

# Inspection of The Flagship School

The Ridge, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 2AE

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Inspection dates: 16 and 17 March 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Inadequate**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5  
of the Education Act 2005

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

While some pupils enjoy coming to school, others do not. Equally, some parents and carers are positive about the school, but others are not. They do not feel that their children are safe in school. This was borne out by the evidence that inspectors found.

Staff work with great dedication and want to provide a safe and nurturing environment for pupils. Inspectors witnessed examples of positive and trusting relationships between pupils and staff during the inspection. However, too often, the behaviour of pupils is unsafe, disrespectful and disruptive. One pupil reflected, 'There should be more consequences for your actions, rather than just get picked up and go home,' and that, 'Behaviour is bad here because staff don't do anything.' Another pupil expressed the same sentiment, saying, 'People don't follow the rules. People don't do what they are told by staff.'

Expectations of what pupils can achieve and of their engagement in learning are not high enough. Some pupils are desperate to learn, but staff do not have the strategies or procedures in place to deal effectively with poor behaviour. This results in what is often a chaotic environment in which some pupils feel bullied and threatened, and leaders are constantly addressing problems and concerns.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Since the school opened in September 2021, leaders have faced some serious challenges in running the school. Their capacity to do anything other than react to day-to-day events has been severely restricted. This is because they are constantly dealing with poor behaviour and the problems caused by temporary accommodation.

Trustees are aware of some of the issues, but have failed to act effectively to address these. They told inspectors that they knew there were problems with some aspects of safeguarding, but were not aware of how serious the situation really was.

Although the school started with an appropriate curriculum on paper, it has not been possible to implement much of what leaders had intended. Leaders do not have the capacity to monitor the impact of the curriculum properly. This is exemplified by the school's programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education, where staff are left to 'cherry pick' aspects of the school's scheme of work. The school is not currently teaching a modern foreign language. Two teachers have left since the school opened. In a discussion about the curriculum with inspectors, the principal reflected on the current situation, saying, 'There are huge gaps,' and, 'This is an impossible task and we need help.'

Leadership of the curriculum is limited. This currently falls mostly to the principal and the vice-principal, who also has a full teaching commitment without non-contact time. The vice-principal is also the school's deputy designated safeguarding lead.

The school's programme to teach pupils to read is muddled. Leaders do not have clear oversight, despite recently introducing a new resource to assess pupils' progress. Leaders are not clear about what resources are being used in classrooms. Although the principal told inspectors that one phonics programme was in use, the reality is that a range of resources from different programmes are being used. Pupils do read set texts together as a class, sometimes linked to topic themes. However, leaders have no real oversight or plan of what is read and when.

A sizeable minority of pupils currently do not attend school at all. The behaviour of many of those who do is poor. Their attitudes to learning are mixed because staff do not have high enough expectations. In classrooms, much off-task behaviour is ignored or simply passively observed and not acknowledged or challenged by staff. This includes the use of offensive language. Classroom visits on both days showed the school to be in a constant state of chaos. When pupils do want to learn, their chances are severely restricted by the actions of other pupils. This was typified by one example of a girl showing an inspector her work and having the book snatched away by another pupil.

Pupils are not supported well enough in their journey to become responsible citizens. Their personal development, including their understanding of what it means to live in modern Britain, is severely restricted because the school cannot deliver its intended curriculum. Extra-curricular activities are limited. Careers education for older pupils is not in place. The vice-principal reflected that educational visits out of school are not wise in the current circumstances, referring to the behaviour of pupils. The principal told inspectors about the recent experience of a police community support officer being sworn at and having resources ripped up when she visited the school.

Despite the daily adversity with which staff are faced, they remain positive about the school and are supportive of leaders. This includes those new to teaching.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Trustees' oversight of safeguarding is not strong enough. Although staff work hard to ensure that pupils are safe, the school is not a safe environment. There are too few staff to ensure that pupils are supervised safely at all times. Sometimes staff resort to locking pupils in rooms to keep them safe from other pupils because they lack effective behaviour management strategies. While some parents are happy, others expressed a view that their children feel unsafe. The school's accommodation is not suitable for pupils with complex special educational needs. Some written records for safeguarding and behaviour incidents are incomplete or lack detail, and physical interventions are not recorded fully.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Safeguarding is not effective because leaders have not provided staff with clear strategies to keep pupils physically safe in the school. Staff are too stretched when serious incidents occur. Not enough are available to supervise pupils safely and effectively on a day-to-day basis. Policies for dealing with poor behaviour and physical intervention are not working, especially when the specific needs and vulnerabilities of pupils are taken into account. The school's temporary accommodation is not well suited to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders and trustees need to review appropriate policies and practices. They need to ensure that staff have access to appropriate training and resources. This will give staff the confidence and ability to deal with unsafe behaviour when it occurs, thus ensuring that the school becomes a safe place for pupils and staff.
- Written safeguarding and behaviour records are not detailed enough. They do not accurately reflect serious behaviour incidents or full safeguarding chronologies. Despite the current information management system being in place since the school opened, leaders have not yet completed the full range of training available to use it. Crucially, leaders and trustees are not fully confident that the system works well enough for the school. Leaders and trustees need to review this situation urgently so that they have full confidence in the systems they use. They also need to ensure the fidelity of the information that leaders and staff record, so that chronologies are complete and incidents that include physical interventions are fully captured, reviewed and acted on.
- Currently, leaders do not have the capacity to run the school safely and effectively. Simply put, too few leaders wear too many hats. Senior leaders are constantly responding to live issues, often dealing with poor behaviour, which distracts them from their core duties. Trustees should act now to address this fundamental issue (the lack of leadership capacity), which undermines all aspects of leaders' work, including oversight of the curriculum and the personal development of pupils.
- The school's curriculum lacks leadership and is not being delivered according to leaders' intentions. Senior leaders do not have effective oversight of what pupils are taught and when. They readily admit that individual schemes of work are not being fully implemented in the way they originally intended. Leaders and trustees need to revisit the rationale for the school's curriculum. A full review of what pupils will learn in each subject needs to be completed. This includes the school's phonics and early reading programme. This will enable leaders to have a new benchmark with which to monitor the curriculum, and for staff to deliver a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all pupils.
- The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are poor. While this is partly linked to safeguarding issues already identified, low-level disruption also needs to be addressed so that pupils can access learning in classrooms. The current behaviour policy is not working. Leaders and trustees need to rethink all aspects of how

staff manage behaviour to reduce serious incidents, such as pupils threatening and attacking other pupils, or the constant damage to the fabric of the building.

- Some pupils do not attend the school as much as they should. This is particularly the case with pupils with very complex needs, which leaders consider probably cannot be met by the school. Part of the problem stems from procedures to assess pupils' needs prior to their joining the school, but also, not enough is being done when placements break down. Leaders and trustees should review the school's work to improve attendance, including the most difficult cases, so that pupils, including the most vulnerable, are not absent from school for extended periods.
- Work to support pupils' personal development is weak. Leaders reflect that pupils' behaviour is impacting negatively on the ability of staff to offer much in the way of enrichment, extra-curricular activities and educational visits. Leaders need to be mindful that the wider curriculum offer, including careers information and guidance and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain, should be afforded equal importance as the academic side of their curriculum provision.
- Having considered the evidence, the lead inspector strongly recommends that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	148055
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10225326
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy free special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	6 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	22
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair</b>	Helen Kay
<b>Principal</b>	Stephanie Salter
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.theflagshipschool.org.uk">www.theflagshipschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The Flagship School is a free special school that is registered for up to 76 pupils between the ages of six and 16. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan, which in most cases is primarily for social, emotional and mental health needs.
- At the time of the inspection, there were 22 pupils on roll spread across Years 5, 6, 7 and 8. The intention is that the school will increase its pupil numbers gradually in the coming years.
- The school opened in September 2021 and is currently based in temporary accommodation adjacent to the site where its new buildings are being constructed.
- Many pupils have experienced gaps in their education or have been excluded from their previous schools prior to joining this school.
- The school is governed by a board of trustees.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection was carried out following a complaint made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether pupils were safe and whether their behaviour was a cause for concern.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the principal, vice-principal and teaching and support staff. Inspectors met with the chair of the board of trustees, accompanied by one other trustee. Inspectors also met briefly with a school improvement partner commissioned by the local authority who was visiting the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and PSHE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.
- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's survey, Parent View. The lead inspector also talked to a parent on day two of the inspection.

## Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Macdonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

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