

# Inspection of Cuckmere House School

Eastbourne Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 4BA

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Inspection dates:	8 and 9 July 2025
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The principal of this school is David Donnelly. This school is part of The Sabden Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jo Foulkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lucianne Stenning.

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

Pupils often arrive at this school with significant disruption to their education. Kind and caring staff have high expectations for pupils' achievements and wider success. They work with determination to understand pupils' individual social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Staff use a range of effective approaches to quickly minimise or remove the barriers that pupils face. As a result, pupils feel valued, safe and happy. They achieve well from their starting points.

Pupils are proud to be part of this vibrant and inclusive school. They grow to appreciate their differences and develop genuine friendships. There is a tangible sense of belonging here. Staff help pupils to manage their emotions by employing a range of carefully thought out strategies. Pupils learn to reflect on their feelings and actions. This helps them to build their self-confidence, resilience and character.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their interests and talents. They relish the 'options programme', which includes activities, such as chess, cooking, indoor games and computing. Older pupils can also complete the Duke of Edinburgh award. The school provides rich experiences for pupils, which help them to grow in their understanding of the local area and beyond. Pupils relish these and thrive as a result.

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

Since the last inspection, the school's curriculum has undergone vital improvements. This includes the design of the curriculum for pupils who attend Tower House, which provides specialist support for pupils with autism. Across subjects, careful thought has been given to ensure that the important knowledge pupils are expected to learn is well considered. This means that new learning builds progressively. Older pupils achieve a range of nationally accredited courses and are well prepared for their next stage of their education.

The school has worked resolutely to ensure that reading is central to its curriculum. Across subjects, staff ensure that pupils have every opportunity to practise their reading skills and develop their vocabulary. An exciting range of texts are available to re-ignite pupils' love of reading. Any gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge are identified accurately. They receive tailored support to help them catch up quickly. Consequently, pupils become confident and fluent readers.

Staff use information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to adapt the delivery of the curriculum. For example, staff use a range of effective strategies to help pupils visualise ideas clearly. This helps pupils to understand concepts more easily. Staff make careful checks on what pupils know and need to learn next. However, in a few subjects, for some pupils, the school does not make use of its subject expertise effectively enough for all pupils. As a result, some pupils do not have the opportunity to learn as well as they could.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength. Staff are skilled at managing any unsettled behaviour effectively. As a result, the school is a calm and positive environment. Pupils enjoy eating

lunch together with staff. This fosters a sense of belonging among the close-knit school community.

The school works closely with pupils and their families to address barriers to attendance. Nevertheless, some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. They miss out on important learning and wider experiences.

Pupils' personal development is a priority. Effective careers advice and guidance supports pupils to develop a personal careers pathway. They learn about important topics, such as healthy relationships and how to look after their mental and physical well-being. Pupils enjoy their leadership roles as members of the school council, as reading champions, 'eco-warriors' or peer mentors.

Staff appreciate the school's work to reduce their workload and support their well-being. Trustees carry out appropriate checks to make sure statutory duties are met. However, they have not provided enough challenge over time. They are taking action to address this. The trust is beginning to set up a local governing board, but this is at an early stage and has not made a tangible difference to the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- Some pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. As a result, these pupils miss out on essential learning and vital school experiences. The trust should persist with determination to ensure that their ongoing work leads to further tangible improvements in pupils' attendance.
- In a few subjects, the school does not make use of its subject expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they could. The trust should move forward with its actions to address this so that all pupils experience high-quality teaching across the curriculum and achieve strong outcomes.

## **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.

## Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	142146
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10379894
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	6 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	93
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Lucianne Stenning
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Jo Foulkes
<b>Principal</b>	David Donnelly
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sabden.org.uk">www.sabden.org.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	23 and 24 January 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Cuckmere House School is part of The Sabden Multi Academy Trust. The principal took up his post in September 2024. A new chair of trustees was appointed in March 2025.
- The school caters for pupils aged 6 to 16 with SEMH needs. All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- The school is comprised of three sites. Pupils can attend the largest site, Cuckmere House. Tower House is a key stage 2 and 3 provision for 16 pupils. The Unit is an off-site workshop operated by the school, where secondary pupils learn construction and carpentry.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the principal, other senior and curriculum leaders, staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust and with two trustees online, including the chair of the board. She also held a remote meeting with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team attended the three sites to visit lessons, speak with pupils, meet teachers and look at a range of pupils' work.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and 'the explore' curriculum. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector listened to some pupils read aloud to familiar adults.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff survey and spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school.
- The inspection team took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text responses.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences of school life. They also considered the responses to the confidential pupil survey.
- The inspection team reviewed a range of the school's documents, including self-evaluation reports, minutes of governing body meetings and behaviour incident logs.

## Inspection team

Louise Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lee Selby

His Majesty's Inspector

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