

Estuary High School

820 London Road, Leigh-on-Sea, SS9 3NH

Inspection dates 17–19 June 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

- The headteacher and steering committee have ensured that all the independent school standards are met and that the quality of teaching and students' learning, progress and well-being are all good.
- Students' behaviour is good throughout the school. They regain their interest in learning that previously many had lost, and they enjoy every aspect of their time in school. Their attendance is high.
- The school's arrangements to ensure the safety of students are outstanding.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations for students' achievement and make good use of well-chosen resources to plan interesting learning activities. As a result, students are well-motivated to learn and achieve well.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for learning. They work closely with teachers to manage students' learning and behaviour effectively. They have strong relationships with students.
- Students are making good progress in all areas of learning and towards their examination courses. A very small number make outstanding progress in reading and spelling.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students benefit from the well-planned individual learning programmes they are given, that are tailored to meet their specific needs, good teaching and good support and guidance. Their behaviour and safety are good, and they are well prepared for when they leave school. Most students successfully apply to enter colleges of further education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always use their marking to give students clear advice about how to improve their work.
- Occasionally, a very small number of the least-able students are given tasks which they find too difficult.
- Teachers do not always promote students' use of literacy and numeracy well enough in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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 inspector visited three lessons to look at the effect of teaching on students' learning. Two of these were joint observations with the headteacher and nearly all staff were seen teaching.
- The inspector looked at samples of students' work across the school, including in the sixth form, with the headteacher and staff. He also looked at a few case studies of individual students to determine the impact of the provision on their learning and well-being.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the proprietor, staff and representatives of the company.
- The inspector took account of the school's survey of the views of carers as there were too few responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, to be taken into account.
- The inspector examined three questionnaires from staff, together with the responses from two social workers from different Local Authorities.
- As the school does not have its own website, the inspector checked that all the required information was available to parents on the education pages of the company's website, should they wish to refer to it. He also checked that the school's safeguarding policy met requirements.
- The activities carried out to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards included the scrutiny of a range of school documentation and their effective implementation. These included: the school information and evaluation form and the school development plan; minutes of the meeting of the steering committee; records of behaviour and attendance figures; safeguarding policies, risk assessments and records of training; records of students' progress over time across the school, including in the sixth form.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Estuary High School is a special school for a maximum of 10 boys, between 13 and 18 years of age, with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Students attending the school are all considered to be highly vulnerable, given the special nature of their difficulties. Students may also have additional special educational needs, such as speech language and communication needs or autism.
- There are currently nine boys on roll, seven of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- All students are looked after children who have been placed in the school by one of a number of local authorities. Four of the students live in the children's home and five are in foster care.
- Nearly all students are White British and none has English as an additional language.
- The school, which opened in January 2007, is part of Kites Children's Services Limited and received its last full inspection in March 2012. There were further monitoring inspections in October 2013, March 2014 and May 2014.
- The school aims to provide, 'a learning environment which will enable students to have a full range of educational activities, both within school and wider community, within a supportive framework that offers students encouragement, therapy, self-awareness and discipline'.
- As numbers are very low, there is no separate provision for the sixth form. All students, including those in the sixth form, receive an individual learning programme tailored to their needs.
- The school uses a local farm to provide a programme for work-related learning for a very few students in the sixth form. It also uses local park amenities for sports coaching and tennis.
- Since the last inspection a steering groups has been set up to oversee the work of the school. This consists of the proprietors, company representatives, the head of care and the headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, so that more is outstanding and more students make exceptional progress, by making sure that:
 - teachers use their marking more effectively to make clear to students how they can improve their work
 - the least-able students are given tasks which are neither too difficult nor too easy, yet which challenge them appropriately
 - teachers regularly promote the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher benefits from strong support from the proprietors, company staff and the steering committee. Together they are driving forward improvements in provision, teaching and students' achievement. They make sure that all the independent school standards are met and that the quality of education, including teaching, and pupils' progress are good. As a result, staff morale is high, team work among staff is good and foster parents and carers have full confidence in the school. This is reflected in the response to the school's own survey of carers and in staff questionnaires.
- The headteacher and staff have created an atmosphere where teaching, learning and good behaviour flourish. As a result, students quickly re-engage with learning and make rapid progress in improving their attendance and behaviour. The school, carers and steering committee are rightly proud of the exceptionally high levels of attendance students are now achieving.
- Strong leadership of teaching and good arrangements for managing the performance of staff have led to good teaching and learning across the school, including in the sixth form. All staff have completed full induction training, including training in child protection.
- Leadership of the sixth form provision is good and enables students to make good progress in preparing for life beyond school.
- Assessment systems are robust, and teachers use their assessments to plan lessons that build on students' previous learning and to track students' progress. The school assesses students on entry to determine their levels of attainment as well as their reading and spelling ages. Staff use this information to set individual challenging targets for students to achieve. They record levels of progress carefully and review these each half term with the headteacher. The outcomes of the review are used to provide additional support for each student's learning, which enables them to make good progress over time.
- The school has an accurate and realistic view of its effectiveness, based on the close and accurate monitoring of its work by the headteacher and members of the steering committee. It uses monitoring outcomes well to set clear priorities for school improvement.
- The school's curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of all students, including those in the sixth form. Each student benefits from individual learning opportunities tailored to their ages, abilities and aptitudes. This includes a wide range of learning opportunities in art, music, history, science, design and technology, computing and physical education. There is a strong emphasis on developing students' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics alongside a well-thought out programme of personal, social and health education.
- There is a strong emphasis on preparing older students for the next stage of their education by providing relevant examination courses that are matched to their different levels of ability. Older students and those in the sixth form also benefit from the personalised programme of work-related learning staff devise for them, as well as the opportunities they receive to take part in work experience in local firms. The school provides students with effective careers advice. This helps them to make choices about college courses when they leave school. The school also makes good use of local resources such as the local park for coaching in physical education and the local farm for work-related learning.
- Staff promote effectively the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including their understanding of British values. Students learn to take responsibility and consider the needs of others less fortunate than themselves through charitable fund-raising activities. The school recently arranged a visit by the local Member of Parliament and learned about parliamentary democracy. Students learn about the rule of law and to appreciate other cultural and religious traditions, within well-chosen topics in citizenship and the programme of personal, social and health education. They learn to appreciate, respect and experience other cultures through, for example, a visit to France and visits to different places of worship such as a church and a mosque. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- Staff promote students' moral development effectively through well-designed topics on sex and relationships education, smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse and internet safety. Staff implement the behaviour and discipline policy effectively, and provide good role models for students. This has a strong impact on improving students' behaviour.
- The school works very closely with foster parents, carers, therapists, external agencies and professionals and placing authorities to make sure that the individual needs of each student are met effectively. There are strong links with the local safeguarding board, educational psychologists, therapist and carers. Handover meetings are held twice a day to ensure that information about each student is shared between care and education staff.
- The school promotes equality and diversity well. Leaders work closely with carers and other agencies to ensure that the different needs of every student are met and they all make good progress from their various starting points. The school fulfils its duties under schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. As a result, the school prepares students well for further education and training.
- Leaders promote safeguarding exceptionally well by fully implementing the school's policies and procedures to promote the safety and well-being of every student. Rigorous and robust procedures are in place to check the suitability of staff, visitors and proprietors who plan to work with students. Staff assess very carefully all potential risks in classrooms, in all learning activities in school and on school visits, including those in the local park and the farm. Potential risks are also rigorously assessed when students travel by car, taxi or public transport. All training and policies on safeguarding are fully up-to-date.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the newly formed steering committee are providing good support for the school. They hold regular meetings each half term to review and challenge its work. Individual members visit the school regularly to gain a first-hand knowledge of its work, and report back to the steering committee. Members of the steering committee ensure that all the legal requirements for safeguarding are fully met by their rigorous review of all policies and procedures and through their focused visits to check on the well-being of students. They ensure that all staff implement safeguarding procedures appropriately and consistently, including those relating to health and safety requirements.
 - Members are familiar with the school's system for tracking students' progress and use this information well to influence priorities for whole school development.
 - They have implemented good procedures for managing the headteacher's performance based on whole-school priorities for development.
 - Members of the steering committee ensure that staff promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively, including their understanding of British values. They check that the school's procedures for tackling any form of extremism are effective and relevant.
 - They make sure that financial resources are used well to promote good teaching and learning and ensure value of money.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students make rapid progress in their behaviour and attendance. Attendance rates are very high, which reflects students' rapid and successful re-engagement with learning. They behave well in lessons and have good attitudes to learning. This is because staff provide excellent role models and manage behaviour consistently well. Staff use the school's systems of rewards and sanctions effectively and take great care to ensure that planned action, designed to manage students' behaviour, are effective and lead to the desired outcome.
- Students are well-behaved around the school and have good relationship with others. Students show respect for one another and act responsibly as ambassadors for the school. Nevertheless, behaviour is not outstanding because, very occasionally, a small number of students lose control and are violent, which results in exclusion from school. On a few occasions, when tasks are too difficult for them, students fail to concentrate on their learning and do not try hard enough.

- Students respond positively to the good atmosphere for learning that staff have established across the school. They appreciate the way teachers celebrate their work and achievements and regularly offer them praise and encouragement.
- Students in the sixth form behave well and show good attitudes to learning.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students say they always feel very safe at school. Staff, foster parents and carers agree. Staff are rigorously trained in all aspects of child protection and safeguarding, including first aid, to promote students' safety and well-being. All staff keep up to date with their training, including reading the latest official guidance on safeguarding.
- Teachers supervise students carefully at all times and are fully involved in any activities in school, on school trips and at the local park and farm. This ensures students are always very safe and secure. Students say that there is no bullying in school but if it did occur, it would be dealt with immediately. Foster parents and carers agree. Students have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying and prejudice-based bullying.
- Records of behaviour show a marked decline in the frequency of unacceptable behaviour over time, with no recorded incidents of harassment or bullying of any kind.
- The school premises are rigorously and regularly checked to ensure they are safe and secure. Extremely robust systems are in place to determine the potential risks that could arise during activities in and out of school, including when students are taking part in the regular activities arranged in the local park and at the farm.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers' high expectations for learning and use of well-chosen learning resources to plan interesting activities were evident in the quality of students' work in their books and throughout all the teaching observed by inspectors. As part of an extended writing day, students were encouraged to use laptop computers safely to research images and topics on horror stories and to include dramatic and powerful vocabulary in writing their own horror stories.
- Students' sketchbooks show that teachers use of a variety of media to stimulate students' imagination and provide them with opportunities to express themselves. For example in one lesson, students were encouraged to create self-portraits in the style of Picasso. This enabled them to produce high quality course work as part of their art GCSE. The quality of work produced shows students are highly motivated to learn.
- Consistently good support from teaching assistants enables students to build effectively on their learning. In a writing lesson, the teaching assistant encouraged the use of a thesaurus to look for the meaning of a word and then to search for alternative words to enliven writing. In an art lesson, the teaching assistant successfully encouraged students to produce a range of lines of varying thickness in their creation of pop art. In both cases, the support of the assistant helped students to make significant improvements to their work.
- The high quality of pupils' work showing outdoor education activities displayed around the school indicates other aspects of the good support the teaching assistant provides. For example, in one activity, she showed students how to identify safe food to eat from the forest and to distinguish these from toxic foods. He also showed them how to light a fire safely and cook meals outdoors. All involved greatly enjoyed these activities.
- All staff manage students' learning and behaviour effectively in all lessons. Parents, carers and students all acknowledge the strength of the relationships staff have established with and between students. This has enabled them to make good progress in both their learning and in their behaviour.

- Teachers make good use of students' prior learning to plan sequences of lessons which build rapidly on their skills, prior knowledge and understanding. Very occasionally teachers provide the small number of the least-able students with tasks that are too difficult for them.
- Marking of students' work is generally good, although sometimes students are not always informed about how to improve their work. Although reading, writing and mathematics skills are taught well, teachers do not always promote students' literacy or numeracy skills well enough in subjects other than English and mathematics.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students enter the school with levels of attainment below those expected for their ages due to the significant disruption to their education that has occurred previously and which has seriously restricted their learning. They make good progress from their different starting points because staff create a positive climate for learning which enables students to re-engage with learning quickly.
- Students make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this progress is not yet outstanding because these skills are not always promoted well enough in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The school's own internal data shows that a very small number of students make very rapid gains in their reading and spelling ages from their initial assessments showing outstanding progress in these areas.
- Students make good progress in their examination courses and all gain relevant qualifications in a range of subjects including unit awards, entry level and GCSE grades that are appropriate to their level of ability. Currently the oldest students are all on course to achieve C grades at GCSE in art, English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and students who have special educational needs generally make equally good progress as their classmates. Very occasionally, a very small number find learning too difficult, which limits their progress.
- The few most-able students make the same good progress as their classmates in English and mathematics from their relatively higher starting points because staff always challenge their thinking in lessons.
- Students' work in their books across different areas of learning, work on display and homework shows they are making good progress in all areas of learning.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Good leadership of the sixth form is enabling the very few students to make good progress in learning and behaviour and to stay exceptionally safe. The school ensures that each student is provided with a tailored made programme of learning to prepare them well for further education and the world of work. This includes work based learning in a local farm and a more academic curriculum for those with the skills aptitudes and interest to pursue this. Students' views and careers choices are taken into account when planning their personal curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is good, with the same high expectations for learning and good use of well-chosen resources as other students in the school. As a result these students make good progress in their examination courses and all successfully transfer to a variety further education courses such as catering and motor mechanics. The school prepares them well for life beyond school. All students who left school since the last full inspection have successfully entered further education.
- Students are well behaved and take a responsible attitude to their learning. They are very clear about what they want to do when they leave school and are working hard in order to achieve their goals. Their

good attitudes to learning are reflected in their very high attendance rates.

- Staff are vigilant in ensuring students stay extremely safe when on work experience placements or in attendance at the farm and local park. Their behaviour and attendance are very closely monitored, and staff maintain high levels of involvement these activities themselves so that they can supervise the students appropriately.

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 GOV.UK website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	134940
Inspection number	462929
DfE registration number	882/6053

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	Day special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	2
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Kites Children's Services
Chair	Andre Palmer
Headteacher	Simone Isaacs
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,676
Telephone number	01702483999
Email address	simone@estuaryhigh.com

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