

Saxon Mount School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114691
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311666
Inspection date	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Clarke
Headteacher	Louise Carlyle
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2004
School address	Edinburgh Road St Leonards-on-Sea TN38 8HH
Telephone number	01424 426303
Fax number	01424 444115

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Saxon Mount School educates students with general learning difficulties, communication difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. All students have a statement of special educational needs. There is a specialist facility for students with autistic spectrum disorder. Ten students are looked after by the local authority (LA), a small number have English as an additional language, and a few students are Traveller children. Some 36% of the students are entitled to free school meals. There are 79 boys and 39 girls. The school offers extended services in the form of a parent and toddler group run by school staff with help from Year 10 students as part of vocational preparation. The school also runs a youth club and a summer school.

In 2007, the school was identified by the LA as a vulnerable school making insufficient progress, and since then has worked closely with a range of LA consultants to improve. The current headteacher is due to leave the school in April 2008 and a new headteacher has been appointed from a nearby very successful school to take over for an interim period.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Saxon Mount School provides a satisfactory education. Parents say it is 'a warm, caring environment' and that 'care and compassion stands out'. Students' personal development is good because pastoral support is strong and the school works well with others to ensure students' well-being. Provision in the unit for students with autistic spectrum disorder is good. In the school as a whole, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, supported by strong contributions from art and from personal, social health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Students enjoy the wide range of activities the school offers, and have a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle. They feel safe in school because they know they have someone they can talk to, and generally they behave well. They are well prepared for their future working lives through the school's strong links with external agencies such as the Connexions service. Students make a good contribution to their school community and the wider locality. The student council is strong and students are forthright in expressing their views. They help in the local community and raise funds for others who are less fortunate. Whilst students' attendance is satisfactory, the school does not sufficiently analyse the relative effectiveness of its strategies to promote attendance, missing opportunities to improve attendance further.

Students make satisfactory overall progress in the school, gaining a range of suitable qualifications when they leave. In some areas, for example physical education and art, progress is good. Younger students underachieve in English because work is not always sufficiently challenging or informed by precise assessment. Although older students progress steadily, examination results for English are weaker than those for mathematics and science. Students are set increasingly effective targets, and make steady progress towards them.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Relationships are good and when lessons are stimulating and well pitched, students work hard and concentrate well. In weaker lessons, the pace is not brisk enough and assessment is not used effectively enough to inform the level of work for students of different ability. Teaching of English for younger students is a relative weakness. Assessment and the tracking of students' progress are satisfactory, but not yet securely embedded across the school to inform teaching and learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Until recently, the school had not taken a sufficiently strategic view of what it needed to improve, and it has not yet sufficiently ensured clarity in the roles, responsibilities and accountability of senior staff. This inhibited students' progress. Within the past year, however, with support, the school has started to pick up the pace of improvement. Governors are challenging the school more as they acquire the necessary information. Self-evaluation processes are improving and beginning to give the school a more accurate picture of what it has to do. The school has set suitable targets and planned actions to achieve these. It has taken steps to improve since the previous inspection but some areas have not yet been tackled sufficiently vigorously. It is committed to continue working with the LA and others to secure improvements and has satisfactory capacity to do so.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the clarity, balance and accountability of the senior management roles.
- Improve progress in English for students aged 11 to 14 years.
- Ensure assessment better informs target setting and teaching and learning.
- Improve attendance further.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The attainment of students on entry to the school is well below average because of the students' learning difficulties. Progress is satisfactory overall. It is good in some subjects such as art, PSHCE and physical education. For students aged 11 to 14, progress in mathematics and science is satisfactory but progress in English, including reading, is inadequate. Progress for students aged 14 to 16 is good in science and mathematics and some students gain General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and other examinations. In English, progress for these students is satisfactory but not good enough to make up for the legacy of underachievement from the earlier stage of learning. Achievement is the same for most groups of students, such as boys or girls, but those students with autistic spectrum disorder make better progress because of the well-focused provision for them in the unit. The school is improving target-setting so as to make the system more robust.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students clearly enjoy the wide range of activities on offer. The school has applied a range of strategies to improve attendance but has not yet maximised their impact by checking which strategies have been most effective. Excellent opportunities for physical activities and opportunities to eat healthy foods contribute strongly to students developing a healthy lifestyle. Students feel safe and say they are listened to. Good contributions from a range of professionals during well-planned PSHCE lessons contribute to their strong awareness of safe practices. For a few students, this does not always translate into safe practices at school, for example there is sometimes some boisterousness when students leave school at the end of the day. Nevertheless, behaviour is usually good, particularly where students enjoy lessons.

Students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Staff provide good moral role models, and the many off-site activities make a valuable contribution to the students' social development. Activities, including art, African drumming and visits, help develop students' cultural awareness. Good opportunities and effective links with a range of external partners help ensure students develop good workplace skills despite the slow start in English for younger students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Among common strengths of teaching and learning are good behaviour in lessons and strong relationships, with well-chosen touches of humour which students appreciate. In the better lessons, organisation and planning are clear and work is pitched at the right level for the different abilities and interests of students. This leads to students being fully occupied and well focused on their work. Where lessons are weaker, they are not challenging enough and work is insufficiently informed by assessment. Early morning registration and reading groups are not always effective because students are not challenged enough by the activities. More

broadly, the school is working to make assessment more precise and reliable, and where this is still developing, lessons are less effective.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum offers outstanding opportunities for challenging physical activities. These contribute to students' social development and healthy lifestyles and provide good opportunities for future leisure and sporting activities. PSHCE is strong. A wide range of visitors come to the school, enriching students' experiences. These visits are planned well to meet students' needs. Residential opportunities support learning well and contribute effectively to students' personal and social development. Work-related learning for older students is a strength and good links with the Connexions service and with local colleges helps students prepare for their future lives. English provision for students aged 11 to 14 is a weakness and activities, including reading at the beginning of the day are not always sufficiently focused. The balance of the curriculum is satisfactory overall, but some year groups sometimes have too many lessons of the same subject on the same day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students feel secure in that they have someone in school to turn to when they need support. There are good links with other agencies. These help ensure the effective care and support of individual students and groups of students, for example those who are cared for by the local authority. Procedures for safeguarding are in place and staff are aware of them. The setting of pastoral targets and the tracking of them is good. Risk assessment and health and safety checks are in place. The emotional well-being of vulnerable students is a priority for the school and it provides sensitive support and guidance for these students. Academic guidance and target-setting are comparative weaknesses because the school is still developing its tracking procedures and these are not yet embedded or universally used.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has made good use of external consultants to help develop several areas of leadership and management. However, there has not been a sufficiently clear strategic view of what needed to be done or a robust enough approach to ensuring priorities were tackled, including holding senior staff to account. This led to the school making slower progress than it could have done for some years after the previous inspection. However, suitable targets have now been agreed and appropriate action plans drawn up to help reach them. The school's procedures for evaluating itself are now satisfactory because it is now improving the quality and use of its assessment information, although these are not yet fully embedded. Overall resources are deployed satisfactorily but the roles, balance of responsibilities and accountability of the senior staff are not yet as clear as they should be. Governors are loyal and care deeply about the school. They are now starting to challenge the school to do better because they are beginning to get better information, for example on students' progress.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

Thank you for your help when my colleague and I inspected your school on 5 March.

Your school gives you a satisfactory education. It cares for you and you feel there is always somebody in school you can talk to if you have a problem. As a result, your personal development is good; you behave well, and make a good contribution to the school and wider community. Your curriculum is particularly strong in giving you a wide range of physical activities to choose from and in preparing you for the time when you leave school.

However, there are several things the school could do better. I have therefore asked the staff to make sure:

- younger students make better progress in English
- senior staff are very clear about their roles
- assessment is improved so it is better used to help in teaching and in setting your targets
- attendance improves.

You could help, especially with attendance by making sure you are only absent from school when it is absolutely necessary.

Thank you again for your kindness to us when we were with you and may I wish you every success for your future.



7 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Saxon Mount School, St Leonards-on-Sea TN38 8NH

Thank you for your help when my colleague and I inspected your school on 5 March.

Your school gives you a satisfactory education. It cares for you and you feel there is always somebody in school you can talk to if you have a problem. As a result, your personal development is good; you behave well, and make a good contribution to the school and wider community. Your curriculum is particularly strong in giving you a wide range of physical activities to choose from and in preparing you for the time when you leave school.

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- senior staff are very clear about their roles
- assessment is improved so it is better used to help in teaching and in setting your targets
- attendance improves.

You could help, especially with attendance by making sure you are only absent from school when it is absolutely necessary.

Thank you again for your kindness to us when we were with you and may I wish you every success for your future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michael Farrell'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Lead inspector