

Grove Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114688
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311665
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	50
6th form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Partridge
Headteacher	Philippa Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Church Road Crowborough TN6 1BN
Telephone number	01892 663018
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

There have been significant changes to the premises and accommodation since the previous inspection. Children in Reception and primary-aged pupils remain on the site of the original school. In 2007, secondary-aged pupils were relocated. They are now sited on a local community college campus, where they occupy part of the original building plus some new accommodation. The local authority, school and parents refer to this as co-location. Post-16 students are housed in the sixth form wing of this community college and they, too, have a mixture of old and new accommodation. The community college is approximately a mile away from the primary site. The secondary department is about a 10-minute walk from the post-16 accommodation.

All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. In about 40% of cases, this is for severe learning difficulties. Of the remainder, there are approximately equal numbers of pupils with moderate learning difficulties, autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Nearly all of the pupils have a White British heritage and boys outnumber girls by almost two to one. There are very few children of Reception age and so they are taught with Key Stage 1 pupils.

There have been changes in school leadership, too, since the previous inspection. The headteacher has been in post for less than two years and the assistant headteacher, who has responsibility for post-16 provision, for less than a year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Grove Park School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Provision is good in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory in the post-16 department. There is a good specialist resource for meeting the needs of pupils with autism. Children, pupils and students make good progress in their personal development and satisfactory progress in their academic work. They love being at school and attend as often as they can. They develop into confident young people with good self-esteem and some degree of independence.

Standards of work are exceptionally low throughout the school because of the complex nature of the pupils' learning difficulties. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall, although they make good progress in some parts of the school. The inconsistent rate of progress is linked to variations in the quality of teaching and learning. While teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, differences in teachers' expectations of their pupils, and their use of time, impact on the pace at which pupils learn. The primary cause of this is teachers' inconsistent use of assessment procedures to establish precisely what pupils can do, know and understand. As a result, pupils do not always spend enough time on activities that are matched exactly to their individual learning needs and this reduces their rate of progress. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. This meets all statutory requirements but the curriculum in the secondary and post-16 departments is not planned or structured in ways that meet the needs of all pupils and students. The range of accreditation lacks breadth, and so does not provide the most appropriate qualifications for all pupils and students, and features of the work-related programme are underdeveloped.

The school is a very caring community and pupils' safety and welfare are at the forefront of its work. Despite this, the overall provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Although there are strong and effective systems for providing pastoral support, the procedures for offering academic guidance are much weaker. Once again, this is due to the school's failure to use assessment data as effectively as it could, even though it collects a wealth of such information. The data is examined, but only at a superficial level. As the school has not determined a consistent rationale for evaluating pupils' progress and achievement, leaders are not in a position to assess critically any differences in performance and thus set appropriately challenging individual targets. Other features of leadership and management are more effective. The school has forged good links with its partners, especially with the co-located community college. The majority of parents support the work of the school, although a few expressed concern about the rate at which their children learn and make progress. The relatively new leadership team had to devote a great deal of time to managing the move of the secondary and post-16 departments but during this period, routine monitoring of the school's work was maintained. This has meant that although leaders know what is going on in the school and what they want to do to bring about change, they do not do this as effectively as they could. They do not use the information from self-audit efficiently by prioritising the few things that will have the most impact and then reflecting this through the school improvement plan and practice. There is satisfactory capacity to drive forward further change.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Staff have established an ethos and environment that are well suited to the students' age. They treat the students as young people who are preparing to leave school and they give them the

personal skills for doing this successfully. The students respond very well to these expectations and they develop into caring, respectful and sensible young people with a positive attitude to learning and to the future. Consequently, over the past two years, all leavers have gone into continuing education or training. The students are taught well. Learning activities are matched to the students' age and capabilities and so they make good progress in lessons. However, their achievements are satisfactory. A limited range of external accreditation is not entirely appropriate for the very few higher attaining students, and there are not opportunities for these more capable students to benefit from extended work experience or to taste vocational learning through links with partners. In addition, assessment data is not used to set challenging targets that are shared with students in order to encourage their rate of progress. However, the future looks promising. The new accommodation, facilities and co-location are beginning to have an impact on the quality of education provided, and leaders have recognised the scope for further development and opportunities to address the curricular shortcomings through even closer liaison with the mainstream school, although this remains at an early stage.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter Reception with levels of skills and knowledge that are much lower than is generally expected from children of this age, because of the nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, they make good progress in their learning and personal development. This is because adults have high expectations, work very effectively as a team and have secured well-established routines. Children achieve particularly well in acquiring social and communication skills. As a result, they become increasingly aware of other children and learn to relate to others in small group work. Children also make good progress in developing early literacy and numeracy skills as a result of good, lively teaching and a structured, well-organised curriculum. Skilfully chosen learning activities enable children to succeed, thus building their confidence and raising their self-esteem. Consequently, children are well prepared for moving into their next class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the analysis and use of assessment data to ensure that lessons consistently feature challenging learning activities to accelerate pupils' learning and that challenging targets are set.
- Use the outcomes of self-evaluation more effectively by streamlining improvement planning to prioritise the few initiatives that that will have the most impact on the school's development.
- Extend the range of accreditation and the work-related programme in Key Stage 4 and in the post-16 department.

A small proportion of the schools whose 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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are inevitably very low, given the severity of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily, although there are pockets of good progress.

For instance, the specialist resource for pupils with autism enables them to make good progress. One-to-one sessions, using a very structured teaching approach, enable these pupils to become more actively involved in their own learning and to be more accustomed to making choices and accepting change. Children get off to a good start when they enter Reception. Vibrant teaching and enjoyable but challenging activities encourage them to make good progress in acquiring skills across all areas of learning. They become more adept communicators, with an enriched vocabulary, and develop early number skills. This rapid rate of learning is maintained as pupils move through Key Stage 1 and into the early years of Key Stage 2. It then slows down as pupils move through the school because teachers do not consistently use assessment information about pupils' prior achievements in their planning. As a result, time is not always used to best effect and this reduces the pace of progress.

Pupils make satisfactory progress against their individual targets. Where these targets are concerned with features of personal development, pupils make good progress towards achieving them. However, curriculum-based learning targets are not linked to standard measures such as 'p' and National Curriculum levels. This limits teachers' ability to provide focused support and leaders' ability to measure the extent of pupils' long-term progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The pupils confirm that they get very great pleasure from being at school. They take big strides in their personal development. They are well-behaved young people with a good attitude to learning. They develop a good understanding of what being healthy means and the importance of diet and regular exercise. They know how to stay safe, and if they do have a problem or concern, they are fully aware that they can go to a member of staff who will sort it out. Some pupils contribute to the life of the school by representing their classmates on the school council. All learners were involved in drawing up the Pupil/Student Charter, which identifies the guiding principles of pupils' rights and responsibilities. A few pupils make individual contributions too, such as pushing friends' wheelchairs or collecting their lunch for them, but there is no structured hierarchy of jobs that pupils might undertake as they get older and more confident. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for leaving school and moving into the post-16 department or into a college elsewhere. Some aspects of the school's work make a good contribution to this, such as helping pupils to learn how to work together and at other times independently, and community-based learning promotes pupils' social awareness and communication skills. However, the shortcomings within the curriculum restrict the potential for all pupils to be fully equipped for moving on to further education or training and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Adults work well together as teams and they develop very good and supportive relationships with their pupils. Teachers use questions well to encourage pupils' speaking and listening skills and to check on their understanding, and they also use a range of other approaches, such as signs and symbols, to encourage the participation of all. Pupils respond in different ways too,

including through electronic aids, and so they can contribute by making choices or expressing a view. Teachers use many opportunities to encourage pupils' personal development. They are competent in their use of information and communication technology and they use it well to stimulate learning and to maintain pupils' interest. Despite this, the rate at which pupils learn is only satisfactory because it is sometimes limited by insecure assessment procedures and the absence of detailed learning targets. As a result, on some occasions the activities provided are at too low a level to extend the learning of all pupils, particularly the more capable ones. In other circumstances, although teachers plan learning activities that provide an appropriate level of challenge, they do not routinely move pupils on to these activities quickly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a satisfactory range and variety of learning activities, although there are some good features to the curriculum. A well-planned personal, social and health education programme contributes greatly to pupils' personal development and social awareness. Visits into the local and wider communities are used effectively to enrich learning and also as opportunities for pupils to practise in social situations the skills that they have learned in the classroom. Educational trips to theatres, art galleries and museums contribute greatly to giving pupils an understanding of their culture, although there are fewer opportunities for them to learn about the cultural diversity of modern Britain. The curricular needs of individual pupils are met well through good links with partners that enable pupils to spend part of the week in mainstream schools. Developing links with the co-located school are also now reaping a reward, as seen in the recent joint production of *The Enchanted Forest*. The curriculum in the primary department and in Years 7 to 9 provides a good basis for a breadth of learning opportunities, and leaders have recently implemented changes to improve this further. The curriculum for the oldest pupils does not fully meet the needs of all, especially those working at slightly higher levels. They do not have enough opportunities to pursue different forms of accreditation, to participate in work experience or to attend short vocational taster courses at college.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school is a safe place and one in which the pupils confirm that they feel comfortable because 'everyone is kind to each other'. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place and safeguarding mechanisms are secure. The input of a variety of colleagues from other agencies contributes greatly to the school's support systems. A range of therapists, including the school's own music therapist, and staff from social care services and medical agencies work very well together in addressing pupils' many and varied needs and in promoting their self-help skills along the journey towards independence. Procedures for providing guidance and support for learning are not established so well. Assessment information, and the outcomes of its scrutiny, is not used in a practical way. Staff do not set challenging individual targets based on 'p' and National Curriculum levels that they can share with pupils, as appropriate. Therefore, they cannot track pupils' progress towards achieving a goal or involve them in evaluating the extent of their own learning through any form of self-assessment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

School leaders and governors have done a good job in overseeing the major change that has taken place since the previous inspection, namely the relocation of the secondary and post-16 departments. They have won the support of parents, many of whom had anxiety about their children's welfare in these large organisations. The firm foundation that school leaders have established with their mainstream counterparts forms a strong base for further developments, although the school has not yet established such a strong link at the level of governance.

Following an audit of practice, leaders have implemented change elsewhere too. For instance, they have altered the way in which the curriculum is planned and have reorganised subject leader responsibilities, but these developments are at too early a stage to have had any significant impact. They also recognised during this exercise that there were other areas that needed addressing, such as accreditation, but this remains unresolved. This is indicative of why school self-evaluation is not as effective as it could be. Although leaders collect information, they do not analyse it critically by teasing out the few most important things that will have the most impact on improving the school's work. A lack of rigorous interrogation is evident in the way that assessment information is used. The data is not processed in a way that raises searching questions about how well individuals and groups are performing, and it is not used as the starting point for setting long-term targets for pupils.

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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	16-19
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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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Grove Park School, Crowborough TN16 1BN

We really enjoyed visiting your school. Thank you for making us feel so welcome. A special thank-you to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us.

Yours is a satisfactory school where your personal development is good, and you make adequate progress in your work. The very youngest children do well. We were really impressed with how well you behave and how often you go to school. You help each other a great deal and do things around the school, like being on the school council and helping your friends. You develop into polite and grown-up young people. You know a lot about how to stay fit and remain safe. The staff care for you a great deal and help you to get ready for leaving school. You make the most of this and it is very pleasing to see that all of your friends who left school last year went to college.

The people who run the school have lots of ideas about how they can make things better and we have given them some things to focus on:

- Make sure they know exactly how well each one of you is doing, so that teachers can set targets for you and always give you things to do in lessons that help you to learn as much as possible.
- Choose just a few things to improve in school and not try to make too many changes at the same time.
- Give the oldest of you a wider choice of examinations to take and more chances to learn about work.

We know that you love being at school and enjoy all the things that you do. You can help the staff to make the school even better by continuing to go to school as often as you can and working hard while you are there.

Thank you once again. I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future, especially if you are leaving school this year. Yours sincerely

Mike Kell Lead Inspector