

West Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125463
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	328335
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Eileen Keeble
Headteacher	Ms Judy Nettleton
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2006
School address	Kingston Road Leatherhead KT22 7PW
Telephone number	01372 814 714
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

West Hill is a special school for students with moderate learning difficulties, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. Since the last inspection, it has been re-designated and now caters for students aged 11 to 16. An increasing number of students entering the school have a greater complexity of need than in the past, including a significant proportion with autism. They are mainly from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The school has gained many awards, including the Healthy School and Sportsmark awards. The school provides advice and support to local authority mainstream schools about how to work with students with learning difficulties, and particularly with those on the autistic spectrum.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

West Hill School continues to be an outstanding school, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Under the strong and determined leadership of the headteacher, it has adapted extremely well to meet the increased complexity of students' needs. Staff expectations of students remain very high and, as a result, students achieve exceptionally well in the development of both their personal and their academic skills. The vast majority of parents are overwhelmingly positive about the provision. Comments such as, 'For my child this school has been a blessing', sum up their views very well.

Students' progress is second to none and this is because of excellent teaching. Given their very low starting points on entry, the standards they attain across a wide range of subjects is well above what might be expected. They gain accreditation in a range of academic and vocational areas, including entry level and GCSE qualifications. Teachers are very secure in their knowledge of the subjects they teach. They make extremely effective use of assessment to set challenging and yet realistic targets for each student which have a marked effect on their determination to succeed. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, allied to a very focused programme of staff development, has ensured that staff have refined their skills to meet the changing needs of students. Across the school, teamwork between teachers and support staff underpins extremely effective management of students' behaviour and ensures that lessons proceed in a calm and orderly way. In outstanding lessons, as seen for example in English, mathematics, science, physical education and food technology, staff make excellent use of practical learning. This invariably results in lessons being fun for all and very purposeful.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The ways in which students uphold the school's 'twelve key values' and learn to think through the effects of their actions on others is impressive. They are keen to point out that 'respect is at the core'. As a result, their behaviour is excellent and students get on together extremely well in a racially harmonious atmosphere. They take on responsibilities, such as being a member of the school council, with enthusiasm and play an important part in improving the school, for example by helping to develop the outside gym. Students' input into the review of lessons is valued by staff and is a very good indicator of the importance students attach to learning. Attendance has improved since the last inspection. It is now excellent, as is students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and of the need to keep safe.

Added flexibility in the curriculum ensures that it fully meets students' needs by being tailored to their personal circumstances. A strong focus on learning the skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology, as well as the skills needed for adult life, forms the bedrock of the provision. An increased focus on therapeutic and sensory opportunities, and a more topic-based approach, ensures the curriculum fully meets students' changing needs. A wide range of professionals, for example educational psychologists, careers advisers and therapists, support the provision very well. With school staff, they help to ensure that students receive high-quality support and guidance and are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Highly effective leadership, with a very strong commitment to the inclusion of all, is steering the school on a path of continual improvement. As a result, students with a very wide range of needs get every chance to succeed. Discerning and robust self-evaluation, particularly by the headteacher and senior team, is central to the school's success. The role of the governing

body is much improved since the last inspection and it now plays an important part in school development by acting very effectively as the school's critical friend. Consequently, strengths and areas that are in need of attention are clearly defined and staff are very aware of the most important next steps for the school. Through the school's strong links with others, it plays a very active role in promoting community cohesion by helping students to appreciate and value differences among people in the local and national arena. The school has rightly identified that it does not yet play a sufficiently active role in promoting community cohesion at a global level. It has highlighted this as a key priority within its school improvement plan.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that it actively promotes community cohesion at a global level.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

As a result of excellent teaching and care and guidance, students invariably meet or exceed their challenging targets. The high quality of support given to pupils, often on an individual basis, ensures that they all make outstanding progress whatever their ability. The high focus on the development of students' language and communication skills pays off because it has a significant and positive impact on their achievements across the curriculum. It also ensures that students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers. The school enables students to achieve very well in nationally accredited courses in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology, as well as in areas that focus on the skills needed for life beyond school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students enjoy coming to school. This is evident in the way that they greet staff first thing in the morning and in their enthusiastic approach to learning. Students of all ages make substantial gains in developing independence, confidence and self-esteem. As seen in a tutor group session, students show great insight into the need to take account of others' feelings, especially those who are sad to leave West Hill. They participate very well in a range of physical activities, such as dance, swimming and 'boxercise', with excellent attention to safety. The Healthy Schools and Sportsmark awards are a testament to this. Students' contribution to the school community is excellent and they are diligent when acting as information and communication technology technicians, cleaning the school mini-buses and doing their jobs as monitors. As a result of the very well-organised work-placement programme, for example in local nurseries, schools and businesses, students develop skills that prepare them extremely well for the next stage of their lives. In these situations, students make an important contribution to the school's local community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Adults working in the school know the students really well and plan exciting and interesting activities with carefully targeted support to match students' individual needs. This enables students to make outstanding progress while enjoying their lessons. Support staff are deployed

very effectively so that everyone extends and consolidates students' learning. Excellent relationships between staff and students mean that students trust the staff. This helps to encourage them to work towards meeting their challenging targets. The school ensures that parents are fully aware of the students' targets and this has a positive impact on enabling them to pursue their child's education at home. Senior leaders are excellent practitioners, particularly when teaching students with the most complex needs. In this way they set a highly effective model for other staff to emulate.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum is very responsive to students' needs. Students are challenged to develop their communication skills by the use of signs and symbols as well as spoken language, depending on their needs. Very effective use of information and communication technology supports learning across all areas and is much improved since the last inspection. Further planned developments around the introduction of a 'virtual learning platform' are well under way. This will give students, staff and parents access to a wide range of exciting learning experiences. The vocational and work-related programme has been extended and students respond extremely well to input from visitors with expertise in areas such as plumbing, to help them gain an understanding about the world of work. The school offers considerable additional opportunities to extend students' academic and personal skills, through, for example, residential visits for all year groups, some of which are abroad, and a range of lunchtime and after-school activities. These opportunities are highly valued by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

As a result of the very high-quality care, guidance and support that students receive, their behaviour, attendance and attitudes to school all show marked improvement. The school's comprehensive behaviour management plans are consistently implemented. Bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively. Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet requirements and stringent risk assessments are undertaken for all aspects of school life. The students say, 'There is always someone to turn to if you need help.' The school has extensive systems for tracking students' academic and personal progress and it uses these extremely well to set challenging targets for each student. Since the targets are well known by students and staff, it means that everyone works towards common goals. At annual review meetings, students use computers very effectively to make presentations, using photos of themselves, to demonstrate their progress. Comments such as 'These help our parents to be proud of our work' show that they understand the importance of doing well at school. Other comments show that they are also clear about the areas where they still need to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are sharply focused on providing the very best education for the students and are extremely successful in achieving this. The headteacher and senior team encourage others to be innovative and to make the best use of their considerable range of expertise. As a result, leaders at different levels have the confidence, as well as the skills, to ensure continuous improvement in the areas for which they are responsible. Governors challenge

school leaders very effectively and ensure that the school provides excellent value for money. School leaders work very well with a wide range of other agencies, including other schools, to support students' learning. Work with mainstream schools to support pupils with learning difficulties, particularly those on the autistic spectrum, plays an important part in the school's success. The clarity of the senior team about what the most important next steps for the school are, along with the determination of all staff and governors to provide the best, mean that West Hill has excellent capacity to improve even further.

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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	1
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?	2
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 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of West Hill School, Leatherhead, KT22 7PW

I would like to thank you for all the help you gave me when I came to visit your school. I judged West Hill to be an excellent school and it was great to see how well you are all doing. I was very impressed with the ways in which you think through your feelings and learn to take account of those of others, for example when supporting those of you who are sad to be leaving. You clearly understand what is meant by the school's 'twelve key values' and show very good respect for others. You have some excellent ideas which have helped to improve your school, such as the outside gym and the introduction of a leavers' prom. I could see that you gain a lot of confidence and you learn to behave very well indeed. I was glad to hear that you enjoy school so much and that you make good friends. I agree with you it is important that 'there is always someone to talk to' if you need help.

Your teachers plan exciting and interesting things for you to do, including the residential visits and the lunchtime and after-school clubs, and you clearly appreciate these. I saw that you are trying hard in your lessons and, because of the excellent teaching, you gain qualifications that prepare you extremely well for life once you leave West Hill.

The headteacher and senior teachers are very clear that they want to see the school improve even further and have some very good ideas about how this might happen. One thing that I agree they should do is to give you more opportunities to learn to appreciate and value differences among people around the world. The school's new information and communication technology 'virtual learning platform' will give you access to a wide range of exciting learning experiences and should be a big help in this. You can play your part in improving your school even further by continuing to try your hardest at all times.

Yours faithfully

Kay Charlton

Lead Inspector