

Harbour School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119046
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326932
Inspection date	28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

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	6–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fran Fryer-Kelsey
Headteacher	Denise Baker
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
School address	Elms Vale Road Dover CT17 9PS
Telephone number	01304 201964
Fax number	01304 225000

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Harbour School is designated for pupils with complex behaviour and learning difficulties and for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). All have statements of special educational needs. Pupils are almost entirely White British. Boys far outnumber girls. The school admits pupils from Year 1 onwards. There is no Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Pupils attend from across Kent and from some London boroughs. All BESD pupils transfer to special secondary schools at the end of Year 6. The headteacher was appointed in January 2009, following nearly two years without a permanent post holder. The school has awards for Healthy Schools 2006 to 2009, Primary and Secondary Basic Skills 2007 to 2010, Active and Sports Mark 2007 and Investor in People 2008. Year 10 and Year 11 pupils were engaged in offsite activities during the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Harbour School is an outstanding school. It provides an exceptional quality of education and care for all its pupils, no matter what their individual needs or circumstances are. Pupils say 'Our school is great!' and the inspectors absolutely agree with them.

The recently appointed headteacher is innovative and forward thinking. Working closely with her excellent senior leadership and middle management teams and the astute governing body, she ensures that the school moves forward rapidly. New initiatives, staff ideas, strategies and curriculum developments are eagerly adopted, shared and trialled to extend learning. This enables pupils to make huge strides in their learning, relationships, confidence and personal development. They want to stay healthy, participating in many sports. Pupils learn very successfully how to manage their extremely challenging behaviour, which in previous settings hindered their ability to make progress. As a direct result, exclusion is dramatically reduced and pupils' good attendance continues to improve. Pupils say they feel very safe, even on the few occasions when other pupils are upset or unsettled. They are proud of their school, valuing the very well maintained learning environment.

Pupils' progress is outstanding across the school. Once settled they make huge gains from their exceptionally low starting points. This is largely due to enthusiastic, excellent teaching that shines through, inspiring pupils, feeding and satisfying their desire for information. Achievement across Years 10 and 11 is impressive. As a minimum, every pupil gains at least one GCSE or its equivalent. Increasingly, pupils achieve higher grades, notably so in art and mathematics. Pupils' comprehension and extended writing skills are, however, less well developed, and constrain their attainment in examinations.

Outstanding staff teamwork and behaviour management skills are crucial to the strong 'family style' community and excellent nurturing care that so strongly benefits pupils. This is significantly enhanced by comprehensive school-based, multi-agency support for pupils' learning and their emotional, mental and physical health. Targets are mostly both challenging and realistic. Pupils can identify their behaviour and learning targets. However, given the school's success in helping pupils make progress, learning targets in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not always set pupils high enough expectations. Nonetheless, academic guidance, including marking, is extremely thorough and ways of improving work are always discussed with pupils. Parents contribute well by supporting homework.

The vibrant curriculum is flexibly planned and individually adapted to reflect pupils' own interests and to capture their imagination. Information and communication technology (ICT) is seamlessly embedded in all subjects. Work-related learning provides pupils with an impressive belief in their abilities and future aspirations. Partnerships, outreach work and inclusion are exceptionally strong. The school is a trailblazer in developing provision that enables pupils with complex behavioural difficulties to succeed and so fully contribute to their local and wider communities. The school's capacity to improve in all aspects of its work is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further raise standards and achievement in writing by ensuring that pupils in Years 10 and 11 do more written work based on text comprehension to enable them to gain higher level GCSE and other examination results.

- Raise learning targets in Years 7, 8 and 9, so that pupils have even higher expectations for the standards of their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Attainment on entry is exceptionally low. Pupils have significant 'gaps' in learning due to the complexity of their behaviour. Nonetheless, they make excellent progress during their time in school. The standards achieved by pupils against national averages remain well below average due to their complex needs. A very few pupils attain or almost attain national averages in end of Year 6 mathematics tests, whilst all pupils in Year 11 achieve at least one GCSE or its equivalent. A small minority of Year 11 pupils achieve GCSE grades A* to C, in subjects including art and mathematics. Computerised data analysis, tracking, monitoring and evaluation are precise and regularly updated so that any pupil's underachievement or static progress is quickly identified and addressed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school and their lively, exciting lessons. They are determined to do their best and receive praise for their efforts. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are outstanding for most of the time. They concentrate hard on work. Even on the few occasions when others get upset or have a bad day, pupils show tolerance. Pupils have an impressive thirst for factual information. Almost all value rewards and as they mature, are successfully taking responsibility for their behaviour, so that the need for exclusion has dropped dramatically. Attendance is good and continues to improve. Pupils are learning to trust and to build positive relationships. They are exceptionally well prepared for adult life through the outstanding work-related learning programme, that includes college 'tasters' and one day a week work experience for the oldest pupils. In 2008, all leavers took up college placements.

Pupils are enthusiastic about being healthy, participating in many sports, including archery. They feel safe, know how to deal with bullying and get adult help if needed. Multicultural links are very well developed with links to countries such as Japan, Belgium and in Africa. The student leadership team and the school council are closely involved in school decisions, including helping to appoint staff. Pupils are expected to be independent and are exceptionally well prepared for the future through impressive community involvement. They gain socially from many trips and residential visits. One boy spoke at length about his love of 'sleepovers' at school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is inspirational, epitomised by the cracking pace of lessons, and impressive subject and special needs knowledge of the teachers. Close matching of work to pupils' individual needs and interests successfully engages pupils and motivates their desire to learn. Teamwork between teachers and their assistants, together with strategies for managing and pre-empting instances of challenging behaviour, is extremely effective in helping pupils achieve their personal targets. As a result, learning continues with minimal disruption and ensures outstanding pupil progress. Relationships are excellent. The balance of support and independence is well focused so that pupils grow in confidence and find learning great fun. In a mathematics lesson, one boy could

hardly wait to remind his teacher that he had worked out a problem without a calculator. Pupils and teaching assistants are so engrossed in work that occasionally teachers have to remind them to listen to key teaching points, or to pupil responses to skilful questioning that really enhance thinking skills. Planning and assessment are thorough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The innovative curriculum is flexibly adapted to provide very personalised learning based on pupils' skills and interests. It encourages enjoyment and is well planned to fill any gaps in basic skills. Art, physical education, design and technology, reading, careers education and the regular use of information and communication technology in all subjects are examples of many significant subject strengths. Regular themed weeks such as Japan week, together with visitors, trips, school clubs and inter-school sports activities, all contribute to outstanding enrichment and extended day activities. A barge trip in Belgium is about to take place. Pupils' emotional needs are fully met by excellent therapeutic provision that includes music therapy, anger management and mental health counselling. The work-related learning programme in Years 10 and 11 is outstanding with all pupils doing one day a week of work experience with local community employers, in addition to undertaking a range of vocational activities. The school is aware of the need to further extend opportunities for writing in order to achieve even higher level examination grades. The school continues to expand its already excellent accreditation offer. All pupils successfully gain recognised national accreditation and this spurs them on to attend college and to decide on future careers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The pastoral care, nurture and support offered to pupils, their families and carers by all staff are excellent. They enable pupils to overcome personal barriers so that they can learn and succeed. The school-based coordinator of multi-agency care who oversees provision for the most vulnerable pupils has immediate access to skilled professionals, so that all pupils and families rapidly get the right kind of support to resolve problems. The school has its own mental health nurse. Safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements. Transition procedures are extremely effective and ensure pupils' confidence. Academic guidance and assessment practice are outstanding. Pupils know their targets for behaviour and learning and often devise targets of their own. In Years 7, 8, and 9 the school knows that raising learning targets will raise pupils' expectations. Work is always marked with pupils so they understand how to improve. Individual education plans are regularly reviewed and in all aspects of welfare monitoring, including exclusion, behaviour and attendance, record keeping is exceptionally thorough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The new headteacher has 'hit the ground running', already gaining full staff support and the respect of pupils. Working visibly with the senior and middle management leadership teams, new initiatives and staff ideas are eagerly being explored and adopted, focused on further raising achievement and school standards. Governance is excellent, demonstrated in the astute appointments of the headteacher and other staff. Governors are fully involved in decision

making, and they question and challenge the school's leaders very well. The school is moving forward rapidly, due to the excellent strategies in place and a shared vision to provide exceptional education for all pupils.

The school's evaluation of its own performance is outstanding, including detailed analysis and use of achievement data, and monitoring and review of areas for improvement. The school development plan has very clear priorities focused on achievement, and includes early development planning for specialist behaviour and learning status. Continued professional development for staff is outstanding, with all staff keen to extend their impressive skills. Outreach training and advice involves several local mainstream secondary and primary schools and some pupils, for example those studying for GCSE mathematics, attend mainstream school lessons. The school takes excellent steps to promote community cohesion and to promote opportunities for very vulnerable pupils. Pupils are fully included in their local community, have links with other countries and a recent highly successful family day enabled parents to learn computing skills from their children. Finance is carefully managed and spent wisely, including money remaining from re-designation.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ 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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 April 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Harbour School, Dover, CT17 9PS

We want to thank you for making our recent visit to your wonderful school so enjoyable and for telling us so much about it. We were really impressed with how hard you work and how you are all doing your very best to improve your behaviour. We can see how much you enjoy being at school.

We think that you go to an outstanding school. Your achievement is excellent and you do incredibly well in Year 11 examinations. This is because everyone in your school does an excellent job in teaching you, helping you to be happy and confident and looking after you so exceptionally well. We like the way that you offer excellent support to each other and are very understanding when others have a difficult day. We think your school council and the student leadership team help the school to make excellent decisions. We can see how much you love learning new facts.

There are a couple of areas that you can improve on. In Years 7, 8 and 9 you have to think, with your teachers, about raising your learning targets so that you have even better work expectations. In Years 10 and 11 you can ask your teachers for more writing and comprehension work to help you get even higher examination results.

We know that you will enjoy working with your teachers to achieve these goals.

Yours faithfully

Judi Bedawi Lead inspector