

Bowden House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100986
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	307552
Inspection date	22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Paul Taylor

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Wendy Phillips
Headteacher	Mr Gerry Crook
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2005
School address	Firle Road Seaford BN25 2JB
Telephone number	01323 893138
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average residential special school. It draws over half its students from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the remainder from neighbouring local authorities. All students are resident at the school and have a statement of special educational need to provide for their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In addition, a number of students have additional learning difficulties, which include specific learning difficulties and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The headteacher has been in post for just over one year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education for its students with significant improvements since the last inspection. Students enter the school with a history of education that has often involved significant periods of disruption due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many students have a history of poor attendance and have often been out of school for extended periods. The personal development and well-being of the students and aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.

The school leadership team has been in post for just over one year and works very effectively with the well-established care management team. This partnership, led by the headteacher has overseen steady improvements in behaviour and attendance. The curriculum is also better than at the last inspection and is now good. Enriched by an increased emphasis on vocational education, including regular access to further education, work experience and short courses in academic and creative GCSE's. A weakness in this improved curriculum is the lack of lessons in a modern foreign language for Key Stage 3 students.

Students report that they feel safe in school and that they have someone to talk to if they face difficulties. Students are aware of the elements of healthy living and many do their best to take regular exercise. The students' views of school meals are mixed even though the quality is undoubtedly good. Students make a good contribution to the school community through the school council and on occasions contribute to the wider community, for example through charity fundraising and exhibiting art for a wider audience.

The care, guidance and support provided is good. Students are supported to settle in to boarding and know they have adults with whom to discuss concerns. Students value the reward system that is in operation. However, the use of targets for academic improvement and the guidance provided are inconsistent. Students' attainment on entry to the school is generally well below the levels expected of students of their age, often due to the extended absences from education, which they have previously experienced. Standards of attainment at the end of both key stages remain below average. However, progress across the key stages is satisfactory and all students gain external accreditation through a range of GCSE and entry level qualifications. This progress reflects the satisfactory teaching that the students receive, although at times it can be outstanding and inspirational making full use of staff expertise. The staff have received good guidance about effective lesson planning and learning objectives although this is yet to be fully adopted throughout the school.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the development of the school and promotes it strongly. He and the newly established senior leadership team have clearly defined roles and are working hard to bring about improvement. There are sound systems for monitoring and evaluating progress and for planning for improvement. The self-evaluation of the school was accurate, identifying appropriate strengths and areas for development, although the curriculum is now better than the school evaluated. The leadership team is supported by an increasingly effective governing body. It is well led by an experienced chair of governors and has started to hold the school to account for its progress and to truly act as a critical friend. There is a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of boarding at Bowden House School is good. Judgement of provision under 'Every Child Matters' outcomes are at least good in four areas and outstanding in two. Four recommendations made relate to minor recording issues, which do not affect the safety or wellbeing of the pupils. There are no outstanding recommendations from the school's previous report. The school has a very well established senior management team who provide stability and strong leadership. This is underpinned by clear procedures, consistent care practice and good communication with both pupils and their parents or carers. A stable and committed team of care staff provide very good levels of care, support and guidance to the pupils.

Physical, medical and emotional care needs are met at an excellent level. Each pupil has a detailed care plan and the Educational Social Worker plays a key role in ensuring that pupils receive specialist external support. Advice and guidance is also provided to parents. General health needs are met. The school catering provision has won awards for the quality of food provided. Pupils are actively encouraged to eat a healthy diet and specific dietary needs such as halal and vegetarian are provided for. Pupils have their privacy respected. Sensitive information is securely stored. There is a clear and accessible complaints process in place and pupils are aware of how to use it. Pupils are confident in expressing their views.

There is a system in place whereby bullying issues are closely monitored. How specific incidents of bullying have been addressed is not always clearly recorded. The staff work hard with the pupils to ensure that bullying behaviour is dealt with. There is ongoing child protection training provided for all staff and it is covered in each new member of staff's induction. All members of staff know what to do in the event that they have concerns about a pupil's wellbeing.

There are clear procedures in place should a pupil be missing from the school. Pupils are encouraged and rewarded to behave well. Targets for improved behaviour and performance in school are included in each pupil's Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The plans are regularly reviewed by teachers, care staff and the pupils themselves. All members of staff receive regular training in physical intervention. Records of incidents of physical intervention are not always completed consistently. Pupils are given the opportunity to comment on incidents of restraint. Sanctions imposed on pupils are appropriate but are not always fully recorded by senior members of staff.

There are numerous risk assessments covering activities, and the school's premises. Some of these have not been reviewed since the last inspection. Fire drills occur regularly but are not always promptly recorded. The fire risk assessment has been reviewed and updated since the last inspection. Checks of fire equipment and other safety checks occur regularly. Staff recruitment files contain all the required information including up to date Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.

Pupils report that they feel safe at the school and the systems, training and staff awareness ensure that risks to pupils are managed and minimised. A positive embedded culture promotes and values individual attainments and education. Teaching and care staff work cohesively to respond to individual pupil's needs.

Pupils have access to a wide range of activities, which promotes their confidence and ability to work in groups or individually. Emotional support offered to the pupils is particularly well assessed and planned for. Key workers, teachers and external professionals provide excellent

levels of support to the pupils and their families and carers. There is an active school council. The council meets regularly and minutes are made available to all pupils after these meetings.

The school referral and admission process is carefully thought through, sensitive and nurturing. Referral information from placing authorities is not always detailed. However, the school ensures that assessments and admissions are individually tailored to meet each pupil's needs. Parents are actively assisted and encouraged to be involved in the admission process. Once a pupil is attending, the school contact is maintained with parents on a regular basis. The school appreciates that pupils preparing to leave the school, especially after being there a number of years, can find the process challenging and difficult. Pupils are supported through the process and the majority manage to leave the school positively.

Pupils are able to contact parents, carers and families whilst boarding. Telephones are available in the living areas and calls can be made in private. The school's premises are well maintained and the size of the building means that refurbishment and maintenance is ongoing. Living areas are comfortable and well furnished and pupils are able to personalise their rooms.

The school's statement of purpose is up to date and gives a good description of what the school intends to achieve. Staffing levels, awareness and training, combined with good leadership ensures that the needs of the pupils are met and their safety and wellbeing is promoted. The induction process for staff is thorough and established members of staff undergo regular training, which includes National Vocational Qualification Level Three in Caring for Children and Young People. Staff meet with supervisors regularly and their training needs and appraisals are clearly recorded. Communication between staff across all disciplines in the school is good. Following visits, the school governor writes reports, which outline areas for improvement. Two independent visitors visit regularly. The pupils are informed of these visits and the independent person's details are available on notice boards throughout the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the use of progress data by subject leaders in order for them to set more challenging targets to raise students' achievement.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring learning objectives are precise and clearly understood by students.
- Provide lessons in a modern foreign language for students in Key Stage 3.
- The school must ensure that it meets the National Minimum Standards currently not met, as detailed below:
 - Ensure that recording of bullying incidents includes how the matter was addressed and resolved. (NMS 6)
 - Ensure that all the details required in the recording of an incident of restraint are included in the reports. (NMS 10)
 - Review risk assessments more consistently. (NMS 26)
 - Ensure that recording of fire drills is achieved promptly. (NMS 26)

A small proportion of the schools where overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school with standards of attainment that are well below those expected of students of a similar age. This reflects the emotional and behavioural difficulties students have and the resultant disruption to their education. Some students occasionally experience difficulty in sitting exams, which adversely affects their achievements. However, most students in Year 11 last year gained GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science and art. The progress students make is satisfactory, although there is evidence to show that some students make good progress. The school's recent improvements in monitoring progress, led by the senior management team, is leading to more accurate target setting for all students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students is good as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. As students mature, they are increasingly able to remain focussed on learning even when one of their peers may become disaffected. They respond particularly well to practical activities where they are drawn in by teachers' high expectations and enthusiasm for the subject. At the end of lessons, opportunities to reflect upon their behaviour are given and generally, they have a realistic view of how well they have done. Sometimes, however, being conscious of the link between 'praise points' and rewards, their view can be a little generous. In discussion, students can recognise the impact the school has had upon them and appreciate the difference it makes. Lunchtimes are social occasions when staff and students eat meals of good quality and generally chat about everyday issues. Incidents of bullying are not common, students feel safe and know issues will be dealt with by trusted staff. Students are aware of the requirements for a healthy lifestyle and readily take up the many opportunities to be physically active during and after the school day. Through Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) and the 24 hour curriculum, they also understand the need to avoid harmful substances. Their attendance is good and reflects the strong relationships they have with care staff. Students make a good contribution to the school community through the school council, looking after common residential areas and in a wider sense, through charity fundraising and the submission of their art work for viewing in public buildings. Their skills for future economic well-being are supported by work experience, access to college-based vocational courses and the development of basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have good subject knowledge and an appreciation of the students' needs. Staff enjoy good relationships with students and behaviour management is effective. Expectations of behaviour are appropriate and in most cases, swearing is challenged. Management of occasional outbursts is effective and reduces disruption to learning. The most successful teaching is evident where the content and teaching style is totally engaging. For example, in an outstanding expressive arts lesson led by a teacher, the students considered 'The Message', an example of

early rap music, and then developed their own rhythms and lyrics using mixing decks and turn-tables. In art, students' sketch books show sustained interest in a project over several weeks. In some other subjects, students' work indicates too little challenge. The school's recently revised curriculum policy gives very good guidance for writing precise learning objectives. This has yet to be adopted by all teachers and as a result, some lesson planning lacks precision and students are unclear about exactly what is expected from them. On occasions, stated learning objectives merely describe what the teacher is going to do and not what the students are expected to learn. Lessons close with a review, but this is mainly about behaviour and opportunities are missed for students to reflect on their gains in skills or understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and now has an increased vocational content. The new headteacher has introduced improved access to local colleges of further education and work related learning including work experience for Key Stage 4 students. The school has added entry level courses and unit awards to existing GCSE courses to make the range more appealing and better suited to students across the ability range. School based accredited subjects now include expressive arts and digital photography. Statutory requirements are met with the exception of a lack of a modern foreign language on offer for Key Stage 3 students. There is a good emphasis on meeting individual needs, which includes access to therapies. Each student has a personal education plan that incorporates education and care needs. These plans also include targets that are linked to objectives on their statements of special educational need. The curriculum is enriched greatly by a wide range of activities organised by teachers and care staff. For example, outdoor and adventurous activities within the extended leadership programme and extensive visits to the local community and beyond for residential camping trips. This provision adds significantly to the students' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There are good systems to ensure the health and safety of the students. Procedures for ensuring the appropriateness of all staff are in place and conform to current government guidance. The pastoral care of students is good. Staff know individuals well. There are clear improvement targets agreed for their behaviour and opportunities to gain points and rewards through meeting agreed expectations. Teachers, their assistants and care staff work well together to support individual needs. The incidence of students leaving classrooms has reduced during the last academic year and staff work well together to reintegrate students into lessons following behavioural difficulties. Systems for dealing with bullying are rigorous, and have resulted in a reduction in the severity and frequency of incidents. There are established links with external support agencies. Systems for academic guidance are satisfactory although most students do know the levels they are working at. Arrangements for the induction of students new to boarding are excellent. Links to support life after school are well established with Connexions, local colleges of further education and work placements. Last year all students went on to employment, training or further education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The newly established senior leadership team has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. In just over three terms, the new headteacher has communicated a clear vision for school development and provides strong leadership in conjunction with well-established care management team. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, including classroom practice, has provided an accurate view of effectiveness. This process is largely undertaken by senior managers although subject leaders have recently begun to develop action plans for their own areas. The use of students' achievement data by subject leaders to evaluate departmental effectiveness is at an early stage. School development planning has a clear focus on raising standards. The governing body shares this commitment and is increasingly holding the school to account for its actions and is taking on the role of a critical friend. There is good capacity for further improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Bowden House School, Seaford, BN25 2JB

Thank you for helping me and my colleagues to get to know your school last week and for the warm welcome. We found that you make satisfactory progress while at the school. Your new headteacher and his senior management team have been working hard to enable the school to give you the education you need now and in the future. They also work very well with your care management team.

The teaching you receive from the staff is satisfactory but sometimes it is better. You get lots of support to help you improve your behaviour and it is clear you become more confident as you get older. Your behaviour is good overall and your attendance has improved and this can help you improve how good your grades are when you take exams.

You obviously enjoy practical lessons such as art and expressive arts. The lesson I saw where you mixed music and created your own pieces was outstanding. The range of lessons and other activities such as extended leadership, shorter exam courses, and college and work experience are good. These experiences prepare you well for leaving school. You mostly get on well with the staff and your fellow students and it is good that you remain focussed even when one or two fellow students find it difficult to behave.

The school works hard to keep you fit and healthy. Breakfast gives you a good start to the day and your physical education lessons help you a lot. The wall displays of work in art and physical education show you achieve well in these subjects. In order to improve the school further, I am asking your headteacher to improve the way the subject leaders use all the information they have about how well you are doing. I am also asking him to see that teachers make it very clear exactly what you are intended to learn in each lesson. Finally, in Key Stage 3, you should have some lessons where you can learn a modern foreign language.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector