

# Hazel Court School

Larkspur Drive, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 8EJ

|                                              |                      |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Inspection dates</b>                      | 21–22 June 2016      |
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>Good</b>          |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Good                 |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good                 |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Good                 |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | Good                 |
| 16 to 19 study programmes                    | Good                 |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Hazel Court is a good and improving school. In combination, the headteacher and two assistant headteachers provide dynamic and skilful leadership. Staff morale is high and everyone is ambitious to ensure all pupils achieve well and are prepared for their future lives.
- Teachers and support staff know pupils well. This knowledge is used to plan learning tasks that capture pupils' interests and challenge them to take new steps in learning. Pupils work on learning activities with increasing focus.
- Developing pupils' communication skills and promoting their social and emotional development is at the heart of every activity and interaction. Opportunities to practise life skills are maximised.
- Pupils achieve equally well in mathematics and English. This represents good progress since the previous inspection when pupils were not making enough gains in their reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils and the most vulnerable receive support that enables them to progress as well as their peers.
- Positive relationships and feelings of safety are reflected in smiles and laughter as well as communicated through speech and sign.
- Older students in the sixth form benefit from a curriculum that focuses strongly on the next steps in education or employment. They have many opportunities to apply learning in real-life situations. Older students are happy, behave well and develop social and independence skills.
- Governors add strength to school leadership with individuals bringing relevant skill and expertise. Governors know what has improved well and what could improve further. They hold leaders firmly to account.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Opportunities to develop pupils' skills and knowledge are not maximised.
- Some parents do not feel well enough informed about their child's learning and progress.
- School improvement plans are limited and do not make sufficiently clear how proposed changes will benefit pupils.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and further raise achievement by:
  - ensuring that staff adjust learning tasks during a lesson if a pupil finds them too simple
  - ensuring that staff balance giving pupils enough time to make independent choices with not leaving them uninvolved for so long that time is wasted
  - ensuring that activities that involve turn-taking around the class do not last so long that pupils lose focus and interest.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that all leaders' and governors' plans for improvement are clear about the intended impact of actions, and identify how pupils will benefit positively from the proposed changes
  - further strengthening communication with parents and carers so that parents and carers know about their child's progress and have a clearer picture about what has happened during the school day.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The senior leadership arrangements introduced in January 2015, of a headteacher, supported by two assistant headteachers, is strikingly successful. Weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, including those relating to low expectations and the quality of teaching of reading, have been tackled and addressed. The school is continuing to improve rapidly.
- The headteacher and assistant headteachers are rightly ambitious that every possible action should be taken to secure the best education and care for the pupils of Hazel Court. The school is now a positive, forward-looking community, where therapeutic, teaching and support staff work collaboratively and play an active role in suggesting and driving further improvements.
- A culture of training and development has been embedded. Performance targets set for staff are linked to pupils' achievements as well as priorities for further school improvement. Teachers report that senior staff have high expectations of them. Teachers welcome the formal and informal visits from leaders and other colleagues as they know that the resulting discussions, advice and training will increase their skills and further benefit the pupils. Middle leaders work collaboratively across the secondary and sixth form departments, ensuring that the curriculum and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are consistent.
- There is a distinct school curriculum. It focuses on developing communication and particularly those aspects of English and mathematics that will help pupils participate in life beyond school, as well as ensuring maximum personal development. Leaders ensure that teachers use assessment information to match learning well to pupils' different needs. For example, the most able pupils have opportunities to attend mainstream lessons in the co-located secondary school. Through a topic approach, all pupils experience a broad range of curriculum subjects. The curriculum is richly supplemented by many trips, events and activities. Careful planning ensures pupils are challenged, have access to varied experiences and progress well.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding and British values are well promoted. A visit to the local council offices and topics, such as 'cultures and traditions' and the 'British day', observed during this inspection, provide opportunities to learn about the lives of different people and to understand British heritage and culture. Pupils sang and signed the national anthem, learned about the flags of the United Kingdom, discovered interesting facts about Queen Elizabeth and celebrated her birthday with a traditional street party.
- Pupil premium funding (additional money from the government) has been used to purchase resources including simple attention aids as well as sophisticated eye-gaze technology equipment. Funding has also been used to provide further literacy interventions. School performance information and pupils' individual learning records demonstrate that, as a result, better progress has been made in reading this year than previously.
- Equal opportunities are understood by staff and pupils and examples of discriminatory behaviour are extremely rare. On the contrary, pupils in both secondary and sixth form departments celebrate the achievements of others and were observed to support each other well. For example, when meeting with the inspector one pupil who communicated confidently in speech whispered encouragingly to another pupil, to facilitate their participation.
- Sixth form students benefit from detailed guidance and preparation for leaving school, including extensive work experience opportunities and supported visits to colleges. Transition arrangements at all stages are carefully planned and sensitively implemented.
- Support for the school provided, or brokered, by the local authority has been highly effective. Leaders are more confident at identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and feedback to teachers and support staff is precise and helpful. Teaching staff are looking forward to the new peer mentoring arrangements that have recently been agreed.
- Leaders, staff and the governing body seek to work with and welcome parents and carers at every opportunity. Parents reported positively on a recent communication (signing) workshop and all parents who responded to the recent school and inspection surveys expressed confidence that their children are safe and happy. Parents and carers receive a weekly newsletter and daily information about their child through a contact book. Despite this, a minority of parents feel that they do not receive as much information as they would like about their child's progress and that the notes in the contact book are not always helpful or informative.
- While senior leaders, subject leaders and governors talk about what should be improved further, some documented plans for improvement, and evaluations of recent projects, lack detail. In some cases, it is

not clear how the proposed actions or improvements would benefit the pupils.

### ■ The governance of the school

- The governing body has recently reorganised and now operates a scrutiny committee as well as full governing body meetings. Careful recruitment has ensured that governors bring excellent knowledge and skills and are well equipped to hold leaders to account. Individual governors hold specific responsibilities, related to their skills, including for finance and safeguarding.
- The governing body is clear about improvements secured across the school since the previous inspection, knowing what has worked and why. Any underperformance has been tackled rigorously and the headteacher is set challenging targets. Positive relationships exist with staff, parents and carers.
- Governors have due regard for their statutory responsibilities. They know how the pupil premium is spent and the difference that this has secured.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and all staff are appropriately trained, including in safer recruitment. Staff and governors are clear about the additional vulnerabilities of the pupils in this school and know what to do if they are concerned that a pupil is at risk. The curriculum is planned to promote personal safety and close working with other agencies is well established. Appropriate supervision is in place to promote pupils' welfare whether in school or taking part in activities beyond the school site. The school safeguarding policy has recently been reviewed. It pays close regard to most recent government guidance.

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

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly since the last inspection and are now good and sometimes outstanding. All teachers dedicate a significant amount of time to teaching communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, most pupils make good or outstanding progress.
- Teachers and support staff have a deep knowledge of each pupil's emotional, behavioural, physical, learning and communication needs. Assessment information is carefully considered and used well when planning next steps in learning. For example, in a secondary mathematics lesson some pupils worked out which objects were heavier or lighter using a pan balance, while others practised weighing cooking ingredients using kitchen scales.
- All lessons promote an aspect of academic learning and also support wider personal development. For example, students in the sixth form worked collaboratively in small groups to find the answers to quiz questions, recording their answers as individual words or sentences, appropriately developing their writing skills.
- Learning activities for pupils of all ages and abilities are interesting, engaging and purposeful. At all times, there is a strong sense of preparing pupils for their future lives and tasks have relevance to life beyond school. For example, in one secondary English lesson, pupils looked at a set of items, such as toothpaste and a flannel, and identified which room in the house these might be found in and what the items would be used for. Pupils developed reasoning, communication and writing skills as well as life skills.
- Pupils respond well to the range of resources to support communication, including individualised communication books, picture exchange systems, electronic communication boards, signing and speech. Eye-gaze technology has recently been successfully introduced for certain pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. While at the early stages of learning to use this equipment, pupils are already using it to make simple choices.
- Daily routines are well established throughout the school. Pupils of all ages enjoy coming together in the mornings for group activities such as 'wake up and shake up' in the secondary department and morning keep fit in the sixth form. Such activities help pupils prepare for the day ahead. Visual class and individual timetables, as well as 'now and next' boards, help pupils make smooth transitions from one activity to another.
- Staff work closely as a team in each classroom. Teaching assistants and support staff are clear about their roles in supporting learning and are highly effective at identifying and recording progress. Teachers and support staff are committed to improving their own skills and constantly apply and refine their own new learning.
- Teachers have high expectations for how pupils will behave and what they will achieve. Daily reading and agreed approaches to teaching phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) have raised the profile of

reading in school as well as improving pupils' skills. Pupils use their reading skills to read signs and access information beyond the classroom. Corridors throughout the school are filled with photographs and examples of work that are testament to pupils' learning.

- Strong teacher subject knowledge, as well as carefully planned activities, contribute to pupils' good progress. Occasionally, tasks are insufficiently challenging for an individual pupil. While this is noted and remedied for the next lesson, staff do not routinely make adjustments during lessons.
- In a minority of lessons, pupils have to wait too long for their turn to participate or during a self-directed activity spend too long doing nothing without intervention. At such times, pupils make less progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils learn about social situations, personal development and staying safe. A thread of safety and well-being is woven throughout the curriculum and school environment. Pupils report that bullying or unkind behaviour of any sort is extremely rare.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence in staff, greeting them warmly with smiles and affection. Pupils, including those in the sixth form, told inspectors that they feel happy in school. They trust adults, and also their peers, to help them if they are worried or need help with their learning.
- The school's relentless focus on preparation for future living ensures pupils grow in confidence and develop their independence skills. Pupils report that they are expected to work hard. Pupils can identify and communicate how their own learning has improved.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Typically, pupils are cheerful and welcoming of visitors. They respond positively and enthusiastically to most adults. Staff support pupils with challenging behaviour well and, consequently, pupils make positive gains in managing their own behaviour. There have been no exclusions this academic year. Good behaviour is expected and pupils understand this and value the rewards that they can achieve.
- In lessons and at less formal times, pupils behave well. For example, at lunchtimes pupils sit in small social groups, supported by an adult, and interact socially. When moving around the school, pupils greet each other and staff cheerfully.
- Pupils generally attend school well. The health needs of some pupils mean that they have more absences than average. However, in all cases, the school monitors attendance closely and ensures that support is given to families so that pupils attend as well as possible.

## Outcomes for pupils **are good**

- Across the school, current pupils, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, those with autistic spectrum conditions and those in the sixth form are making good progress from their different starting points. Pupils are achieving well in reading, writing and mathematics. However, as a result of their complex and extensive needs, pupils' attainment in both the secondary and sixth form departments remains significantly below that of pupils in mainstream schools.
- Teachers and leaders carry out regular checks on learning. When any pupil is making less progress than might be expected, staff work together to plan how best to address this. New approaches or additional support is provided swiftly.
- The most able pupils typically make rapid progress and benefit from a range of opportunities to learn alongside their peers in the co-located mainstream secondary school. According to their individual needs, pupils attend various subject lessons including mathematics and history. Mainstream pupils regularly support pupils at Hazel Court, for example attending the school council and modelling how to express opinions and seek change.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve similarly to their peers. Analysis of pupils' progress in key stages 3 and 4, supported by evidence in learning journals, shows that previous gaps in progress and attainment in English have almost closed and there are no longer any gaps in achievement in mathematics.
- Skilled staff make learning fun and ensure that no matter what their need, pupils are given access to a wide variety of carefully designed learning experiences. Learning to communicate a simple preference is understood by everyone to be a life-changing and life-enhancing skill and all staff seek to promote pupils'

varying communication skills at all times.

- The majority of pupils are making at least good progress in English, mathematics and personal development. This is because staff are adept at assessing pupils' educational starting points and work together with specialists to ensure each pupil has individualised targets. Lessons are tailored to stimulate and challenge pupils to repeatedly take the next small but vital steps in learning.
- Pupils access a wide range of curriculum subjects including science, history, geography, physical education and art through the range of topics studied. Pupils' learning journals record and demonstrate learning and progress over time, with pupils' work supplemented by photographs and observational notes. There are more opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to use and apply their English and mathematics skills and knowledge than previously. This is contributing to pupils' raised achievement.
- The whole of the school day is used to maximise learning for pupils. For example, pupils help prepare mid-morning snacks and, when necessary, adults support pupils learn to feed themselves and manage their hygiene.
- Pupils achieve exceptionally well in spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, benefiting from frequent trips and visits. Regular visits into the local community, including to the supermarket, enable pupils to put learning about money, shopping and travel into practice. Taking part in a school ball, or going on a residential trip, allows older pupils to benefit from experiences similar to their peers in mainstream schools.
- From the time they join the school, pupils are helped to develop a sense of their own future. There is regular conversation about next steps in learning and ambitions for future life. Transitions from primary school, between the secondary and sixth form departments and from the sixth form to college, training, employment and new living arrangements beyond are very carefully planned and implemented. Older students spoke positively to inspectors about their future ambitions. Students leave the sixth form well prepared for their next steps.
- Pupils' progress and achievement is not maximised when tasks that are too simple are not adjusted promptly or when lessons progress too slowly. Sometimes in independent activities pupils choose to do nothing and are not encouraged, soon enough, to become involved in purposeful activity.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The assistant headteacher who leads the sixth form department, and all staff who work in the sixth form, have high expectations of what students can achieve. Leaders ensure that students follow a personalised vocational pathway, including English and mathematics, that meets their individual needs. Through the curriculum, students can achieve accreditations which are currently under review to ensure that what is on offer is most appropriate for the next group of sixth form students.
- Teaching is effective and all students make good progress, including in English and mathematics, from their starting points. Staff use their knowledge of each individual to provide challenge and support. This takes many forms. For example, some students benefit from the therapeutic visits of a specially trained dog. Students are given many opportunities to practise their skills in a variety of contexts. However, when a pupil chooses not to participate in an activity, staff do not always seek to engage them swiftly.
- Students behave well, feel safe and report feeling confident in the staff to help them. Students know that it is important to try hard and that every day can be seen as a fresh start. Positive relationships were seen during 'British day' when all sixth form students had a street party, shared food with one another and listened to music together.
- Last year, all leavers left with an appropriate onward plan, with the vast majority continuing in education. A great strength of the sixth form curriculum is the emphasis placed on work experience and employment as well as preparation for further learning. Students receive high-quality careers advice and guidance about the opportunities available to them. Current pupils have had opportunities to undertake voluntary work, and work experience inside the school, in the local community and also in large well-known supermarkets and food outlets.
- Leaders seek to enable students to be as independent as possible. Frequent trips into the local community afford practice at travelling, shopping and handling money. Pupils purchase, bake and sell jacket potatoes to their peers on a weekly basis as part of their learning and enterprise development. Students are well prepared for the next stage in their life.



## School details

|                                |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 114694      |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | East Sussex |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 10002394    |

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

|                                                              |                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                                        | Special                                                                                  |
| <b>School category</b>                                       | Community special                                                                        |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                                   | 11–19                                                                                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                                      | Mixed                                                                                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>         | Mixed                                                                                    |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>                   | 80                                                                                       |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes</b> | 34                                                                                       |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                                 | The governing body                                                                       |
| <b>Chair</b>                                                 | Mike Hughesman                                                                           |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                           | Sophie Gurney                                                                            |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                                      | 01323 465 720                                                                            |
| <b>Website</b>                                               | <a href="http://www.hazelcourtschool.co.uk">www.hazelcourtschool.co.uk</a>               |
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| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                           | 3–4 October 2013                                                                         |

## Information about this school

- Hazel Court provides education for pupils who have a range of special educational needs or disability including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and autistic spectrum conditions.
- Hazel Court is a special school, organised into two phases and situated on two school sites that are three and a half miles apart. The secondary department is co-located with The Causeway School. The sixth form department is co-located with Sussex Downs College. Both phases are run by the same governing body and share the same headteacher. An assistant headteacher is based at each site. No alternative provision is used.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or statements of special educational needs.
- Approximately one third of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for pupils in local authority care or eligible for free school meals.
- Since the previous inspection, leadership arrangements have been changed. The senior leadership team now comprises a headteacher and two assistant headteachers, who were both appointed to these roles from other senior positions in the school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and the significant majority are boys.
- The school works in partnership with other local schools and alliances to improve teaching and learning. This includes the East Sussex Special School Alliance and Cuckmere House Teaching School.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 18 lessons, all of which were conducted jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders and staff, members of the governing body, parents, pupils and a representative from the local authority.
- A range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's information about pupils' achievement, records concerning pupils' attendance and behaviour and the school's systems for recruiting and vetting staff.
- Pupils' learning journals were also looked at.
- Inspectors took account of 15 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). There were no responses to the staff or pupil questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Corbett

Ofsted Inspector



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