



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report
SAXON MOUNT SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 114691
LEA: East Sussex

Inspection Dates: 6 – 9 July 2004
Reporting Inspector: Helen Sharpe HMI

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Saxon Mount School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Saxon Mount is a secondary special school that provides education for 113 pupils aged 11 - 16 who have moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Pupils with additional needs are now being admitted, including those with more complex learning needs and speech and language difficulties. Some pupils have associated emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Within the school there is a facility for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders that is made up of two classes in which up to 12 pupils are taught. In the school as a whole there are over twice as many boys as girls; at the time of the inspection there were 77 boys and 34 girls on roll. Pupils come from a wide area of East Sussex, stretching from Camber to Bexhill-on-Sea. About 42 percent of pupils are eligible for free school meals and no pupils have English as an additional language.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Overall, pupils make good progress in their personal development and adequate progress in their academic learning. The school has a positive and friendly ethos. Pupils' behaviour is mostly good; they are interested learners and have good relationships with staff.

The quality of teaching and learning is at least adequate and for some pupils, in particular those in the facility for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) it is consistently good. Pupils follow an appropriate curriculum that includes a good range of additional activities these make an important contribution to their social and physical development. By the end of Year 11 most pupils achieve success in a number of external examinations. Teachers, teaching assistants, the therapists and the welfare officer, work together well and provide good care and support for pupils.

The newly formed leadership and senior management teams are beginning to identify some areas for development, mostly in relation to pupils' personal development and care. There is less focus on raising pupils' academic standards. Managers do not yet rigorously monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision and standards achieved, and priorities for development are not yet clearly defined in the improvement plan. The school currently provides satisfactory value for money.

Grade: 3

Improvement since the last inspection

There have been improvements in most of the areas identified at the last inspection. Managers now monitor teaching annually. The resources, and the planning and assessment for information and communication technology (ICT) have improved, although the impact on standards is not yet evident; music and religious education have been introduced; almost all of the safety issues have been fully addressed; the accommodation has considerably improved and is now very good. Teachers' planning for the whole range of ability and the assessment and recording of pupils' learning have improved but inconsistencies between subjects remain.

Grade: 3

Capacity to improve

The schools capacity to improve is satisfactory. Staff care about pupils and want them to enjoy their education and to do well. Improvement is gradual but with support from the local education authority (LEA), senior managers are beginning to gather evidence about weaknesses and to understand how to plan with sufficient focus to bring about improvement.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

Raise standards for all groups of learners by:

- rigorously monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's provision and prioritising areas for development through effective school improvement planning
- improving assessment and recording in all subjects and using the information obtained to improve learning and teaching
- analysing assessment data more thoroughly to determine how much progress has been made by groups of learners and individual pupils.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The school grades itself as good but inspection evidence indicates that this is slightly generous. Standards overall are adequate and pupils make good progress in their personal development and acceptable progress overall. Pupils enjoy learning and they develop good speaking and listening skills which improve their confidence and self esteem. Pupils in the ASD facility make good progress in all areas as there is a strong focus on the needs and abilities of individual learners. However, in the rest of the school the small number of higher attaining pupils and those with the most severe learning difficulties make slower progress as work is not always sufficiently matched to their abilities and understanding.

Last year the school exceeded its Key Stage 4 targets for achievement in external examinations. Most pupils achieved success in up to five entry level certificates and one or two GCSEs. It is difficult to judge the challenge of the school's targets because there is a lack of overall data to show how much progress individual pupils have made in each subject during their time at the school. This means that managers cannot analyse individual progress across all subject areas or compare variations between different groups of learners.

Discussions with pupils indicate that they know they have made good progress in reading as their test scores have improved. They are less clear about the progress they have made in other areas of the curriculum, or about their targets for further improvement.

Grade: 3

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school rightly identifies that the personal development of pupils is good. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, they are polite and friendly and they demonstrate good attitudes and behaviour in lessons and around the school. Attendance has improved since the last inspection, but the level of unauthorised absence for a small group of Key Stage 4 pupils remains too high. In the last academic year there have been no permanent exclusions but there have been a high number of fixed-term exclusions.

The school ensures that pupils learn about healthy living. They are encouraged to include exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle and they enjoy both their physical education lessons and the additional sporting activities. Some pupils are able to make positive contributions to the school community through participation in the school council and older pupils benefit from good work experiences.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. These aspects of pupils' development are promoted well, in out of school activities and in the better lessons, where teachers provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own and others experiences. As a result, pupils work together well and respect others feelings and values. Around the school there are interesting and colourful displays of events and pupils' work demonstrate that pupils take part in a good range of social, sporting and cultural activities.

Grade: 2

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The school judges the quality of its provision to be good and the inspection evidence supports this judgement.

All teaching is at least adequate and it has many good aspects. In one lesson, the skilful use of stimulating resources inspired pupils so that they developed a clear understanding about working conditions in factories in the nineteenth century. This was thoroughly enjoyed by all pupils. The teaching in the ASD facility is very good. There is detailed planning for each pupil which links lesson objectives to individual targets. The assessment of their learning from the time they join the class is thorough and assessment information is used effectively to ensure that appropriate activities are planned and progress recorded. In better lessons across the school, questioning is used well to check pupils' understanding. Staff help pupils to develop the confidence to answer questions fully and to contribute their ideas. Appropriate use is made of visual cues to increase pupils' understanding of text and this ensures that their interest and concentration are sustained. They enjoy the lessons and behave well. There is a new learning and teaching policy which is a useful guide for staff but this has not yet impacted on teaching across all subjects. Assessment information is not used consistently to inform teachers' planning; this means that some teaching is not always sufficiently matched to the needs of the learners such as the highest attaining pupils and those with the most severe learning difficulties. Most lessons have a clear structure but plenary sessions are not consistently used to reinforce and assess pupils' learning.

The curriculum matches the needs of the pupils well and the Key Stage 3 and primary strategies have had a positive impact on the quality of planning. Planning for some subjects and lessons takes into account the ability of the whole range of learners, but in others this is inadequately addressed. Personal and social education is promoted well during the school day and through additional activities such as visits to France and participation in sporting events. A new personal, health and social education (PHSE) co-ordinator has been appointed for next term but the lack of a co-ordinator throughout this year has hindered the consistent implementation of the PHSE and citizenship schemes of work.

Pupils have equal access to almost all areas of the curriculum but girls have very limited choice in the options sessions compared to boys. The pupils in the ASD facility currently do not have access to the science laboratory as staff have concerns about their safety.

The school takes good care of its pupils and staff are committed to supporting their health, safety and welfare. Most parents value the care and support the school provides for their children and themselves. The pupils report that they feel safe in school although a small minority reported concerns about bullying. There are suitable procedures for identifying and addressing issues related to child protection and incidents of concern. The school welfare officer offers good pastoral support to individual pupils and the speech and language therapists work closely with teachers in establishing appropriate programmes for pupils.

Since the last inspection the organisation of taxis at the end of the school day has improved but, in wet weather in particular, safety issues remain. The school is aware of this and action is being taken.

Grade: 2

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school evaluates leadership and management as good. The inspection evidence demonstrates it is adequate.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school strongly focused on the personal development of all pupils. However, senior managers and subject co-ordinators are not yet sufficiently focused on monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility and raising the standards of all learners.

The roles of senior managers have recently been revised but their responsibilities are not yet clearly defined. Staff are not sufficiently held to account for the quality, or the outcomes of their work. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education provided and the standards pupils achieve are at an early stage of development. This makes it difficult for senior managers, subject co-ordinators and governors to be fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan is not yet completed but it sets out priorities more clearly than the previous plan. However, the areas for development have not been derived from robust monitoring, evaluation or data analysis.

The school is strengthening further its partnership with parents. Regular surveys seek parents' views, and their comments at annual reviews indicate that most are satisfied with the progress their children make, in particular in the development of self esteem. Links have been established with some local colleges which ensure pupils are prepared for their move to appropriate placements at the end of Key Stage 4. The school has recognised that there is a need to increase links with local mainstream schools. Accommodation is very good. The experienced staff work well as a team but demands on them are high as most co-ordinate a subject and teach a number of others. The long term lack of an English co-ordinator has led to some inconsistencies in practice.

Grade: 3

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