gone into the new management structure of the school. The headteacher and proprietor have ensured that all the independent school standards are met, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- The headteacher gives clear strategic direction to the school. The recently formed management structure of senior and middle leaders is designed to meet the school's expanding needs.
- The effective monitoring of the quality of teaching has ensured that students achieve well. A well-considered staff training and development programme is in place. For example, a high proportion of staff are undertaking additional qualifications, with many staff achieving internal promotion. However, with new staff in place and some staff absence, it is too early to measure the full impact of recent initiatives to improve teaching and students' achievement.
- The school's assessment systems are not yet fully integrated with teachers' performance targets, which are not always sharply linked to students' progress. The school is already exploring ways to refine the present online system, particularly for the primary pupils. This is to ensure that all the assessment information is fully used to set clear targets, especially for literacy and numeracy.
- The range of activities, the stimulating displays, high quality resources and the use of the well-adapted indoor and outdoor environment meet the students' needs well. These make a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition to the National Curriculum subjects, a considerable emphasis is placed on developing students' personal skills. This successfully ensures that students develop practical skills required for adult life in Britain today and show respect and tolerance for all.
- Activities are enriched by a host of valuable experiences, tailor made to support the students in all aspects of their daily lives. Older students have many opportunities for careers guidance and visit a wide range of work experience settings, such as gardening, childcare, health and beauty and mechanics' workshops.
- School surveys and inspection questionnaires indicate that staff, parents, carers and students are extremely happy with the school's work. The school has an open door policy, and a range of methods of communicating with parents and carers is used and they are generally contacted daily by text or email. The administrative team deals effectively with the 25 different local authorities.
- Leaders of the therapeutic and behaviour team, which is central to the work of the school, have been extremely effective in fostering a range of supportive and worthwhile partnerships. They successfully draw on outside expertise, where required, to ensure that the students are given the best possible provision to meet their specific individual needs. For example, sessions are available for speech and language, art, play and therapy using systematic construction toys.
- As the school is growing, the management structure is evolving and middle managers are taking on positions of responsibilities. They have not yet had time to monitor and review the work in their subject areas, but there are clear plans to do so.
- Equality of opportunity lies at the heart of the school's work, relationships are excellent and the school has created a family atmosphere where each student and adult is valued.
- Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and robust, and fully meet statutory requirements. For example, all staff have attended training in de-escalation techniques and physical restraint. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are robust.
- The leadership team works very closely with staff from the alternative provision settings and monitors the progress, attendance and behaviour of the students who attend. The staff are in constant contact and students are always accompanied by their learning support assistants.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Although the governing body was set up in September 2014, the governors have a clear sense of the school's direction. They have worked diligently with the headteacher to ensure that the school has the policies and procedures to operate effectively and to meet the independent school standards. Through regular reports and meetings with the headteacher, they have a good understanding about data on the school's performance and the quality of teaching. However, the appraisal system is new and there is not always a clear understanding of the link between staff performance to inform decisions on salary progression.
 - They keep a careful eye on the funding for each student, but it is not always sufficiently clear what

the impact has been for specific interventions.

- They take their responsibilities very seriously and ensure all aspects of safeguarding meet requirements and are active in ensuring the students are being prepared for life in modern Britain.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is typically good and records show that there have been dramatic improvements in their communication and social interaction skills. These improvements are carefully recorded so that the behaviour support plans can be constantly modified to guide responses when students' behaviour sometimes dips. These strategies have worked successfully.
- Learning takes place in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Students have positive attitudes to learning, moving between short periods of intensive teaching and their chosen reward activities without difficulty.
- The management of students' behaviour is very effective. Members of staff know students very well and are adept at recognising triggers that indicate increasing stress and anxiety.
- Staff are skilful at managing changes, both during the day and to new activities, to minimise upset to students and to maximise learning time. For instance, preparations to support independent travel or to take examinations are carefully and thoughtfully managed, enabling students to succeed. This careful monitoring extends to those students who attend the alternative provision, and behaviour and safety are of paramount importance.
- Students have the opportunity to contribute to a number of advocacy groups, where a range of school and local issues, environmental problems and community projects are discussed, for example supporting children in India or, more locally, meeting neighbours at local community events. Through decision making, negotiation, listening and interacting with others, the students have their own voice within the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards for this aspect are met.

Safety

- The school's work to keep the students safe and secure is good. Policies and procedures are fully in place to safeguard students and to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed.
- High levels of staffing mean that students are very well supervised. Members of staff are alert to the harm that students may cause themselves as a consequence of their special needs. Praise and constant rewards are used well to reinforce positive behaviours.
- Considerable emphasis is placed upon extending students' understanding of risk. This includes consideration of sexual health, internet safety, including cyber bullying, and homophobic bullying or preventing indoctrination to extremism. For example, in science or food technology lessons, students are reminded that they are dealing with hot or dangerous substances and should consider health and hygiene issues.
- Attendance improves significantly for many, compared to their previous schools, but the school still has to deal with the significant challenges of these young people in care who often move around the country. The school strives constantly to deal with these challenges and has had considerable, notable successes with some of the older students. As a result, all the independent school standards are met for welfare, health and safety.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because it is generally matched well to the personal and academic targets of each student. Lesson planning ensures that students work consistently towards their personal and academic targets. However, literacy and numeracy targets are not always emphasised sufficiently in the learning time. This leads to some missed opportunities for students to develop these skills across all subject areas. There are also missed opportunities to use the latest technologies to overcome barriers to learning, particularly in the support of writing skills.
- Sessions are carefully timed to make the most of students' concentration spans. This was seen in the primary school where the younger pupils are focusing on listening skills and learn to carefully follow instructions. Older primary pupils are learning about the Romans and make good use of their reading skills to find out how to make swords. Rewards are used very effectively to mark each small success in learning. Short breaks are then created in which pupils enjoy choosing their own activities and they develop their physical skills in the new purpose-built adventure playground.

- All members of staff are encouraged to make use of a range of communication techniques that build well on speech and language therapy. They speak clearly and appropriately, encouraging students to recognise social cues and listen to others. Examples of this are the way in which students describe different art techniques or how to play net games or make a burger meal.
- There are specific lessons for guided reading and improving the use of learning through letters and sounds, or reading with expression. All classes have their own book areas which are well used, and there are further plans for the new building development to include a resource area. Achievement and progress, particularly in reading, are good because teachers make the learning fun, such as dressing up as a dinosaur for Book Week, or supporting pupils to make their own film tracks.
- A range of effective approaches, including questioning, is very effective in gauging how securely students have grasped what is taught. In a GCSE English lesson, students produce their own timed assessments. They particularly enjoyed Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The structure of the lesson and the skilled support of the teacher and the learning support assistant in responding to students' questions demonstrated high ability learning and teaching.
- Numeracy skills are well taught and linked to life skills, so that students can learn how to budget or increase their fitness through measuring their stamina.
- The majority of feedback is given verbally and there is good immediate spoken feedback so that students can correct their mistakes straight away. In addition, teachers often write comments about the quality of students' written work, but are inconsistent in checking if students respond to them.
- All parents and carers are pleased with the quality of teaching and their child's enjoyment of learning. Students told the inspector that the teachers are always there for them, and will go the extra mile.
- Leaders have ensured all the independent school standards for teaching and assessment are met.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students is good because of the consistent progress they make whilst on roll at Heath Farm. Most students have made limited progress before they start the school, often as a result of persistent absence from school or breakdown of previous placements. For example, most of those who completed their Year 11 programme in 2014 have gone on to the sixth form. They secured GCSEs, in English and mathematics, art and physical education, and other functional skills accreditation. The present Year 11 are also predicted to achieve similar success.
- The abilities of the most able students are recognised. Where appropriate, they sit their GCSE examinations early to spread the work load, and special mentoring and tutorial arrangements, often in partnership with the local secondary schools, are put in place.
- All primary and the majority of secondary aged pupils have achieved AQA unit awards and a pupil in the primary department was the youngest, nationally, to attain such an award.
- English has improved a little more than mathematics and this is partly due to teachers' subject expertise. The school makes good use of all additional funding to provide one-to-one support, if students need any additional help to reach their potential.
- Signs of improvement in achievement in science are already on the way as a result of improved teaching. Expertise in physical education and art plays an important role in students' enjoying and making good progress in their physical and creative development. Not all of the students have sufficient opportunity to participate in musical activities.
- Achievement in personal development is outstanding and lies at the heart of the school. Students are very well prepared for their future lives through personal, social and health education lessons. Together with the mentoring programme, this makes an important contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Students enjoy weekly assemblies on a wide range of exciting topics, learning about different faiths and cultures or discussing the repercussions of the Charlie Hebdo tragedy in France.
- The use of therapeutic education, that covers speech and language, art and play therapy, makes an outstanding contribution to students' learning. It very effectively supports the ways in which students are given opportunities for learning and working with their peers. Both the one-to-one and the group work give careful consideration to students' barriers to learning. Excellent progress has been made by helping students to be motivated and keen to learn. This has a positive impact on their overall progress and achievement. Leaders have ensured all the independent school standards for students' achievement are met.
- Students who attend the alternative provision achieve well and are developing their employability skills by attending sessions on motor mechanics, construction, land based studies or health and beauty.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- The new sixth form provision has made a good start in providing a good quality education. Students make good progress. They reinforce the GCSE qualifications by resitting examinations to gain even higher qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Relationships between students and staff are positive, behaviour is good and staff are proud of their students and keen for them to do well. Students are safe and well looked after and effectively supported in lessons and in their free time. Staff are friendly and students know there is always someone to talk to.
- Students confidently share personal feelings. One student wrote, 'I had a mixture of opposing emotions and feelings towards a new household. I felt nervous because they were strangers but I also felt like it was a new start. I felt like part of the family instantly and tried to make them proud of me.'
- As they are located near to the town centre, students are able to access local colleges easily. This makes a strong contribution to their work in school and recent reports from the off-site provision are positive.
- The sixth form curriculum ensures that students have the opportunity to learn about the wider world and to develop their own independence skills. They have regular trips, for example, to the local shops to buy ingredients for their food technology course. They learn about the world of work, and practise applications and interviews, as well as outdoor education where they experience team building and camp craft.
- Teaching is good and students were, appropriately at this time, learning about the key aspects of the forthcoming elections and explaining words such as manifesto and proportional representation.
- The leadership and management are good and the new plans still require time to be put into practice as final numbers for the coming academic year are still not fully known.

What inspection judgements mean

School provision

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

School details

Unique reference number	119009
Inspection number	462866
DfE registration number	886/6060

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Independent
School status	Independent SEBD special school
Age range of pupils	5–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	6
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education
Chair	Tuesday Rhodes
Headteacher	Craig Ribbons
Date of previous school inspection	March 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,432
Telephone number	01233 712030
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