

Starhurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125464
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315241
Inspection date	7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Eileen Bleach
Headteacher	Mr John Watson
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
School address	Chart Lane South Dorking RH5 4DB
Telephone number	01306 883763
Fax number	01306 889819

Age group	11–16
Inspection date	7 May 2008
Inspection number	315241

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector and a Care Inspector.

Description of the school

Starhurst school provides day and boarding provision for learners with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All have statements of special educational need. An increasing number of learners have more complex difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders and language and communication difficulties. Many have presented disturbed and disturbing behaviour since early childhood and patterns of behaviour vary widely. Because of the nature of these difficulties, they are working below national expectations. Currently, there are 10 permanent boarders, which falls below the full capacity of 16. This is due to the knock-on effect of the rebuilding programme and the county's inclusion policy. All learners have the opportunity to experience boarding provision throughout the school year. The overwhelming majority of students are of White British background. Three are looked after by the local authority or are in foster care. Many have a history of disrupted education, including a significant amount of time out of the school system.

The school is part of the Mole Valley federation of local secondary and primary schools. In November 2006, the school retained its Investors in People Award and, in March 2007, was awarded the Football Association Charter Standard for schools. The school's Sportsmark Award was retained in September 2007. The headteacher is responsible for both care and education in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Starhurst is a good school. It is very effective in meeting its aim of educating learners at an individual level through a quality environment and creating opportunities for personal responsibility and independence. The school provides a purposeful and caring environment and has some significant strengths. An outstanding feature is the partnership arrangements with other schools and colleges, and the range of intervention and support work with learners, using specialist provision. The latter includes the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), art therapy, auricular acupuncture, a partnership social worker and speech and language support amongst many others. This enhances very well the quality of learners' well-being and the progress they make. The school also works closely with parents and carers who are appreciative of its work, as shown by the positive comments from those who returned recent school questionnaires seeking their views. One commented, 'My son has improved in confidence, academically and socially since attending the school. Staff are understanding and keep parents very well informed of any problems.'

Achievement is good. Although standards overall are below average, learners make good progress in relation to their starting points. By the end of Year 9, some achieve levels expected for their ages, particularly in mathematics and science. Success rates at GCSE have been improving over time and, in 2007, though below the national average, 67% attained five A* to G grade passes in their examinations. Learners were particularly successful in the leisure and tourism course. Though overall progress in learners' literacy skills is also good, progress in writing skills is slower.

Learners' personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects is good. Because of the school's initial focus on rekindling learners' interest in education, self-esteem gradually improves, as does behaviour and working relationships with teachers and other adults in the school. In an essay describing his experience at the school an older learner wrote, 'Starhurst has been a really good influence on me. I really will miss it when I go.' A particular strength is learners' contribution to both the school community and wider community beyond school. They are actively involved in school decision making, and support a number of local charities as well as a school in Uganda. Some are also involved in the new gardening project. Attendance rates for many individuals improve but the small number of learners who have poor attendance rates have a disproportionate affect on the school's overall attendance rates.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) work very effectively together. Effective lesson planning ensures the individual needs of learners are met. Good working relationships underpin the quality of lessons. If there are any behaviour issues, these are handled calmly and purposefully by teachers and TAs. The curriculum is good, meeting the needs of learners and supporting well their academic and personal development. A good range of enrichment activities, including a wide range of creative arts and sports opportunities, enhances further learners' education. The new building programme has helped extend curriculum provision and greatly enhanced the quality of the learning environment. The school provides good quality care, guidance and support for learners and is successful in supporting each individual in very specific ways. All, including the most vulnerable, are looked after very well in a safe, healthy and caring environment. All learners have individual education plans (IEPs). Though many of the targets set in these are specific to learners' individual needs, some are too broad and vague. This means that learners are unclear as to how they can meet these targets.

Teachers and all other adults working in the school are dedicated and enthusiastic, having the best interests of learners at heart. Though there are good systems in place for tracking learners' progress in their academic work, their progress in information and communication technology (ICT) is not yet formally assessed.

Leadership and management are good at all levels with clear roles and responsibilities. There is a very strong ethos, which promotes learning, achievement and high quality integrated care and education. Rigorous self-evaluation has ensured the school has continued to improve since the last inspection. Strong liaison and collaboration between all staff ensure that every learner does matter, re-kindling their interest in education and improving their life chances. Governance, despite problems of recruiting parent governors, is effective and focused. The school's improving track record, developments since the last inspection and the clear direction set for further improvement show there is good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of boarding is good and demonstrates many commendable features. Enjoying and achieving are outstanding. The school meets all the National Minimum key Standards for Residential Special Schools and no recommendations regarding boarding welfare are made as a result of this inspection.

The school has positive regard for health and medical matters concerning the students and ensures that these areas are monitored and reviewed. Procedures provide staff with clear guidance regarding students' health care and medication arrangements. This includes the secure and diligent administration and storage of medication. Students have health care histories, and health care reports in their individual files. Boarding staff reinforce the school's PHSE curriculum regarding healthy living and personal safety through one to one or group discussion. Students said that staff take an interest in their health and development. Meals are of good quality and the menu provides for a balanced and healthy diet.

The school has appropriate procedures regarding privacy and confidentiality. Students have a balanced degree of autonomy and privacy consistent with their age, development and agreed risk assessments. Toilet and bathing facilities afford good privacy and a telephone is available for students use without reference to staff, though most have mobile phones. The majority of student questionnaires state that staff have respect for their individual privacy. Staff take appropriate action regarding complaints. There is a comprehensive and well known complaint procedure and a simplified version is available for the students. Posters providing the contact details of student help and advice lines are displayed.

The school takes positive steps to promote students' welfare and protect them from exposure to risk of harm. The procedures provide staff with clear guidance regarding child protection and safeguarding issues. All boarding staff receive safeguarding training at induction and refresher training is available via the Surrey County Council Multi-Agency Safeguarding Board. The majority of students feel safe in school.

The school has an anti-bullying coordinator who monitors and tracks incidents of bullying or intimidating behaviour. All boarding staff are quick to challenge and deal with such incidents. There are anti-bullying posters and workshops. A consultant psychotherapist is available to boarding staff and provides guidance for staff. Most students are of the view that bullying is not a current issue in the school and the majority feel that this is dealt with effectively. The homely and friendly atmosphere in the boarding section encourages students to enjoy and

benefit from the experience of boarding. Absconding is not a current issue in the school and unauthorised absences are infrequent. Students' behaviour is well managed by the boarding staff, following the behaviour management policy and the 'Positive Options' programme, a recognised method of behaviour management in residential child care and school settings. All boarding staff are trained in the positive options method and joint training with the school's teaching staff is scheduled. The 'racist incident' book shows that such incidents are rare. Students respond well to staff requests and instructions and any incidents where students become challenging or push boundaries are calmly, sensitively and, when necessary, firmly handled by staff. There is good liaison between boarding staff and teaching staff regarding the behaviour management of students.

The school takes active steps to keep students, staff and visitors safe from potential safety hazards. There is a detailed health and safety policy and procedure and internal health and safety audits occur monthly. The school has a wide range of risk assessments including risk assessments on individual students as appropriate.

The school uses an external company regarding the vetting of staff. There are sound and thorough recruitment and vetting procedures in place, including the vetting of taxi drivers.

The boarding section makes an excellent contribution to students' education and learning. Students benefit from a wide range of projects and initiatives. These include the twinning of the school with a school in Uganda and the development of a calendar which has raised a profit from sales. Other projects include those relating to mountain bikes and gardening. The school has been successful in coaching three students to play football at county level for the Surrey County Council Special Schools. Fishing is the most popular activity, with almost every student in boarding showing a keen interest. There is a clear regard for equal opportunities and diversity and a number of theme nights have occurred representing various cultures including Irish, Scottish, Asian, Caribbean and Mexican. Students' progress is monitored and formally reviewed in relation to their statements of special educational needs and IEP's. Students' progress is monitored and formally reviewed. Boarding staff are actively involved in supervising students' homework and learning activities and have sound communication and liaison with teaching staff at the school. Three of the older boarding students are currently involved in work experience. The boarding section's arrangements in this area have significant strengths and promote education, learning and initiatives to a high standard and are very much appreciated by the students.

All boarding students have link workers who liaise with teaching staff, a range of other professionals and parents. They monitor and review students' progress appropriately and make a written and verbal contribution to students' annual reviews. Students confirm that they can attend reviews and other meetings that concern them. Specialist professionals are available as appropriate. The majority of students said that link workers and other staff have an interest in their well-being and are always approachable. The school's arrangements afford students a sound and consistent level of support and monitor and review students' progress appropriately. The school takes students' views seriously and actively encourages their contribution to school life through a range of forums. Staff consider and respond to students' ideas and suggestions.

Students have placement plans as part of their individual education plans, health records and progress reports. Boarding and teaching staff work together and plans show detailed recording and list progress, issues, targets and future plans. Students are clear that the school is proactive in this area. Students have contact with their parents and others consistent with agreements as set in placement plans. Any contact is clearly recorded and held on students' individual files.

Students live in boarding houses that provide adequate communal and private space. Students' bedrooms comprise single and shared accommodation which have been personalised to varying degrees. They are clean and hygienic with no safety hazards evident.

The school's Statement of Purpose and prospectus accurately describe the service and facilities provided. Boarding staff receive in-house and external training including National Vocational training and are supported by a formal and informal supervision network. Boarding staff have appraisals and development plans and work effectively as an established, well integrated and professional team. Standard 33 visit reports evidence close monitoring and scrutiny of the school's conduct and operation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Assess formally learners' competencies in ICT skills both within the subject itself and across other subjects.
- Sharpen the consistency of the quality of target setting in learners' IEPs.
- Provide more support for learners' writing skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

On joining the school, learners' standards are well below those expected for their ages. Most are at least two National Curriculum levels behind their peers in mainstream schools. By the end of Year 9, most learners have made good progress in improving their levels. In 2007, 10% in mathematics and 20% in science reached level 5, the expected level for their ages. Apart from success in GCSEs, older learners also achieve success in a range of other courses such as entry-level certificates and a short course GCSE in physical education. Learners are also successful in a range of vocational courses and activities, some achieving representative honours in football at county level. Learners' overall literacy skills improve well, but their progress in improving the quality of their writing, in particular extended writing, is slower.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners eat fresh and healthy food prepared on site and experience a wide range of British and international dishes, linked to the cultural diversity themes in the curriculum. They understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. Participation in formal physical education lessons and a range of enrichment activities and competitions is high. Learners report that they feel safe and that if there are any incidents, the school deals with these quickly and effectively. Behaviour is satisfactory overall, a positive rewards system helping in this respect. A learner suggested that some still 'throw wobblers', but behaviour improves as they grow older. In a Year 7 physical education lesson, an older learner took responsibility very well for supporting a younger learner working on a fitness programme. Transition to learners' next stage of their career is eased because of their progress in the key skills of literacy and numeracy and the opportunities they have had for work experience. At the end of the last school year, all leavers continued on to further education, employment or work based training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Staff know their learners very well. Some learners are a little reluctant at the start of lessons. However, they respond well eventually because activities are made interesting and they receive much individual support to improve their progress. Where appropriate, staff ensure that learners behave and work safely, for example, in food technology lessons. In a Year 8 lesson, learners successfully prepared 'fajitas' for the following day's celebration of Mexican life. Though there are opportunities for learners to be involved in self-assessment, their comments are basic and they do not receive enough advice as to how this aspect of their work could improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum successfully re-engages learners' interest in education and enables them to make progress and achieve success. Some younger students visit a local specialist language college for Spanish lessons. A range of academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 support learners well for the next stage of their career. There are also opportunities for older learners to attend courses at two local further education colleges. The well-planned and structured personal, social and health education course develops further learners' personal attributes, and includes citizenship and careers guidance elements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a strong, collaborative, caring and supportive environment where learners feel safe, develop their personal qualities and make good progress. All have IEPs but the targets on some of these are not precise enough and it is not always clear what learners should be achieving. There are careful assessments for each learner in relation to their personal needs and the impact these may have on other people in the school. Learners receive good advice for their future careers. The school works hard to improve learners' behaviour and attitudes and, last year, there were no permanent exclusions. There is also a declining rate in the number of fixed-term exclusion days. Despite the school's best efforts, some learners still do not attend as well as they should. Learners' academic progress is being monitored by newly introduced tracking procedures. However, the benefits of this are not yet evident and there is no formal assessment of learners' competencies in ICT.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, senior leadership group and those with other posts of responsibility are effective in setting a clear direction and sense of purpose for the school. There is good quality monitoring and evaluation of teaching and all staff are involved in school self-evaluation. This has resulted in a clear focus on what the school needs to do to improve further. Newly introduced systems and procedures are helping the school move forward, although for some of these it is too early to judge their impact. Well-managed resources support improvements and ensure

that learners make good progress. The governing body acts effectively in its role as a critical and supportive friend of the school.

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
---	----------------

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 boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	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	2
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

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

20 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Starhurst School, Dorking, RH5 4DB

My colleague and I visited your school over a two day period. I spent one day there, seeing you in lessons and in other activities. I also chatted to some of you. My colleague visited the boarding lodges for two days. He chatted to you, joined you for breakfast and for your evening meal, and went fishing with you. We were both pleased by the friendly way you greeted us and the open way in which you chatted with us. We were also pleased to hear how you enjoy the extra activities you can join in, and the care and support you receive. We would also like to thank you for filling in the special questionnaire that you were given. You receive a good quality education at the school and the boarding provision is good. This is because:

- the staff have your best interests at heart and make every effort to make sure you will do well in the future
- the staff make sure you are safe and well cared for
- you make good progress and your behaviour improves
- you are able to be involved in the life of the school and to help others outside the school
- teachers make your lesson interesting and make sure the work is suitable for you
- the curriculum is interesting and includes a good range of extra activities for you take part in
- the leaders of the school have plans to make things even better for you.

To make things even better the school should:

- assess your capabilities in the use of ICT
- give you more help with your writing
- make sure the targets you are set in your IEPs are very clear so that you know how to achieve them.

A small number of you could help by:

- improving your attendance.

Once again, many thanks for making us feel welcome and good luck for your future.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead Inspector