

# Cuckmere House School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114696
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	311669
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Kell

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5-16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	64
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dave Bashford
<b>Headteacher</b>	Frank Stanford
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 September 2004
<b>School address</b>	Eastbourne Road Seaford BN25 4BA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01323 893319
<b>Fax number</b>	01323 897719

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<b>Age group</b>	5-16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the procedures for evaluating pupils' progress and achievements and the use of assessment data in setting challenging targets; how well leaders compare the relative performance of different groups of pupils and different subjects; and the systems for tracking pupils' personal development. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, school documentation and assessment information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report. The residential provision was subject to a joint inspection by the Additional Inspector and a social care inspector from Ofsted on the same date that the school was inspected.

## Description of the school

The school was granted specialist status for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in 2005. There are three discrete elements of provision. The vast majority of pupils attend full time and in the main school. Virtually all of them were permanently excluded from their previous school and they all have a statement of special educational need for severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Up to 13 pupils are in a primary pupil referral unit (PRU) located in the main school building and managed by the school leadership team. A few of these pupils have been permanently excluded and attend the PRU full time, while others are dual registered, which means they are on the Cuckmere House roll as well as that of their mainstream school. These pupils are in danger of exclusion and so they attend the PRU part time. The Special Activity Unit (SAU) provides for the third group of pupils. This new development was set up for permanently excluded pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have particularly severe additional difficulties associated with their behaviour.

The residential facility, Tower House, has 12 places and so the school takes pupils from a large area of East Sussex and very occasionally from adjoining local authorities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This excellent school does an exceptional job in helping pupils who have had a troubled past and inconsistent schooling to change their behaviour and to develop a hunger to learn. The very high esteem in which pupils, parents and carers hold Cuckmere House is well founded. There is very close liaison with families and one set of parents summed up the views of the vast majority when, after having indicated their very strong support for the school on the parents' questionnaire, they simply wrote: 'What more can I say?' The most striking feature about the school is the sense of calm, as there are no underlying tensions that inhibit learning. Excellent relationships are based on a sense of mutual respect between staff and their pupils. Staff have a clear focus on enabling pupils to be successful, as learners and as young people, and the pupils respond very positively to these very high expectations. The few pupils who stay at Tower House benefit greatly from the contribution that this outstanding residential facility makes to their personal development and academic progress.

Cuckmere House is not a school that rests on its laurels. Even though it was judged as outstanding in the previous inspection, it has continued to evolve. Highly effective leaders constantly seek ways to become even more influential, within both the school and the local authority. The successful bid for specialist status accelerated their ability to do this. It enabled the school to improve the quality of education for its own pupils through the school project to develop innovative classroom practice and to involve pupils more in their own learning. By implementing its specialist school community plan, the school has developed excellent partnerships with local schools through its work on easing the transition from primary to secondary school for vulnerable pupils. The strength of the school's links with other organisations is also evident in leaders' involvement in the management of the area primary behaviour support service team, two PRUs for secondary-aged pupils and a local secure unit.

Standards are well below those expected of pupils of similar age because pupils have a history of disrupted education through exclusion and/or poor attendance. Despite this, pupils make outstanding progress during their time in school. Pupils' excellent achievements are evident in all three elements of the school's provision. Young pupils in the PRU develop an enjoyment for learning and recognise the need to follow classroom rules and to comply with adults' requests. Consequently, their rate of progress increases substantially and very close working with mainstream schools enables them to return successfully to their dual-registered school or to join a new school if they have been permanently excluded. The small number of pupils in the SAU make such very good progress because learning activities are very relevant to their needs, with a strong focus on preparing them for leaving school. These are the first pupils to benefit from this provision and they are rightly proud of their achievements as all of them have a confirmed destination for when they leave school, including college courses and an apprenticeship. In the main school, the rapid rate at which pupils acquire the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) underpins their excellent achievements. Consequently, they are successful in the accredited examinations that they take at the end of Year 11. A high proportion gain five GCSE passes grade A\*-G, as well as receiving other qualifications, such as in food hygiene and first aid.

Pupils make such outstanding progress because the transformations in their attitudes, behaviour, self-esteem and confidence give them a platform to make the most of the excellent quality of education that is available to them. Their personal development is extremely good. The pupils are courteous and welcoming and they relish their time in school. The vast majority go to school

regularly and the school is addressing the absence levels of the few older pupils whose attendance is erratic. Pupils have a very clear understanding of how they can lead a healthy and safe lifestyle and they make a very good contribution to the school community. For instance, many were involved in the establishment of The Den, the recreational area, and they take a pride in their work and respect the work of others. The very informative displays around the school are never spoiled and there is no graffiti or damage to the fabric of the building. By acquiring academic qualifications, a strong work ethic, social skills and the ability to work with others, pupils have the tools to make a very successful transition from school to college or into work.

All pupils learn very well because lessons are productive, stimulating and enjoyable. Teachers' very high expectations of behaviour and learning enable them to set challenging activities that stretch all pupils. They are able to pitch work at just the right level because, as one pupil commented, 'The teachers here understand us.' In practice, this means that teachers use knowledge of pupils' prior achievements to set work that promotes very effectively the next steps in learning. Lessons move along at a cracking pace and a good variety of activities maintains pupils' interest. The excellence of the curriculum is not confined to the classroom. Local resources are exploited very well. Visits and visitors into school bring learning alive and make it relevant to pupils' everyday lives, but the school does much more than this. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a good work-related learning programme that includes work experience and links with local colleges. All pupils have the opportunity to experience residential visits too, ranging from outdoor pursuit activities in Kent to enriching the music curriculum by following 'The Beatles Trail' in Liverpool. The school places great importance on extending learning beyond the school day. On four days each week, after-school clubs are open to all pupils and the school ensures that it meets any additional transport costs so that no pupils are prevented from attending. Cuckmere House is a very safe and caring school and all the necessary safeguarding procedures are in place. There are meticulous arrangements for supporting pupils' personal development through detailed monitoring and tracking sheets, which the pupils understand and value. The school also has detailed systems for gathering information on pupils' academic achievements. Staff use this information to plan work and to set National Curriculum level targets or examination goals for all pupils. They have taken the decision, rightly, to share these only with those pupils whom they judge to have the emotional robustness to deal with the expectations.

School leaders have a very impressive history of being innovative and taking action on the outcomes of the school's very rigorous self-evaluation procedures. For instance, they identified the need to improve ICT facilities and their use. As a result, staff and pupils now use new resources very well to support learning. The school's commitment to equality of opportunity means that leaders collect a great deal of information on pupils' achievements and they track individuals' progress, putting in place additional support if necessary. However, current systems do not lend themselves efficiently to enabling leaders to interrogate this data in other ways, such as comparing the performances of different groups of pupils or their rate of progress in different subjects to ensure that there are no pockets of relative underperformance anywhere in the school. Governors assist the school's leaders very well by supporting their work but also by challenging them when actions or proposals are unclear. They, and school leaders, have an excellent capacity to maintain the momentum by building even further on the school's very many strengths.

## **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

### **Grade: 1**

Tower House supports the work of the school exceptionally well. Very close working between school and care staff ensures a consistent approach to helping pupils to take control of their own lives and to be responsible for their actions. The residential facility exceeds all national minimum care standards. It has outstanding provision for promoting pupils' safety, supporting a healthy lifestyle, encouraging an enjoyment in learning and developing in pupils a sense of belonging and contributing to a community. It makes a significant contribution to helping pupils to develop the social and self-help skills that will make them attractive to potential employers. Pupils' learning is evident in day-to-day practical activities. For instance, they get involved in budgeting, planning, buying and preparing meals and they take on duties and chores around the house, such as clearing tables and tidying. Internet facilities allow pupils to access the school's intranet to download documents for personal work.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Reorganise the procedures for collating data on pupils' academic achievements so that the information can be analysed more efficiently.

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## 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?	1
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 boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

7 February,

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cuckmere House School, Seaford BN25 4BA

Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. It was a real pleasure to talk with you and to see you in lessons. You told me that Cuckmere House is a good school and that you really like being there. I can see why. It is an excellent school that does a really good job in helping you to develop into sensible and mature young people who are ready to move on to college or into work. Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are very impressive. You listen to what is being said to you and do what is requested. Most of you go to school as often as you can, although a few of the older pupils could attend school more often. You have a very good understanding of how to stay safe and to remain healthy, and work hard to help the school community to improve, such as making The Den. Tower House also does an excellent job in helping those of you who spend some evenings there to learn and practise new skills.

Lessons are very good. Teachers set you work that is at just the right level to keep you interested and they give you activities that are enjoyable. As a result, you make excellent progress in your work. Your school gives you lots of extra opportunities to do other exciting things as well. The after-school clubs and the many visits that you make, such as to Liverpool and hostels for outdoor pursuits, give you the chance to try out new things. All the staff at the school look after you very well and you told me that you feel safe there. The staff are very good at supporting and helping you, and you work with them by always trying to do your best. The staff who run the school are doing a first-class job and they are determined to try and make Cuckmere House even better. I have given them one suggestion to help.

- Collect all the information that staff have about what you achieve in your work in a better way so that they can check it easier and make sure every one of you is doing your very best.

You can all help to keep your school as good as it is by continuing to attend regularly and by carrying on working hard while you are there. Thank you once again, and I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future, especially those taking examinations this year.

Mike Kell Lead inspector