

Peacehaven Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131601
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	315840
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	839
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Creasey
Headteacher	Helen Cryer
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Greenwich Way Peacehaven BN10 8RB
Telephone number	01273 581100
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Peacehaven is smaller than most secondary schools and is relatively new, opening in 2001. It has specialist status for science and mathematics as well as Healthy Schools, Sportsmark and Artsmark awards. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. While few speak English as an additional language, the number from other ethnic groups is growing slowly. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above average and the school incorporates a unit for up to 25 students with speech, language or communication difficulties. The headteacher at the time of the last inspection was seconded to another school and replaced by an acting headteacher for a year; the current headteacher took up the post nearly two years ago.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Peacehaven Community School provides a good standard of education. Although it is still a relatively new school, it has established itself as seeking to include all students and to raise their aspirations. It offers a positive learning culture for both students and staff.

From below average starting points students achieve well, meet challenging targets and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The first two year groups to pass through the school made excellent progress owing to the particularly high quality teaching provided by the small group of experienced teachers recruited when the school opened. The progress of subsequent year groups has slowed as student numbers have grown and wider recruitment has meant less experienced teachers joining the staff, reducing the overall quality of teaching, but students' progress is nonetheless good. The school has taken effective action to support and develop its teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, the quality of lessons and of intervention when students are not doing well enough is improving and is good overall.

Less able students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make particularly good progress. This is because teachers include them very well in lessons and because of the exceptional care for their personal development and well-being provided by the learning and support team. This is much appreciated by the students and their parents with one saying her son had made 'progress that we never dreamed was possible' since joining the school.

Students much enjoy school and get on well with each other and with staff. Most behave properly, although a minority do not and fixed-term exclusions are above average; the school is, however, working effectively to reduce these. The curriculum is well planned to support students' personal development and learning needs. There are well established strengths in providing for the less able and provision is expanding for the more able. The school's specialist status has made a good impact on the curriculum by broadening the opportunities available although targets relating to students' achievement have not all been met. Guidance for academic improvement is good in some subjects and from some teachers. Nevertheless, students are not consistently involved in deciding how to improve their work so that they can become more independent as learners. This is especially the case for the more able students, a group who do not achieve as well as they should.

The headteacher provides clear direction and is well supported by her colleagues at all levels of leadership. They adapt well to the challenges faced in a complex organisation at this stage of its development. For example, their support for the many young staff, and well coordinated work to develop the curriculum, indicate a good capacity to improve the school further. A high value is rightly placed on working with the community and with students' families. The large majority of parents and carers believe the school does a good job with one saying 'I wish I'd had the enthusiastic teachers my daughter has now. No wonder she enjoys school so much.' Monitoring and evaluation give the school a largely accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses, although judgements about the impact it is making in its work and what to focus on next are not always based on sufficient measurable evidence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge all students, especially the more able, to think independently about how to improve their work.

- Ensure evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's provision and past initiatives, and the identification of further priorities, are consistently underpinned by reference to measurable evidence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Between Years 7 and 9 the students make good progress. Standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly average by age 14 although the results of the most recent national assessment tests in Year 9 were below average with falls in the proportion of students reaching the expected levels. Improved identification and support for underachieving students means that progress has improved and the school's most recent assessment data show students on target to do better this year.

In Years 10 and 11 good progress continues. The results of GCSE examinations are average. Students do well on vocational courses and in practical subjects such as art and design. There are however variations in achievement between subjects, with boys doing less well than girls in mathematics and English, and success in meeting challenging targets associated with the school's specialist status has been patchy. As with younger students, improved teaching and better targeting of underachievement is addressing these areas of weakness.

At all ages, less able students make the best progress relative to their starting points and students with significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because of the support they receive. Able students do not always achieve as well as they should and the school is beginning to improve their achievement, although there is further to go.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students greatly enjoy school as reflected in their above average attendance, the good attitudes usually displayed in lessons and their positive relationships with each other and with staff. They feel very safe and know they can turn to staff if they have concerns. Students' moral and social development is good and most behave responsibly, although the behaviour of a minority sometimes falls short of the school's suitably high expectations. Students understand well the need to live healthy lives, for example by eating good food. They appreciate the healthier food on offer in the cafeteria, although some do not always make healthy choices in their lives outside school. The students make a good contribution to the school community, for example through the year council and the highly effective mixed age mentoring groups within which younger students value the support of their older counterparts. Students are involved in a good range of activity in the local area including charity fund raising. The majority leave school well prepared for further education and for their future economic well-being because of the skills acquired in team working and their basic literacy and numeracy, as well as through work experience and courses in personal finance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are well planned to ensure good progress through engaging and varied tasks. High expectations and good management of students' behaviour promotes a positive learning

environment. The needs of less able students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well met, with good deployment of well trained teaching assistants. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to extend and monitor students' learning by effective questioning. They make good use of technology such as interactive display boards to support learning. Teachers are good at sharing and developing best practice with each other. For example the school knows that more able students are not always sufficiently challenged and is working hard to ensure a consistent approach to stretching them in all lessons. Staff associated with the school's specialist status for science and mathematics make a good contribution to developing teaching. Students' progress toward their long-term targets is monitored well. Identification of pockets of underachievement has improved this year and has boosted the progress of those requiring more help by enabling interventions to be better targeted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well adapted to meet students' needs. Provision is particularly strong for lower ability students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, through the work of the learning development team. Transition arrangements from primary school are well planned. Vocational options for older students are good and increasing through work with local partners, for example in providing new 14 to 19 diploma qualifications next year. The personal, social, health and citizenship programme provides well for students' personal development, including their spiritual and cultural understanding. Extra-curricular provision is broad and for many students this fosters their enjoyment of learning as well as helping them lead healthy lives through participating in sport. The school's recognition of the need to extend opportunities for more able students has led to developments in some subjects such as the three separate science GCSEs and early entry to French GCSE. The school is making good progress in ensuring all subjects offer this extra challenge. Specialist status in science is making a good impact across the curriculum, for example through work connected to information and communication technology, while the impact of mathematics is satisfactory but less developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Effective monitoring of each student's personal and academic needs enables the vulnerable and at-risk to be accurately identified. Support for the students with complex learning needs is exceptional. It is very well coordinated with external agencies and students' families and underpins their excellent academic progress. Good support for attendance ensures it is above average. High levels of fixed-term exclusion reflect the school's robust approach to the minority of students who behave badly. While this has been effective in almost entirely avoiding permanent exclusions and the reintegration of excluded students is good, the school is now reducing the levels of exclusion through more effective strategies to enable students to stay in school rather than miss learning time.

Guidance for academic improvement is good. Teachers give good and sometimes excellent verbal and written feedback about the quality of students' work and the next steps for improvement. Most students know the level they are at and their target levels or grades. However, they are not always involved enough in deciding what to do to reach their targets because teachers are inconsistent in developing their skills in self-evaluation. This prevents them taking ownership of their learning and, in particular, hinders the more able students from

gaining the highest grades at GCSE where independent learning is crucial. Careers guidance is well planned and students feel well informed when deciding on options or college applications.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school very well, providing the energy to sustain improvement. Leaders at all levels have a shared purpose. The school knows itself well and self-evaluation is mainly accurate. It draws on a good range of evidence enabling weaker aspects of achievement and teaching to be identified and tackled. Evaluation is less effective in checking the impact of provision on less tangible issues such as the personal development of students as a whole. An example is assessing whether all students not only understand the importance of leading healthy lives but actively do so, and addressing the needs of those who do not. Subject leaders' evaluation is good and is helping to reduce the differences in achievement between subjects. Nevertheless, some subject leaders do not refer enough to measurable evidence when deciding what to do next or judging the impact of what they have already done. Staff development links well to the monitoring of their performance and is helping share good practice. Resources are managed effectively. The headteacher works hard to ensure that the private finance initiative under which the school was built operates to the benefit of the students. In some areas this presents challenges; for example, the small dining hall in relation to the number of students means they have limited time to eat lunch. The senior leaders benefit from the close and critical support given by the governing body.

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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?	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	2
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?	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Peacehaven Community School, Peacehaven, BN10 8RB

This letter is to explain the outcome of the recent inspection and to thank the many of you who took the time to talk to us when I and my colleagues were in the school.

- Peacehaven Community School provides a good standard of education.
- Most of you told us that you really enjoy school and feel safe and well cared for, and that the school does a good job in helping you to lead healthy lives. These views were backed by your parents and carers in the questionnaires returned.
- You make good progress with your work and reach the standards expected by the time you leave. This is because you are well taught and because the subjects offered meet your needs well.
- Those of you who find learning more difficult make good and sometimes very good progress because the staff understand well how to provide help for you.
- The school is working hard to improve what is provided for those of you who need more difficult work, although the staff know they are not there yet and not all lessons and subjects are challenging you to do your best.
- You get good advice from teachers in lessons and in some marking as to how to improve your work so that most of you know your learning targets.
- You told us you enjoy the extra-curricular activities and clubs and it was impressive to see students taking a lead in organising some of these.
- The headteacher and her colleagues work hard to support all of you and think carefully about how to develop the school further.

Even in a good school there are areas which can be improved and we have asked the headteacher to include the following in her plans:

- Help the students develop more independence in deciding how to improve their work to reach their targets so they are less reliant on teachers.
- When checking the school's effectiveness and deciding what to do next make sure reference is always made to a wide range of evidence about the impact on your lives and learning.

Thank you again and good luck for the future.

Stephen Long Her Majesty's Inspector

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