

Huntercombe Hospital School (Stafford)

Ivetsey Bank, Wheaton Aston, Stafford ST19 9QT

Inspection dates

9–11 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and her team of staff share a total dedication to ensuring that every pupil is able to flourish and make the best possible progress they can in a caring environment.
- Skilled teachers, teaching assistants and hospital and care staff work together with a clear priority to build pupils' resilience and well-being. As a result pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are highly effective. Teachers are often skilled in a number of subjects. They plan highly individualised work to meet the differing needs and interests of each pupil.
- The individualised approach to learning ensures equality of opportunity to a good education for all. It enables pupils to build on work from their home schools and colleges and prepares them well for a successful return.
- Pupils generally achieve well and some achieve outstandingly well given their previous difficulties, including in external examinations.
- The head of education for the Huntercombe Group of schools provides good support and challenge to the headteacher at regular meetings and ensures that all independent school standards are met. High-quality information about the school is fed back to the proprietors so that they can take effective action to improve the provision.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is no distributed leadership for some key areas of work such as leadership of the sixth form and external partnerships. Teachers have limited opportunity to develop responsibility and leadership skills.
- Sixth-form pupils are sometimes unable to access practical aspects of vocational studies due to limited accommodation and resources.
- Teachers and the headteacher have a clear view of the progress of individual pupils. However, there is not yet a system in place to enable leaders, including proprietors, to check on progress within subjects, for different groups or over time.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - reviewing the staffing structure to enable more delegation of responsibility for key areas of the school's work
 - developing an assessment management system to provide leaders, including proprietors, with an accurate analysis of pupil progress.
- Further raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - increasing access to all aspects of vocational courses for appropriate learners in the sixth form
 - ensuring that teachers consistently give good-quality feedback to pupils, which helps them to make better progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- It is clear that every member of staff at Huntercombe School, Stafford shares a total commitment to improving the chances of pupils in the school and is willing to go above and beyond what is normally expected.
- This is due not least to the leadership and vision of the headteacher, who has driven improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since registration as an independent school. There is a clear, shared ambition to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress they can, emotionally and academically, during the – sometimes short – time they are in the school.
- The headteachers of the Huntercombe Group meet together at least termly with the group's head of education, sharing knowledge and best practice, to better inform the school's own provision.
- The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness and correctly identifies areas for improvement.
- Teachers and leaders have a good understanding of how well individual pupils are doing, particularly through the recently introduced mental health tracker. However, assessment information is not used well enough to provide leaders with a clear overview of the progress pupils make, for instance in their different groups or in different subjects.
- Checks on teaching and learning are frequently carried out by both the headteacher and head of education and actions are swiftly put in place to improve practice where necessary. Leaders have a good understanding of the effectiveness of teaching and assessment on learning. Information from learning walks, drop-ins and trawls of pupils' work and teachers' planning is used very well to inform leaders about teachers' performance. Targets for teachers are appropriately set against the school's development plan and designed to raise standards of pupils' work
- Teachers are provided with good opportunities to develop themselves professionally. However, the relatively small staffing complement leaves little room for distribution of some key areas of responsibility such as leadership of the sixth form or partnerships with alternative providers which might extend the curriculum on offer. There is a strong focus on high-quality partnerships with home schools and colleges, which are fundamental in ensuring positive outcomes for pupils. This is particularly the case when pupils return to their original schools or move to new ones.
- Similarly, partnerships with parents and carers are strong and supportive and play a key role in ensuring that pupils have the best chance of successfully moving out of the hospital school setting. The large majority of parents who spoke to the inspector or sent in emails were very positive about their child's experience in the school, of the quality of information they receive from hospital and school staff, and of the guidance they are given.
- The curriculum is generally as broad and balanced as pupils are able to cope with, and they are encouraged to work with staff on timetables which suit their individual needs well. English, mathematics and science are always taught. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form the focus is on supporting pupils to be successful in external examinations and to gain awards at a range of levels. Sometimes this needs to be in a reduced number of subjects to ensure that good grades are achieved. The school has a large array of curriculum documents and resource textbooks to match the coursework being carried out in each pupil's home school. Schemes of work are in place for all national curriculum subjects.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is embedded in all lessons and there is complete commitment to embracing equal opportunities and tackling discrimination of any kind. Pupils are encouraged to consider the needs of others through fund-raising activities. The nature of often relatively short placements and of therapy and treatment needs can make it difficult for pupils to take on responsibilities while in the school.
- Pupils are taught about the dangers of radicalisation. They understand the principles of fundamental British values as part of the programme aimed to help pupils keep themselves safe and to be able to participate in, and be full members of, their communities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - There is no governing body but the proprietors keep a close check on the school's effectiveness through their head of education. They ensure that the headteacher's performance management is linked to improvements in the provision, provides oversight, and reports back to the director of quality and safety for the group and thus to the proprietorial board.
 - The head of education holds frequent meetings with the headteacher to check on the quality of

teaching and learning, on pupil progress and on the use of funding. He contributes to the performance management of staff.

- The school is not in receipt of any additional funding for disadvantaged pupils nor for those with special educational needs, and fees are only requested for the days that pupils attend in the school. The head of education holds the headteacher to account for pupil outcomes and provides a good level of challenge and support.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. Staffing appointments are managed through Care Quality Commission as well as Department for Education (DfE) standards. The headteacher is designated safeguarding lead and another teacher has also undertaken recent update training. All staff are trained to an appropriate level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teachers are highly committed to ensuring that each individual pupil achieves as well as they possibly can.
- The school goes to great lengths to obtain information from home schools and colleges about what pupils have been learning before they arrive at the hospital school. As a result of this information individual programmes to match and develop pupils' skills and knowledge are planned. Additionally, pupils are assessed on arrival at the school and this, together with the information from home settings, provides a sound baseline for further assessments and for teachers' planning.
- Following admission to the hospital and to the school, pupils are not always able to function at expected levels. Teachers are very skilful at planning programmes of work to engage and motivate each pupil and to build gradually on what they know and can do.
- The small staff of teachers has extensive curriculum knowledge and expertise in a number of subjects. They diligently research the coursework required by different schools and colleges. Wherever possible older pupils will take external awards while they are in the school and the success rate is high due to the good personalised support they receive.
- Pupils know and contribute to their targets and to evaluation of their work. However, teachers do not always give good-quality feedback to pupils and so pupils do not always know how to improve their work.
- Pupils often work independently, on computers or using textbooks, towards personalised objectives set by the teachers. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilful in moving around to the different pupils in a lesson to ensure that they are able to make good progress towards their different objectives. In several lessons seen, individual pupils were following different topics in work planned with home schools and colleges. This enabled each pupil to learn new language and concepts to keep abreast of the work being covered by peers in home settings.
- Although pupils often prefer to work on their own and are covering different work, interaction is encouraged wherever possible. Pupils are supported to verbally express views and opinions through skilful questioning. For example, in an English lesson a pupil was helped to empathise and work towards a personal response to a wartime poem, while another discussed the structure and language of poetry.
- There is a good focus on basic skills and all pupils spend an appropriate amount of time developing their reading, writing and mathematical skills so that they can obtain an award at an appropriate level. The personalised work with teachers and teaching assistants helps pupils to recognise where they are having difficulties or where they have gaps in learning, perhaps due to missed schooling, so that appropriate action can be taken quickly.
- Teachers provide home schools, colleges and parents with regular updates on pupil progress at the six-weekly multi-professional meetings and through written reports.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **are outstanding**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils gain confidence because they develop trust in the staff. They quickly begin to overcome barriers to their learning as their treatment progresses and the vast majority of pupils demonstrate that they are keen to do well. Staff are extremely effective in managing anxieties about work which might otherwise affect a pupil's well-being. All staff are highly supportive in helping pupils manage their workload

effectively by suggesting they reduce the number of subjects being taken, where necessary, or deferring an examination to a later date where appropriate.

- Many of the most-able pupils aspire to go to university and are well motivated to learn independently. Teachers keep a very close check to ensure that they do not become too isolated, and encourage excellent group participation in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons or through cooperative activities. During the inspection pupils demonstrated deep levels of empathy for others' views in a lively discussion about faith and belief.
- Building resilience and a strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding underpins all of the work of the school. Pupils gain a good knowledge and understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly in the use of modern technology. Pupils are encouraged to self-reflect as part of their treatment.
- The cultural diversity of the pupil population changes frequently, but activities such as international food days and cultural days help pupils to develop tolerance and respect and a very secure understanding of British moral values.
- School staff are very mindful of pupils' personal and treatment needs and work cooperatively with therapists and other hospital staff to engage and motivate pupils in carefully monitored programmes. Healthy eating and physical activity are managed sensitively in liaison with hospital staff. A new mental health checklist has recently been introduced to assess pupils' progress towards participation in school activities and their well-being in the school environment. However, it is still a little too early to determine how the information provided can be used to best effect.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Causes of admission are very varied but pupils who may have had very difficult experiences previously are supported extremely well to quickly settle to work and begin to make rapid progress.
- Behaviour during lessons is exceptional. Pupils are very focused on doing well, although concentration can sometimes be affected by illness and treatment.
- Pupils feel very safe in the protective environment of the school and hospital. They say there is no bullying and, because they enjoy close relationships with staff, would always feel able to discuss any concerns.
- Pupils are involved in decision making wherever possible, for example, interviewing for staff appointments, redecoration of rooms, deciding on their own timetables and choosing which charities to collect for. They very quickly begin to be involved in decisions which may affect themselves or others.
- Attendance is good within the boundaries of each individual's illness and treatment, but is often a significant improvement on their attendance in prior settings.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils can be admitted to the hospital school for relatively short periods of time, quite often less than 12 months. The key focus, therefore, is on maintaining work levels and continuing coursework to match home schools as far as possible with a view to a successful return or move on.
- When they are first admitted, pupils are not always able to function at previously assessed levels. Sometimes they are reluctant to accept help. Teachers manage workloads sensitively to a point where pupils feel motivated to engage and accept challenging tasks.
- Pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science is very good. The school staff work hard to ensure that, as far as possible, pupils can gain external awards which reflect their differing ability levels. Many of the most-able pupils gain GCSEs at A* to C grades. Last year, of the nine pupils entered in a good range of subjects, the success rate was 91% at these higher grades. Pupils who are not following GCSE courses are supported to gain a range of other awards including Functional Skills and AQA unit awards. The school is registered as an examinations centre.
- Key stage 3 pupils follow the national curriculum in as many subjects as they can manage. They make such good progress over time that some, who are emotionally ready, are able to begin examination coursework early.
- Pupils who have statements of special educational needs or are subject of education, health and care plans are quickly identified on admission. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that all necessary information is obtained from parents and home schools and colleges in order to provide for these pupils' needs most effectively. As a result of this excellent support and the school's highly

personalised approach to learning, these pupils achieve as well as other pupils from their differing starting points.

- Excellent teamwork between hospital and school staff and good partnerships with parents and home schools and colleges give pupils the best opportunity to continue to achieve after they leave Huntercombe School. Moves back to mainstream settings are very sensitively and carefully managed.
- In this small school with a continually changing pupil population, specialist resources are not always available to meet every need and this can restrict curriculum choices, particularly in some practical aspects of subjects.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Provision for sixth form learners is good. Numbers of post-16 learners are usually small and frequently change as learners are admitted and discharged from the hospital. Consequently these few learners are usually taught alongside younger pupils following similar courses. This meets the needs of the very small number of sixth-form learners well.
- As with all pupils in the main school, staff liaise exceptionally well with previous schools and colleges in order to continue work they have been following where they can. They take care to ensure that this work is well matched to their needs and abilities.
- The most-able sixth form learners are often continuing to work towards GCSEs due to fractured schooling at earlier stages which have resulted in missed opportunities to complete coursework and take examinations at the usual stages. The extremely good results they achieve, including in English, mathematics and science, are evidence of the success of the personalised approach to their learning.
- Learners sometimes have restricted access to vocational subjects. This is due to a lack of resources which means they can sometimes only access the theoretical, but not always the practical, aspects of a subject. However, the school does all that it can to enable learners to follow courses which interest and motivate them. The use of alternative provision and work placements is not currently in place and would not necessarily be appropriate for learners while they are receiving hospital treatment and therapies.
- There is currently no identified specialist lead for the sixth form, but one of the teachers acts as examinations officer to ensure that learners can take appropriate awards and qualifications. The vast majority of sixth-form learners successfully return to continuing education placements when they are discharged.
- Post-16 learners participate in the same PSHE lessons as other pupils and, like them, develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and of the importance of understanding British moral values. Like other pupils in the school, the development of resilience and personal well-being and preparation for their future lives underpins the ethos and purpose of the school in every activity.
- For those learners for whom it is appropriate, effective careers guidance is provided by an external careers consultant.

School details

Unique reference number	142013
Inspection number	10008632
DfE registration number	860/6041
Type of school	Special school – social, emotional and mental health needs
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	12–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Number of part time pupils	6
Proprietor	Huntercombe Group
Chair	Nicholas Rose (Head of Education – Child, Adolescent, Mental Health Services)
Headteacher	Carol Harvey
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,950
Telephone number	01785 842103
Website	No school website
Email address	HHstaffordschool@huntercombe.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Huntercombe Hospital School (Stafford) is one of several schools in the Huntercombe Group. The school provides day education for up to 39 pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs who have been admitted to the hospital provision.
- This is the school's first standard inspection since registration with the DfE. At that time there was a stated intention to reduce the minimum age to 11 years. However, it is to remain at 12 years to comply with hospital admissions.
- Pupils can be admitted for varying lengths of time depending on treatment. Numbers of pupils vary considerably and pupils are admitted and discharged across the school year. Pupils are usually dually placed, remaining on the roll of their home school or college.
- Pupils may attend part time in the school when they are first admitted to hospital and again as they are supported to move on to other placements towards the end of their treatment.
- The large majority of pupils at the time of the inspection were of White British heritage but this varies throughout the year.
- The school is not in receipt of additional funding specifically for disadvantaged pupils or for those who have special educational needs or disability. At the time of the inspection there were seven pupils with statements of special educational need or with education, health and care plans. These pupils have a diagnosis of a range of disabilities and learning difficulties including autism spectrum conditions.
- None of the pupils attend alternative provision.
- Most of the pupils have experienced disruptions in their education prior to admission to Huntercombe.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted at one day's notice.
- The inspector visited lessons and observed pupils' learning. Most lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or the head of education (child and adolescent mental health services – CAMHS).
- The inspector reviewed pupils' work in their books and sampled reports on their progress.
- A range of school documents were examined relating to policies and procedures, curriculum, safeguarding, the school self-evaluation and development planning, and other aspects of compliance with the independent school standards.
- The views of pupils were sought in a meeting and in informal discussions with the inspector.
- The inspector spoke to two parents and examined emails from a further three parents. There were insufficient responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to be able to take them into account. School-based satisfaction surveys completed by parents and pupils were also reviewed.
- The inspector also spoke to or received emails from representatives of pupils' home schools and colleges.
- A meeting was held with a number of the school staff and the hospital's family therapy worker. Responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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