

The South Downs Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114692
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311667
Inspection dates	16–17 July 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Remo Palladino
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Beechy Avenue Eastbourne BN20 8NU
Telephone number	01323 730302
Fax number	01323 640544

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school occupies two sites, one to the west and one to the east of Eastbourne. It mainly educates pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and communication difficulties and has a small number of pupils with profound, severe or moderate learning difficulties. There are three times as many boys as girls, around 94% of pupils are White British, and a very few children are cared for by the local authority. The school provides an outreach service to local mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The South Downs Community Special School is a good school where pupils make good progress and achieve well. Its outstanding links with others, including extensive outreach work with other schools and very close working relationships with various agencies, make an extremely valuable contribution to provision.

Parents are very appreciative of all the school offers. Typical of their comments are, 'I cannot praise the school enough for the way it has supported, cared for and educated my child' and 'The support that staff provide for the children is second to none'. Children in the Foundation Stage have a good start, making good progress and achieving well. This is because the provision is well led and managed to make sure the children's individual needs are met. Children in this stage greatly enjoy their learning and activities and look forward to coming to school because activities are very engaging. Their personal development is good because they are very well supported and looked after. Throughout the rest of the school too, pupils make good progress including different groups such as boys and girls and pupils with different types of special educational needs. They make very strong progress in communication because of the school's sharp focus on this and because staff work together very successfully to support it. However, the detailed assessment data on very small steps of pupils' progress are not used fully to influence school practice to promote even better achievement.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent, being extremely well managed with great sensitivity to individual differences. Their understanding of healthy eating and activities is outstanding and reflects the care the school takes in promoting this. Pupils feel very safe because the ethos of the school is secure and warm and because there are robust systems to make sure children are well looked after and protected. They love coming to school because they enjoy all it provides and opportunities are regularly seized that raise their self-esteem and confidence. They contribute positively to the school community, for example by helping other children and by taking active part in the school council, and are developing their understanding of helping others in the wider community very well. Pupils' preparation for their future lives, including their economic understanding, is underpinned by their good progress in basic skills.

The good teaching and learning include very close teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. Staff are very sensitive to the individual needs of pupils. Lesson planning is very clear, activities engage and stimulate the pupils, and communication is very well encouraged. The curriculum includes excellent opportunities after school, during the school holidays and on residential trips. It provides a good and suitable range of activities that effectively support the good progress pupils make and nurture their good personal development. However, activities to help pupils develop the use of their senses are not as fully developed and integrated across the curriculum as they should be.

The school is very well led and managed, with its excellent vision for improvement and very clear sense of direction linked with good self-evaluation. Consequently, the school not only knows its strengths and weaknesses very well but also knows how it can improve. It is well supported and challenged by committed governors. The school has progressed well since its previous inspection, including rising to the challenge of providing for pupils with different special educational needs. With its strong systems to monitor and evaluate its own progress and with the powerful commitment of staff, the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children arrive at school happy and wanting to learn because the provision meets their needs well. One child's comment typifying this was, 'I like it here all day long'. Very close team working between teachers, teaching assistants and others nurtures the children's excellent behaviour, their enjoyment of their education and their increasing independence. The palpably supportive ethos gives delightful warmth to the setting. Leadership and management are very well focused on the individual needs of the children and, reflecting this, individual learning targets are very well used. Because of the engaging curriculum and the good teaching and support, children make good progress and achieve and develop well. However, not all staff are assessing development through play sufficiently to plan the next steps in children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make full use of data from very detailed assessments of small steps in pupils' progress to influence school practice.
- Develop activities to help pupils use their senses and ensure such opportunities are fully integrated across the whole curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well below average for their age because of their special educational needs. However, pupils make good progress in their time at school and achieve well. The youngest children make a good start in the Foundation Stage and this is continued throughout the school. Pupils in different groups, including those of different ages, boys and girls, pupils with different types of special educational needs, all achieve equally well. Even so, because of the nature of pupils' difficulties and disabilities, standards remain low. Children are set challenging targets, which older pupils know and understand. Pupils make very strong progress in developing communication skills because of the emphasis the school places on this and because staff, including speech and language therapists, work very closely together. All this helps very much towards pupils making successful transitions to the next phase of their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The good personal development of pupils reflects the good care, guidance and support they receive. They feel very safe because there are strong systems and routines to keep them so. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles including eating habits and exercise. Pupils' very high levels of attendance are an indication of their outstanding enjoyment of school life. Their self-esteem is raised and their behaviour is excellent because these aspects are extremely well supported and encouraged by all staff. Pupils contribute very well to the school community through their consideration of others and through the school council and they have a growing understanding of their contribution to the wider community. Their good skills relating to economic understanding mirrors the good progress they make in areas contributing to this such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good teaching and learning throughout the school lead to the good progress all pupils make. All lessons observed by inspectors were good, with one being outstanding, and the judgements from these observations very closely match the school's own observations. Detailed planning is very well used to structure lessons. Very close teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants and extremely good management of pupils' behaviour contribute to the settled atmosphere of the classrooms and to good progress. Staff are highly sensitive to the changing needs of pupils. In one lesson, for example, it was immediately spotted that a pupil had lapsed into a very uncomfortable sitting position and was encouraged to adopt a better posture. Communication aids such as manual signing and visual symbols are very well used to support progress and enhance participation. However, the pace of learning is sometimes slow in parts of lessons. For example, the use of computers is not always maximised and the lesson introductions are sometimes not brisk enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum takes good account of national requirements, such as developments in the teaching of literacy, local opportunities, including the use of the environment, and the individual needs of pupils. The excellent enrichment includes residential opportunities, extensive provision during the school holidays, and a rich variety of school clubs. Schemes of work have been appropriately rewritten to respond to the changing needs of the pupils and strong systems ensure the curriculum continues to be refined and developed. Therapeutic aspects of the curriculum are very well integrated into provision. For example, the locally developed 'Jump Ahead' programme makes a very important contribution to the motor development of pupils, while the close working of teachers, teaching assistants and speech and language therapists helps develop pupils' communication skills very well. Nevertheless, the sensory strand of the curriculum is not as well developed or as well integrated into the whole curriculum as it should be.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral support is particularly strong across the school, contributing to pupils' good personal development, and parents recognise and greatly value this. Risk assessments are appropriately undertaken for school based activities and outside trips. Pupils' attendance and their behaviour are very well monitored and supported by effective reward systems. Strong child protection systems are very well supplemented by the school's close working relationships with other agencies. The individual progress of pupils is monitored and recorded well. This effectively informs planning for teaching and learning as well as pupils' individual targets. Up-to-date and very carefully kept records of achievement celebrate what the pupils can do. However, the use of data on pupils' progress, drawing on very detailed small steps of assessment, is not fully embedded and therefore does not contribute to improving achievement as well as it should.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's excellent vision and sense of direction powerfully contribute to the high motivation and commitment of staff. Its self-evaluation matches the findings of the inspection team closely, taking good account of the views of pupils, parents and others. Wide consultation has gone into the development of the most recent improvement plan, which correctly identifies and systematically tackles key challenges. Through these processes, the continuing professional development of staff is coherently developed striking an entirely suitable balance between whole-school needs and staff aspirations. Interrelationships between the leadership and the management teams and the clear roles and responsibilities of staff ensure that responsibilities and accountability are widely distributed and staff held to account. Lessons are observed systematically and accurately and this, along with effective support and training, is helping improve teaching further. The committed governing body balances good support and challenge very well. Although performance management is undertaken for teachers and includes clear criteria on which performance is assessed, this is not yet as fully developed for teaching assistants and administration staff.

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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?	2
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	2
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

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

18 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of South Downs Community Special School, Eastbourne, BN20 8NU

You may remember that I came to your school with another inspector recently.

It was lovely to meet you all and see all the work that you are doing. Thank you very much for being so helpful and polite to us.

We found many things we liked. The school works with lots of other people to make sure you get a good education and are very well looked after. You have a lovely range of activities and your lessons are very interesting. You behave really well and you love being in school. The staff who manage the school make sure everything runs very smoothly.

There are two things the school could do even better so I have asked the staff to:

- Make better use of some of the information about how you learn.
- Build up more activities that help you use all your senses.

Thank you again.

Every good wish

Michael Farrell Lead inspector