

Holme Court School

Abington Woods, 4 Church Lane, Little Abington, CB21 6BQ

Inspection dates 10–12 March 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 |

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher and proprietors are good, and have ensured, by rigorous monitoring and speedy intervention when standards dip, that the quality of teaching, and consequently pupils' achievements, are also good.
- Specialist trained staff, who work very effectively as a team, enable pupils from all groups to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Behaviour is good and pupils talk about their school with pride.
- The school ensures that pupils are safe and safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements.
- The range of subjects taught covers all required aspects in depth and is enriched with a very good variety of trips, visitors and practical activities. These all contribute to pupils' self-esteem and to their confidence to keep trying their utmost to improve still further.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are very considerate of others, including those new to the school. They listen respectfully to each other and support each other well.
- Pupils' individual next steps in reading, writing and mathematics are displayed for all to see and so their progress and successes are celebrated by all.
- Pupils are helped to understand what they have done well and this contributes to their growing confidence and improved attendance.
- The school has continued to maintain and build upon the good standards noted in the previous report, because staff, proprietors, parents and pupils all work together with purpose.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Excellent teaching practice exists in the school. However, opportunities to share this, and therefore develop it consistently, are hampered by the limited time the headteacher has to focus on this.
- Recently introduced policies, such as that for handwriting, including staff writing in pupils' books, are not yet consistently applied by all adults in the school and do not yet model best practice.

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

- This inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour and learning in six teaching sessions or part sessions. Three of these were observed with the headteacher.
- The responses of 13 parents on Parent View, Ofsted's on-line survey, were taken into consideration, as well as several written and verbal comments from parents.
- Discussions took place with staff and the school's policies were examined, as was pupils' work and other evidence about their progress. Pupils were heard reading. Records of training were studied.
- The inspector spoke informally and formally with pupils, observed their behaviour and examined the school's safeguarding procedures.
- The inspector considered the views of the 13 staff who completed a questionnaire.
- The accommodation and facilities for pupils were checked.

Inspection team

Sheelagh Barnes, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holme Court School is a small, independent, co-educational, day specialist school for pupils with dyslexia and associated difficulties. It is registered to admit pupils aged from seven to 16 years.
- The proprietors opened the school in 2005 in a small rural location in Bedfordshire. It has re-located twice. It now shares a site with Abington Woods Outdoor Education Centre in Little Abington.
- The school was previously inspected in December 2011.
- The school premises have been renovated and improvements made during the past five months, following a material change inspection in October 2014.
- There are currently 20 pupils on roll, all of whom have special educational needs in the form of dyslexia and nine of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Around a third of pupils have missed significant amounts of school time in the past, before coming to Holme Court.
- The school provides short-term intensive programmes for pupils, who usually stay for between one and three years, after which most are expected to return to their previous school or move on to a new mainstream setting.
- The aim of the school is 'to help pupils to overcome their dyslexia by fulfilling their potential as learners through the use of a holistic approach, so that they can then move back to mainstream schooling.'
- There are strong links with the sister school, The Cambridge International School, located less than a mile away. The proprietor of both schools is Cambridge International Schools Ltd. The company has, in the past month, become aligned with the International School's Partnership Group which now forms part of the governance of Holme Court School.
- The school is registered with the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide the headteacher with more time within the school day to focus in greater depth on the monitoring of teaching and learning throughout the whole school and thereby:
 - ensure a greater amount of outstanding teaching and learning occurs by disseminating best practice
 - giving opportunity for staff to observe teaching which leads to pupils making excellent progress
 - make sure that recently introduced policies, such as that for staff handwriting, are consistently applied by all adults.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides good leadership and management of the school. She is supported by staff who express very positive views of her leadership and who all share her commitment to achieving the best for all pupils. This results in a harmonious atmosphere in which good behaviour and learning can flourish.
- Self-evaluation of the school is accurate and rigorous. It is based upon careful monitoring, focused on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements. Effective planning for improvement, based upon this self-evaluation, ensures that the school is well placed to maintain the good standards achieved.
- There is a strong emphasis on maintaining the high quality of teaching through regular staff training and review. Staff are specialist-trained to teach the range of requirements of pupils who attend. For example, speech therapy and occupational therapy can take place in school when needed. Performance management and staff appraisal are rigorous and linked to students' progress and welfare.
- As the headteacher has a teaching commitment for nine-tenths of the week, the time for her other roles, including administrative tasks, and monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning, is extremely limited. Nevertheless, she monitors teaching and learning regularly and effectively. This includes conducting book scrutiny and monitoring of assessment. However, this restriction on her time means opportunities to share and develop the very best teaching practice is limited.
- Assessment is used well to ensure that students are making all of the progress they can. Extra support in the form of one-to-one tuition is provided, when needed, to ensure that pupils do not fall behind. Clear and informative reports are sent regularly to parents. These help them to see the progress their child is making and how they can improve still further.
- A suitably wide range of subjects is taught, with appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy. The school actively promotes British values, including those of democracy and tolerance for the beliefs of others. It prepares pupils well for their future and life in modern Britain.
- Guidance about further education and careers is good; it is further enhanced through the good and developing links with a national bank. This information helps students to make informed choices about education pathways and career options. All pupils moving on from school at the end of Key Stage 4 this year are taking up places in local colleges.
- All of the independent school standards are fully met. The arrangements for ensuring safety and safeguarding are robust. The information provided for parents and carers about school policies and practice is of good quality. There is a clearly stated complaints procedure that fully meets requirements.
- Science, practical and artistic skills are used to enhance pupils' learning effectively and these areas of learning are well led by middle leaders. Combined with a good range of visits and visitors these subjects all help to make learning exciting and interesting. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and rigorously tackles discrimination.
- The school has good and accurate systems to assess the progress of each pupil, which it has redeveloped in response to national changes.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is good and continually challenges the headteacher and the school to improve
 - makes good use of performance data and supports the regular review of the quality of work in the school, leading to ongoing improvements
 - ensures that training of all staff is regularly reviewed and updated and that good teaching is rewarded

- ensures that pupils are provided for well to enable their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- engages well with key partners, stakeholders and placing authorities
- ensures that equipment and accommodation are of good quality and that there is efficient management of resources.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is because there are clear expectations by all staff, which are consistently implemented. As a result, pupils receive praise and rewards for what they have achieved both academically and socially, and so are encouraged to try their best at all times.
- Pupils' attitudes to school and to their work are good. For many, this is a substantial improvement as before attending Holme Court around a third had previously found attending school extremely challenging and some had ceased to attend their previous schools. A small number had become electively mute outside their homes, but have responded well since joining the school. Pupils conduct themselves well and take great pride in their school. There are marked improvements in behaviour over time for those with particular behavioural needs.
- Pupils' self-esteem is promoted well through involvement in such activities as self-assessment of their work. They are given clear criteria for each written and mathematical task, so that they can see how well they have met the teacher's requirements and feel a sense of pride in what they have done.
- Pupils have a good and developing knowledge of public institutions and services in Britain, together with a good understanding of British values and the importance of tolerance of the views of others. They learn about festivals celebrated by others internationally, such as the Hindu festival of Pongal. One pupil commented in the school newsletter, 'the rice pudding that we made for Pongal was amazing!'
- Pupils are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions and reflect upon their own achievements. Parents and staff agree that behaviour is good.
- Pupils contribute towards the lives of others, such as making tea and serving it to local senior citizens and collecting for a range of different charities, such as Children in Need, and the Kasiisi Porridge Project.
- Healthy lifestyles are promoted effectively. Pupils learn about healthy eating, diet and nutrition. Provision is made for physical activity and pupils all take part in swimming.
- Pupils say that behaviour is generally good, but that a very few 'have difficulty managing their anger at times'. However, they say that staff are quick to resolve these issues when they occur.
- The school system of 'parking' questions which are not directly relevant to the discussion at the time, in order to minimise distraction in lessons, is not consistently used in all classes.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Systems to protect pupils from harm are fully in place. Staff training ensures that all staff can respond swiftly in case of accidents. The building is kept in a clean and tidy manner, reducing risks.
- Systems to safeguard pupils are good and all staff have good levels of awareness of potential risks. Pupils are taught about different types of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, and how to protect themselves when using the internet. They say that there is little bullying and any that occurs is dealt with swiftly.
- Pupils are taught to be aware of health issues, for themselves and for others further afield. They know about the importance of clean water and shelter for people in areas hit by disaster. They are encouraged

to collect stamps and bottle tops for international charities. This has a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- Leaders and managers are rigorous in completing the appropriate checks on staff and visitors to the school. Parents who expressed their views are unanimous that they believe the school looks after their children well and keeps them safe. Staff also agree that the school takes care of pupils' individual needs effectively.

The quality of teaching is good

- The vibrant teaching enables pupils to make good progress in their academic and social development. Teaching is good and there is some outstanding practice. As a result, some pupils make great leaps in their understanding and self-esteem.
- Lessons are planned carefully to meet the needs and interests of pupils, and to match the requirements outlined in their education plans. Careful assessments of what they know and can do are used effectively to ensure that work is suitably challenging but achievable. These assessments are shared with pupils and, as a result, they can clearly see the progress they are making.
- The school uses a system whereby all of the criteria the teacher will use for the assessment of each written and mathematical task are set out in pupils' books for them to see before they start the work. In this way, pupils can use the list to check their own work as they go along to make sure they remember the most important things. It also enables them to see teachers' marking as fair, as it does not raise issues that have not been listed. This greatly impacts on pupils' development of good attitudes to tasks they previously have not found easy, or willing to undertake, for fear of failure.
- Pupils' progress is monitored carefully throughout each lesson as well as over time. Small adjustments are made to ensure that learning progresses as swiftly as possible or aspects are reviewed, if needed. This results in students' good progress from their starting points, which very low due, in part, to missed schooling in the past combined with their specific learning difficulties.
- Teaching places strong emphasis in developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. There is also a strong practical emphasis for pupils who find written work challenging. They are encouraged to learn through planning and costing projects, such as a trip to London and weighing and measuring ingredients for shortbread and 'trench stew', as well as by more formal methods.
- The most-able students are also challenged to attain their very best. Teaching is innovative and works to capture pupils' interests as a method of gaining their enthusiasm. It also makes use of regular routines such as daily reading, writing and spelling practice, where each pupil is supported by the specialist trained staff very effectively. As a result, pupils make positive comments about their developing enjoyment in reading. This is endorsed by parental comments, such as their child 'now reads books!'
- Teaching prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education or work. Teaching successfully promotes in students the belief that they can aspire to, and attain, the highest possible standards. As a result all of the pupils leaving at the end of Key Stage 4 are taking up places in college.
- Work is marked regularly and much of the feedback to pupils is reinforced in detail verbally. The school has a new policy for presentation of all written work, by adults and pupils. This is not yet being consistently applied by all adults; some of the teachers' comments written in pupils' books have poorly formed letters and weak presentation. This does not provide exemplary writing for pupils to copy, and is not always easy for them to read.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The progress made by pupils of all levels of ability, including the most able, is good and enables them to

swiftly catch up with the levels expected for their age. Pupils make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics because lessons are tailored very carefully to their specific needs and interests.

- The school believes that it is imperative for pupils to become literate and numerate and fosters these skills at every opportunity, for example, developing mathematics skills by issuing challenges to build the highest towers using spaghetti and marshmallows or weighing ingredients to make bread. As a result, pupils see their lessons as meaningful and enjoyable and participate fully, making good gains in skills and confidence that will ultimately enable them to re-integrate into mainstream education and employment. One pupil commented in the school newsletter 'We've been learning algebra in maths, I love algebra, but sometimes it can be hard!'
- The achievement of pupils, who are disabled or who have special educational needs, is good. The school encourages pupils to practise their developing skills regularly, by making them fun. For example teachers set 'competitions' to see if the pupil or teacher will 'win' cards representing letter blends. Tasks such as learning to cook a healthy breakfast and making pottery poppies for Armistice Day also have a positive impact in helping pupils to achieve their creative potential and develop their sense of self-esteem and worth.
- Progress and achievement in reading are good. Reading is encouraged and pupils are positive about refining their reading skills. They read for a wide variety of purposes, including following plans and instructions as well as those who now read for pleasure.
- Pupils have the opportunity to study for a range of qualifications. All study Spanish, take GCSE mathematics and undertake The Duke of Edinburgh Award. Some work to take Level 2 qualifications, such as Childcare. As a result, pupils are successful in attaining a range of different qualifications and skills and gain places at further education establishments and mainstream schools.
- Computing skills are taught well. The teacher for information technology has set up an individual page for each pupil outlining the work that they have covered in lessons in mathematics and science and giving the opportunity for pupils to review work at home and send in questions to her, which she answers speedily. As a result, pupils become competent users of technology and use it well in homework and to support their work in other subjects.
- The school ensures that pupils can take part in a good varied range of extra-curricular activities, including artistic and sporting opportunities. They undertake trips to museums, temples, churches and synagogues and this effectively widens their knowledge and skills, both academically and socially, and increases pupils' confidence.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | |
|---------|----------------------|
| Grade | Judgement |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 108886 |
| Inspection number | 455956 |
| DfE registration number | 873/6051 |
| Type of school | Day special school |
| School status | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 7–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 20 |
| Number of part time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Cambridge International Schools Ltd |
| Headteacher | Anita Laws |
| Date of previous school inspection | 09/12/2011 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £14,250 |
| Telephone number | 01223 778030 |
| Fax number | N/A |
| Email address | admin@holmecourt.com |

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