

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Frank Stanford
Headteacher
Cuckmere House School
Eastbourne Road
Seaford
East Sussex
BN25 4BA

Dear Mr Stanford

Short inspection of Cuckmere House School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 2018 with Simon Yates, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your deep commitment to the school and exceptional leadership are reflected in the quality of support you provide for the pupils and their families. Together with trustees and governors, you have created a culture where teamwork is the key to success. The collaborative work across the multi-academy trust at different levels further strengthens the work of the school in securing extremely positive outcomes for pupils. You, your staff, trustees and governors constantly strive to improve outcomes for all pupils, both in their academic studies and in their personal development.

Your self-evaluation is accurate and clearly defines the school's many strengths. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that the provision for pupils is outstanding. You and your staff are always looking to improve the school further and consider carefully factors which may affect its future work.

Your highly motivated staff are proud to work at the school and know that leaders respect the excellent work that they do. They are well trained and feel exceptionally well supported. Your staff work with passion and enthusiasm to provide every pupil with a personalised curriculum that unlocks their potential and enables them to thrive. Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. Staff show genuine concern and care to all pupils. Pupils' best interests are at the heart of

every decision. Parents describe staff as 'reliable, responsible and dedicated' and able to see the potential in their children.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, and their behaviour around the school is excellent. They are settled and able to focus and concentrate in lessons, showing high levels of engagement with their learning. They are polite and well-mannered and demonstrate respect and consideration for each other and the adults in the school.

Parents are unanimous in their support for your 'amazing school'. All parents that shared their views with the inspectors were complimentary about the quality and education and care that their children receive. They recognise the progress that their children have made since joining the school in both personal development and academic achievement and would recommend the school.

Trustees and governors ask searching and pertinent questions of leaders to check that the school's provision continues to be outstanding. They recognise the impact of your inspirational leadership in empowering and supporting staff at all levels to develop their practice. Consequently, governors and trustees share your high expectations and have a deep understanding of the school which helps them contribute to its continued improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a strong and effective safeguarding culture where pupils' safety and well-being have a high priority. The designated safeguarding officers are knowledgeable, both in relation to safeguarding practice, and about the pupils in the school. They share best practice across the multi-academy trust. Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained to support the pupils in their care. Appropriate and timely training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about potential risks.

Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The safeguarding governor has attended appropriate training and has oversight and scrutiny of relevant processes. She meets regularly with the designated safeguarding officers and visits the school.

The wider staff team has a strong working knowledge of safeguarding issues and understands the risks to their pupils. Staff engage closely with parents, carers and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

The systems to safeguard pupils are robust and are monitored rigorously by leaders, who take swift action when safeguarding concerns are raised.

Pupils say that they feel safe and know that they can share any concerns with an adult. This is as a result of the trusting relationships between pupils and staff. Parents agree that their children are safe in school and that they are well looked after. Through assemblies, the wider curriculum and one-to-one work, pupils are encouraged and supported to keep themselves safe in both the real and the online

world.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection the school has become part of the SABDEN Multi-Academy Trust. This has brought benefits to the school through collaborative working and the sharing of good practice. It is also clear that you and your school leaders bring skills and expertise to advance further the work of the trust.
- During this inspection, we looked particularly at whether leaders have maintained a high standard of education since the last inspection. We also considered the actions being taken to improve attendance.
- The high-quality teaching seen at the last inspection has continued. You have established a very strong culture of professional dialogue, support and challenge among your staff. Staff appreciate the professional development that they receive and told inspectors that they feel 'enthused and empowered' in their roles. They value the many opportunities that they have to share skills and knowledge with each other, and with colleagues in other schools. Staff feel highly valued, and know that their well-being is important to you, stating: 'Everyone cares for each other.'
- You place the development of the whole child at the centre of everything that you do. The school is a learning community that provides excellent education and care for its pupils. Skilfully designed activities meet the needs and interests of the pupils, in particular with the focus on outdoor learning and the range of activities to motivate and engage pupils in their learning. Inspectors observed pupils in key stage 2 using their mathematical skills to work out the area and perimeter of a tennis court on the school field. The curriculum is carefully designed to support the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils are calm and focused, and show a commitment to achieving the best they can. They told us that 'learning is fun' and that teachers show them how to improve their work as well as celebrating the progress they have made.
- Teaching is well structured and pupils know exactly what they are expected to achieve. Work is closely matched to pupils' abilities, with an appropriate level of challenge for individual pupils so that they can extend their learning further. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants are extremely successful in engaging pupils in learning. Curriculum targets are closely measured using the school's assessment systems. Leaders and teachers regularly check the accuracy of their judgements about pupils' achievement by comparing their achievement with that of pupils in other schools in the trust, and local mainstream schools.
- All pupils take accredited courses and are aware of the high expectations from school staff for them to achieve. Pupils are supported to make choices at the end of key stage 3 to prepare them for their future pathways in education or training, and appreciate the advice given by careers advisers. A pupil in Year 10 spoke of the accreditations he had already taken in preparation for his next steps into college and how he was looking to improve on his results if needed. He was also aware of the progress he had made in being able to manage his emotions and the impact this had on his ability to concentrate.

- Staff know and understand extremely well the pupils in their care. As a result, they are able to manage pupils' behaviour in a well-judged and timely manner. The exceptionally strong relationships within the school contribute effectively to the strong progress that pupils make. Pupils behave exceptionally well, both in lessons and when taking part in outdoor activities. They are able to learn strategies to self-regulate their behaviour, and understand how the school rewards system supports them to behave appropriately. The result of this is that the number of exclusions and repeat exclusions has fallen.
- Staff use a range of assessment information to identify accurately the next steps in pupils' academic, social and emotional learning. Consequently, pupils are given the bespoke help that they need. This ensures that the very successful transition into school, often following negative experiences in previous schools, has a direct impact on pupils' progress. This success is evident in pupils' books and the high quality of their work seen across the school. Pupils take pride in their work, and are aware of their achievements, both academically and in their personal development. Current assessment tracking shows that the majority of pupils are making strong progress.
- Leaders are devoted to improving attendance for every pupil, and demonstrate their determination through a commitment to following up every absence. The school has identified that positive relationships with pupils, families and a range of agencies are key to improving attendance, and this is at the heart of their approach. There is clear analysis both of individual attendance and of the impact of the school's actions to improve attendance. This is still an area for improvement identified by the school. The vast majority of pupils have much improved attendance compared to their previous placement. However, there is still a minority, whose low attendance means that they cannot benefit fully from the outstanding provision provided by the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they pursue vigorously all avenues to ensure improved attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Johns
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We considered a range of school information, including your self-evaluation and

current school improvement plans. We discussed your assessment of pupils' progress across the school, and you shared with us evidence of your assessment process. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies, the single central register of checks on staff, and a sample of safeguarding files. We looked at attendance and behaviour records.

During the day inspectors met with you, other members of the leadership team, and staff. I also had a discussion with the chair of trustees and one other governor. I spoke to your school improvement partner. Inspectors conducted learning walks with the head of school and assistant headteacher. We visited classrooms and the breakfast club. We observed outdoor activities, where we had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. Inspectors met formally with a group of staff, two groups of pupils (secondary and primary), and spoke with a number of parents. I also took account of the seven free-text comments and the nine responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I considered 37 responses to the staff survey and 46 responses to the pupil survey.