

Inspection Report

CUCKMERE HOUSE SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 114696

LEA: East Sussex

Headteacher: Mr F Stanford
Chair of Governors: Mrs A Gibbins

Lead Inspector: Maureen York HMI
Inspection Dates: 21 - 23 September 2004

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School Contact Details

Headteacher: Mr F Stanford
Chair of Governors: Mrs A Gibbins

Cuckmere House School
Eastbourne Road
Seaford
East Sussex
BN25 4BA

Telephone: 01323 893319
E mail: akesh@cuckmerehouse.e-sussex.sch.uk

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 Cuckmere House School and of the local education authority. The inspection was carried out by 2 of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Description of the school

Cuckmere House is a special school for boys aged between 5 and 16 and is set in a quiet residential area of East Sussex. It caters for boys with statements of special educational needs with severe emotional, behavioural and social difficulties who live in East Sussex. The school offers up to 60 places (12 residential) and also incorporates a primary phase pupil referral unit. A significant number of pupils have a range of additional special needs. 65% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. No pupil has English as an additional language. At the time of the inspection there were 51 boys on roll. Attainment on entry is below national expectations.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

This is an outstanding school which provides very good value for money. It significantly enhances the life chances of the boys and has excellent relationships with parents who value the education and care provided. Inspirational leadership at all levels ensures that there is a sense of purpose across the school. While the management team has a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths it is also able to correctly identify areas for improvement. Cuckmere House is a happy school where pupils enjoy learning and, as a result of the total commitment of the whole staff, nearly all pupils achieve as much as they can and overcome their previous difficulties. Standards are good and by the end of year 11 most boys achieve success in a number of external examinations. They have very positive attitudes and are developing into responsible members of the community. Procedures for ensuring the safety of the pupils are very robust and, as a consequence, the boys feel safe and secure. This enables them to respond positively to the high expectations teachers have of them. The extended day activities and residential provision make a very strong contribution to the development of the pupils' personal skills and through appropriate target setting they are supported in understanding how to care for themselves. There is an emphasis on healthy eating and physical activity. The staff understand how these approaches have a major impact on the pupils' learning. The headteacher has a realistic and ambitious approach to the future development of the school.

Grade: 1

Improvement since the last inspection

There has been very good improvement on all of the issues identified at the last inspection. The pupils now have more opportunities to experience other cultures and the wider community. The spiritual dimension is effectively promoted by encouraging mutual respect and by allowing the boys time for reflection. All aspects of the information and communication technology curriculum are in place, additional learning needs are identified and appropriate support programmes put in place. Teaching remains very good and the pupils continue to achieve very well.

Grade: 1

Capacity to improve

The school has excellent capacity for continuous improvement. There is a strong leadership team supported by an effective governing body. School self-evaluation is well used and the headteacher strategically balances the needs of the school with developing wider partnerships within the local education community. There is considerable expertise in this school and its effective support for both individual pupils and school managers in other establishments is highly valued, especially the significant contribution made to this work by the deputy headteacher.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the precision of individual target setting across all subjects.
- Liaise with external agencies to minimise the difficulties experienced by some pupils who travel long distances to school.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

This school transforms the lives of its pupils and restores their faith in their abilities and in themselves. Boys achieve good standards by the end of each key stage and progress in relation to their prior attainment is very good; they are able to overcome their significant past difficulties. Very good progress is made in achieving behaviour targets. Pupils make very good academic and vocational progress in lessons and most meet their learning goals and targets, achieving appropriate qualifications. The behaviour of pupils is excellent and parents confirm that the school positively changes the behaviour of the boys and prepares them well for future study or employment. The pupils are enthusiastic about learning and want to come to school.

The extended day and residential provision make a significant contribution to the achievement of the pupils and this is a direct result of clear and well understood routines, together with the consistent approach used by all members of the staff team. Attendance is good and is slightly above the average for schools with pupils who have similar difficulties. However, although the school manages this well, the punctuality of some pupils who travel long distances to school is affected by recurring transport difficulties. Health issues are taken seriously. The pupils have appropriate consideration for the safety of others; this is promoted well in various lessons such as design and technology. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are very good and there is good evidence to show that weaknesses in aspects of cultural and spiritual development have been remedied. Spiritual development is extended well through planned and structured assemblies and there are significant improvements in the cultural aspects of curriculum content and planning. The boys are also given good opportunities to make a contribution to their community. This is a school where learning is valued and one with a focus on improving standards of achievement, no matter what the previous attainment or difficulties of the pupils.

Grade: 1

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The provision is very good. The teachers show high levels of proficiency and confidence in the management of pupils' learning, and teaching throughout the school is very good. Key to this is the teachers' very good subject knowledge, combined with their skill in behaviour management. Teachers plan lessons very carefully to match individual learning needs and curriculum requirements. They keep detailed records of pupils' work, sharing these with parents and pupils to ensure that progress is monitored and maintained. Teachers ensure that lessons proceed at a good pace, making it very clear to pupils exactly what they want them to learn. This skilled teaching creates a climate in which learning is seen as an enjoyable activity. In a year 7 music lesson, pupils learned to play an accompaniment on a xylophone to the teacher's spirited rendition of "Rock around the clock". Carefully structured teaching and the close attention to pupils' differing rates of progress led to a productive and enjoyable lesson for all. The teachers are highly proficient in helping pupils to stay on task, while encouraging them to become more independent learners. In an English lesson the late arrival of one pupil was successfully managed so that the pupils continued their work. This was because a settled and purposeful atmosphere had been created. Teaching assistants, in particular, provide excellent support. A particularly strong feature is the handover meeting at the end of the day between classroom staff and those leading the after school activities. These meetings are highly focused and informative and contribute greatly to the pupils' settled transition into after school activities.

The classrooms are bright and well decorated, and make excellent use of good-quality display to celebrate the work of pupils. Good use is made of well-prepared and up-to-date learning resources, including electronic whiteboards.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, and is planned to meet national curriculum and external examination requirements. The curriculum is well matched and focused on responding to the pupils' needs and abilities. There is an appropriate balance between the vocational and academic focus and workplace skills are well covered. The development of social skills is paramount in all aspects of provision and the development of these is outstanding. An integral part of the curriculum is the involvement of pupils in a wide range of educational visits out of school. These visits are highly valued by pupils, and contribute to the strong emphasis placed on the development of social skills as a platform for future life. Very good provision is made for learning about safe and healthy life styles. There are close links with a local further education college and with local employers through vocational courses and work experience. These contacts offer older pupils an excellent work-related curriculum, and provide productive links with employment opportunities. Personal development is a strength of the school. The staff understand the needs of pupils and they ensure that they are very well cared for and supported.

The school carefully analyses the assessment information it collects about pupils. There are, however, minor weaknesses in the precision of target setting in some academic subjects with over-general targets set on occasions.

Grade: 1

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher is a highly effective leader and manager, and provides a clear sense of purpose and direction for all his staff. He sets exacting standards for the quality of care, guidance and education, and closely monitors the school's performance. The senior management team is very successful in supporting staff and pupils. The school has a particularly strong teamwork ethos in which all are valued for their contribution to the pupils' welfare. Formal and informal communication is very good and teachers feel well supported by their colleagues. Professional development is linked to whole school improvement and to personal development and is used effectively to provide training for staff in key areas of education and guidance, for example, stress management. Staff are well qualified for their roles, and have high levels of professional expertise. The governing body fulfils all its legal requirements and supports the school very well. Its members have a good knowledge of their roles and responsibilities.

The school makes exceptionally good use of resources, staffing and accommodation, and provides very good value for money. The school environment is very attractive, and well cared for by staff and pupils. Excellent links have been established with partner schools through a number of intervention and support programmes. Senior staff play a key part in supporting and training other teachers within the local education authority, and in developing and implementing strategies for working with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is a clear focus on equal opportunities. No discrimination is evident, and disadvantaged pupils are given strong support.

Grade: 1

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