

Compton Place Road, Eastbourne, BN20 8AB

Inspection dates 02 – 03 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Gildredge House Free School is an exceptional learning environment.
- Students love the school and are extremely proud to wear its uniform.
- Parents are delighted that they took a 'leap of faith' and enrolled their children at the school.
- The Gildredge House Free School Trust has delivered an outstanding solution to the challenge of insufficient primary school places faced by East Sussex County Council.
- Together with the leadership team and a highly professional set of governors, the Trust has created a unique 'Gildredge ethos' that is enabling all students to enjoy learning, make rapid progress and achieve well.
- Gildredge House is founded on a simple set of core values. These values are evident in all aspects of the school's work.
- Adults treat all students with respect. Students are polite, courteous and friendly to everyone they meet.
- The care shown by all members of the community to each other is particularly pleasing. All are welcome and have an equal opportunity to excel.
- Students behave extremely well. They follow well-thought-through routines and procedures without being asked. They do not interrupt each other's learning. Measures taken to ensure students' safety are sound.
- Children in the early years make a flying start to their time in school.
- Students benefit from inspiring and innovative teaching. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and communicate it effectively.
- Senior leaders provide excellent examples of how to teach. Teaching over time has been outstanding.
- Teachers benefit from extremely skilled resource management so that they have everything they need to do their jobs well. This includes the purposeful re-cycling of materials and resources from previous uses of the site.
- The school makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are extremely well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Sport and games are central to the 'Gildredge ethos'. Teachers help each student find a sport to suit them. Ninety per cent of middle school students represent the school competitively.
- Students are also encouraged to explore their creativity through music, drama and art. Students explore culture through the learning of a range of languages, including Latin.
- The range of extra-curricular activities available for students is exemplary. From boxing to Japanese, there is something for everyone.
- Students also appreciate the support they get for their learning in supervised 'prep' – study periods at the end of each day. They say it helps them stay on top of their work.
- Leaders are working to improve the poor attendance of a tiny minority of Year 8 students. These students are also being challenged to take more care with their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 25 parts of lessons. Five of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed learning in registration periods and an assembly.
- Inspectors met with Gildredge House Trust members, governors, and senior leaders. Inspectors also met newly qualified teachers and subject leaders.
- The lead inspector met with a group of parents. Inspectors also took account of the 159 responses to Ofsted’s online survey Parent View. They considered the content of a phone call and several emails which were received during the inspection.
- Inspectors also considered 25 responses to a confidential staff survey.
- Three groups of students met inspectors to give their views of the school.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of the school’s documentation, including information about attendance, exclusions, the work of governors and the ongoing plans for the free school’s expansion. Inspectors also looked in great detail at information about students’ progress and attainment since the school opened.

Inspection team

Dr Simon Hughes, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Elizabeth Cooper

Additional Inspector

Noureddin Khassal

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Gildredge House is a rapidly expanding free school which currently educates children in Reception and Years 1, 7 and 8. At the time of the inspection, it had 355 students on roll. It is oversubscribed for the coming academic year in all year groups. There are two classes in each of Reception Year and Year 1 and there are 120 students in each of Years 7 and 8. Both the primary and secondary phases are broadly average in size.
- Gildredge House has exceeded its published admissions number because it receives, each year, a fair share of students allocated through East Sussex's fair access protocol.
- Gildredge House plans to open sixth form provision in September 2015 and has successfully recruited its first cohort of students.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The very large majority of students speak English as their main language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding from the government), who attend the school is well below the national average.
- The number of disabled students and those with special educational needs is also well below the national average.
- The school is situated in an affluent area of Eastbourne. The governing body as trustees of the Gildredge House Free School Trust are, however, committed to making the 'Gildredge ethos' accessible to as many parents as possible. They reserve 40% of their places for students from the wider Eastbourne area.
- School leaders are forging productive links with other members of the Eastbourne Improvement Partnership.
- All children in the Reception Year attend full time.
- Publicly held data are only available for the Reception Year in 2014. It is not possible to report, therefore, on whether or not the school meets the government's current floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the outcomes for the few pupil premium students in Year 8 whose persistent absence impacts on their learning and progress by:
 - continuing to work tirelessly with families to reduce the number of sessions missed
 - challenging and supporting this group of students to present their work neatly.
- Increase even further the proportion of teaching that is consistently outstanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher of the school is an outstanding leader. She has built a vibrant and inspiring learning community from the ground up and in record time. She has a relentless focus on ensuring that all students do as well as they can. She says, 'We want to be the best we can be'.
- All senior leaders are highly ambitious for the school following the example of the headteacher. They provide excellent support to the headteacher. They work together well but are able to focus effectively on their individual roles and responsibilities.
- All leaders base their work on the 'Gildredge Five', its core set of teaching and learning expectations.
- Governors provide excellent professional support to the school. Members of the Gildredge House Free School Trust have appointed a number of governors including a highly experienced governor. She was elected by the board as Chair of the Governing Body to lead the school's strategic development. She has contributed excellent systems, genuine expertise as well as boundless enthusiasm and energy. Other governors have committed to undergoing training and have quickly acquired the skills they need to support her.
- The Board of Governors, as both trustees and directors, and the school's business manager have a tight grip on the school's finances. They understand the importance of accurate budgeting. They have used resources brilliantly to create an outstanding learning environment. It is a skilful blend of brand new educational spaces and historically significant buildings. The school has managed to re-cycle many resources left over from previous public bodies who used the premises.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements and are extremely effective. All checks are carried out regularly and thoroughly.
- Middle leaders provide expert leadership to their subject teams. They have developed programmes of study that enable students to learn the subject using 'the Gildredge Five'. They contribute effectively to the training of staff. Middle leaders also check regularly the work of their teams so that any areas of weakness are spotted early and support provided. They support the school's well-thought-through and robust performance management system.
- Gildredge House is committed to its formal academic curriculum. This comes from its core values. For example, all students learn foreign languages. Students receive subject-specialist language teaching even in the lower school. This is also the case for science, design and technology and art. Subject specialists also oversee the teaching of English and mathematics all through the school. Consequently, students were seen using subject-specific vocabulary at a very early stage of their learning.
- The curriculum contributes extremely well to students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school uses the older parts of its building to help develop students' understanding of Britishness. It retains the roll of honour of a former independent school once housed on the site. Modern British values are developed through, for example, history, where students noted: 'with all the different cultures, that is what creates Britain' and 'everyone deserves a chance in Britain – we're all human. Everyone has rights'.
- All leaders are conscious of the need to maintain high standards for students eligible for the pupil premium. They check carefully how well they are doing in each class or subject. They provide additional resources skilfully to help them catch up or accelerate according to their needs. This is because leaders are committed to ensuring each student has an equal opportunity to excel. As a result there is very little variation between disadvantaged students and their classmates.
- It is too early to assess the impact of the sports premium funding. The school only began to receive it at the beginning of 2015. Published plans, however, indicate that considerable thought has been given to developing a programme which will be inclusive, as with all aspects of Gildredge House school life. Very young students have already taken part successfully in a tennis competition.
- Leaders know the school extremely well. They have systems that combine detailed information with very easy-to-read presentation. This means they can spot quickly any areas of underperformance. For example, while attendance overall is above national averages, both in the primary and secondary phases, leaders are aware that a few disadvantaged students in Year 8 are persistently absent. They know, and can show, how this is impacting on these students' progress. They are working with the families to improve attendance and it is getting better.
- The school works imaginatively in partnership with the local authority to solve some of the challenges it faces with a shortage of good or better primary school places.
- Leaders are increasingly contributing their expertise to the wider educational system. The deputy headteacher is commended locally for his exemplary safeguarding work. He is also increasingly consulted

by other schools about Gildredge House's innovative approach to assessment. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides support to other schools locally as they develop their education, health and care plans. The headteacher is supported by the subject leader in leading the development of a beacon centre in the region for the teaching of Latin.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors hold the leadership team to account robustly. They know the school extremely well, including understanding and questioning the range of school performance data. They visit it often and some contribute up to 20 hours a week of voluntary service. This is commendable. As a result, the headteacher has a strong sense of support for her work. She also knows that she will be challenged and held to account.
- Governors are actively involved in checking the quality of teachers' work. Right from the start, they adopted a robust approach to managing staff. They only reward good performance. This is always coupled to the progress students make over time and in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Students are extremely polite, courteous and friendly.
- Students love the school. They say they are proud to wear their uniform and be seen in it.
- Students never disrupt each other's learning. They all participate enthusiastically in lessons and rarely drop their interest. Teachers are highly adept at drawing out responses so contributions are heard from every student in most lessons.
- The vast majority of students take pride in their work and present it well. They look after their books and equipment. A tiny minority of disadvantaged students in Year 8 take less care with their work but are being challenged to improve it.
- Teachers treat all their students with respect. This is repaid by the students so that all lessons are conducted in a friendly and happy manner. This contributes to highly effective learning relationships.
- Students also behave well in the dining room and other communal spaces. They play well together at playtimes and lunchtimes, mingling across the ages. Some of the older students enjoy the leadership roles they have because they can befriend younger students.
- The school has had to permanently exclude no students since it opened.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- All checks on adults wishing to work or volunteer in the school are carried out thoroughly and robustly. Governors oversee these processes carefully.
- The site is extremely tidy and well maintained. There is no litter. The site is secure and every effort has been made to keep it safe. During the extensive building programme, students were kept safe due to rigorously enforced safety procedures.
- Procedures for dropping off and collecting, especially in the lower school, are efficient and effective. They contribute to a punctual start to the day and the safe transfer of the younger children to and from the care of their parents.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe at school. Parents agreed.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Senior leaders have gathered together an outstanding group of teachers. The vast majority of teachers love their work and are proud to work at Gildredge House. The staff are extremely well qualified and those joining in September have similarly high levels of expertise and experience. There are no vacancies for the coming year despite the rapid growth in the numbers of students on roll.
- All teachers are keen to adopt the 'Gildredge ethos'. They are highly ambitious for each of their students. They want to be inspiring and motivating. Teaching over time is at least good, but the relentless focus on excellence means that all teachers want to be outstanding all of the time. They believe students deserve such high standards.

- Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and communicate it effectively. They also use a wide range of techniques and methods relevant to the subject they are teaching. For example, in the Reception Year, the teaching of phonics was supported with helpful rhymes to aid children's memory. In drama, students were encouraged to improvise a play they had written themselves. The final performance from one group left the rest of the class in silent wonder.
- Teachers consistently engage students, at all ages, in discussions about what they are learning. Consequently, they are able to judge instantly when a student is falling behind or is struggling. They are skilled at supporting the individual while retaining the pace of learning for the rest of their class.
- Teachers assess work in keeping with the 'Gildredge House Scale'. This represents an innovative approach to assessment without levels, designed by the school's leaders. The scale is tethered to old National Curriculum levels to enable comparison with standards in other schools, but two levels below. This allows pupils to rise through eight points equivalent to GCSE grades, in order to provide real stretch to each student. As a result the vast majority of students are making accelerated progress. Many are reaching standards already well ahead of other students nationally.
- Small class sizes in both key stages are undoubtedly helping to accelerate progress.
- The most able students benefit from the very strong subject teaching. They are set challenging work which makes them think. Teachers encourage them to work at levels above those expected of their age and support them with suitable materials and resources.
- Progress is also accelerated through supervised study lessons at the end of the day. Students appreciate the support they get for their learning in 'prep'. They say it helps them stay on top of their work.
- Other adults support teachers well in lessons. Not only do they carry out helpful duties, but they, too, engage students in discussion about their work. Teachers and their assistants question students carefully to probe their knowledge and understanding and also to push them forward in their learning.
- The teaching of phonics is extremely good. It is systematic and thorough and, as a result, children are, for the most part, reading early and well. The teaching of English in the middle school is contributing to students who are articulate, confident and able to access all other aspects of the curriculum. Levels of oracy are second-to-none.
- The school benefits from having a number of specialist teachers of mathematics who teach the subject well in the middle school. In addition, they support the development of numeracy effectively lower down. Outcomes in the early years and in Year 1 are rising as a result.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- There are few published data for this school. These relate only to outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, as the school is still just in its second year of operating. In 2014, 65% of children in the Reception Year achieved a good level of development which was above the national average. This year, using the same methods of assessment, 76% of the current Reception Year are on track to reach this milestone.
- In Year 1 currently, those students have gone on to prepare to sit a national phonics screening check. When the school tested them as a trial in December, only 22% of them reached the benchmark. Teachers re-doubled their efforts and re-focused their teaching so that now over 80% are on track to achieve the standard. This is rapid and accelerating progress.
- Inspectors were provided with information showing similar rates of progress in reading, writing and number in Year 1. These standards have been compared to those attained by other students in schools locally. They have been found to be reliable and accurately judged. This is further evidence of rapid and accelerating progress.
- Students in all classes exhibited a willingness to read and were supported appropriately to do so according to the relevant age and stage of their development.
- Students are also making exceptional progress in the development of their writing. Many already possess good pencil grips, form their letters well and write at length fluently, even in Year 1. This is highly commendable.
- In the middle school, progress is accelerating too. Students arrive at the school with varied prior learning experiences and thus very different starting points. They are taught together in mixed ability classes, part of the 'Gildredge ethos', so that the lower attaining students have excellent peer role models to follow.
- The most able students are encouraged to excel in everything they do. Teachers set work which stretches them. They rise to these challenges well, often exploring ideas and concepts more widely and deeply than was intended. They show a real passion for acquiring new knowledge.

- Inspectors saw detailed evidence of how the school is using its innovative system to speed up the process of learning. The vast majority of students are making at least good progress. Many more are exceeding the levels expected for their age.
- This exceptional progress was seen in subjects outside the core of English, mathematics and science, too. In one case, a Year 8 student was working at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B in French, already. In physical education, Year 8 boys were performing at an extremely high level in a relatively unfamiliar sport, handball. At the same time, Year 8 girls were learning to bowl in cricket. The skilful commentary of their teachers meant that, in both cases, they were acquiring knowledge quickly and developing their skills such that they could use them in a real-time game situation.
- Ninety per cent of the students participate in competitive sport. They are learning, therefore, how to co-operate and act as a team. Alongside this they are developing healthy lifestyles and appropriate attitudes such as fair play and to respect the decisions of referees and umpires. All of this will prepare them well for the next stages of their life, work or further study.
- Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. There is nothing to compare their progress with nationally, as yet.
- Disadvantaged students usually do as well as their classmates. In some subjects they are doing better. There is a small group of students in Year 8 for whom the pupil premium provides support whose progress has been held back by poor attendance. Some of these students entered the school behind their peers and need as much help as possible to catch up. The school is supporting them and their families to do so.
- In the vast majority of lessons students were observed making good or better progress consistently. In a lesson where students were preparing for a test, the teacher's skilful questioning caused all of the class to make rapid gains to their learning. This is the 'Gildredge ethos'. Only the best is good enough.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Children in the early years benefit from a purpose-built learning environment. A strong community of parents and staff has enriched the learning spaces by helping to develop the outdoor area, with the financial support of the Friends of Gildredge House (parents' association). A forest school setting is under construction too.
- Leadership of the early years is outstanding.
- All staff are suitably trained and qualified and the correct numbers are qualified to administer first aid should the need arise. Children are kept safe.
- Standards already achieved in the Reception Year are above the national average. Results in the phonics screening check in Year 1 are on track also to be above national averages. This is because the children had a very good start in the early years.
- A comprehensive range of materials and resources are available to support the play, learning, behaviour and development of even the youngest children. They are supported in their learning by the well-trained and professional staff team. As a result, two thirds of the Reception Year attained a good level of development in 2014 and over three quarters are on track to do so in the current academic year.
- Students in the middle school provide friendly support as part of the development of their leadership skills. The younger children certainly look up to them.
- In the early years, the provision for disabled children, those with special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged is exemplary. The tiny number of looked after children do very well in this setting.
- All children's learning and progress are documented in well-kept learning journals. Photographs are used effectively to capture key moments in each child's development. Staff write helpful comments next to the photographs to set out what has been learned or achieved.
- Leaders have exceptional relationships with parents. They communicate with them very effectively through newsletters, phone calls, emails and face to face. Information evenings are well attended, especially when there is a focus on supporting children's learning. Surveys are conducted regularly so that the school can make necessary adjustments. Parents feel that they are an active part of the community.
- Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of the education their children receive at Gildredge House and would highly recommend it. They recognise that enrolling their children at a school with no track record was a 'leap of faith'. They told inspectors that they are very glad they did so.

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	139796
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	450296

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	355
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Caroe
Headteacher	Lea Gilbert
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01323 400650
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