

Cornfield School, Littlehampton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126170
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	330271
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Surtees
Headteacher	Ric Turney
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2007
School address	Cornfield Close Littlehampton BN17 6HY
Telephone number	01903 731277
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

All of the students have a statement of special educational needs for social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. The vast majority of students are boys. A very large majority of students have a White British background. Approximately a quarter of the students are in public care.

When Cornfield School was inspected in March 2007, it was judged to require special measures. At the time, the substantive headteacher and an assistant headteacher were on long term sick leave and a seconded headteacher was running the school on a temporary basis. The assistant headteacher left the school in July 2007. The substantive headteacher did not return to work and eventually left in September 2007. In January 2008, the seconded headteacher was appointed executive headteacher of the two schools, his own and Cornfield. This appointment is for a maximum of two years to allow Cornfield's governors to appoint a new substantive headteacher. No appointment has yet been made.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Cornfield School has improved considerably since its previous inspection. It now provides a good quality of education. Such significant improvement was possible because the staff and governors responded very well to the very effective input of local authority staff. Staff with senior leadership responsibilities successfully seized this opportunity to transform the extent and quality of students' learning and personal development. They achieved this through a combination of systematic and robust monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, appropriate target setting and a rigorous analysis of data. Most importantly, they raised the staff's expectations of students' attitudes and behaviour and engineered a culture of high challenge and aspiration. Leaders' impact is evident in all aspects of the school's work.

Standards are generally well below national expectations when students enter the school, although a few are working at levels expected of learners of that age. Overall, students make good progress and achieve well. The exception is mathematics, where students' progress is satisfactory because there remains a legacy of significant underachievement in this subject. By the time students leave school standards are below expectations, although an increasing number attain accreditation in some subjects that are in line with national expectations. Students with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally good progress because of effective strategies for identifying these students and then bolstering their numeracy and literacy skills through targeted support.

Students achieve so well because teaching is good. Activities are planned around students' targets and so they are interesting and challenging. As a result, learning takes place at a good pace because students' needs are met and so disruptive behaviour is less frequent. When disturbances do occur, they are managed consistently. Students' good personal development is also an important contributory factor to the good progress that students make. Their good behaviour, attitudes and attendance reflect their enjoyment of school and enable them to make the most of a good curriculum. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 in particular has a very good emphasis on work related learning and so students are prepared well for leaving school. The school's good links with its partners, such as local schools and colleges, enable students to benefit from the subjects and courses that are on offer. Other links, such as with a local community centre, provide opportunities for students to contribute to the local community. While there are some opportunities for students to contribute to the work and running of the school, such as via the school council, these are under developed. Students receive good quality care, guidance and support. Their day-to-day care and welfare needs are met well, and structured systems support and guide their academic and personal development effectively.

Strong leadership and management have underpinned the improvement since the previous inspection, and leaders have a good capacity to sustain this level of effectiveness. Students, parents and carers all have confidence in the school and are supportive of its work. Although governance is currently satisfactory, governors are becoming increasingly aware of the need to balance their dual roles of support and challenge.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the students' rate of learning in mathematics so students make the same progress as in other subjects and achieve equally well.

- Devise and implement opportunities for students to contribute more to the school community by taking on additional responsibilities as they move through the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards on entry are generally well below those expected of students of this age. Standards rise by the time students leave school. Although attainment levels are below national expectations, all students, including the small number of girls and those in public care, make good progress and achieve well. At the time of the previous inspection, students underachieved in English and mathematics, although they did better in science. This situation has been remedied. Students in Years 7 to 9 now achieve well in English and science, and some make very good progress. Their progress in mathematics is satisfactory. A similar profile exists in Key Stage 4; students achieve well in English and make particularly good progress in science but they do less well in mathematics, particularly in Year 11. There are historical reasons why students under performed in mathematics in all year groups, but there are clear indications that this situation is being improved through more effective teaching and learning.

The most significant factor in students' accelerated rate of progress is the establishment and use of individual National Curriculum (NC) level targets in all subjects. They act as a constant focus for both teachers and students. Whilst a number of students achieved GCSE passes in 2008, few were at grade C or above. The GCSE grade predictions for 2009 are much more optimistic. Some students are unlikely to achieve this standard but, despite this, they still make good progress. This is because those who find the work difficult are identified early and they receive additional targeted support in literacy and numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Staff's raised expectations, consistent application of behaviour management procedures, and the improved quality of teaching all have a positive impact on students' personal development. Secure behaviour management and interesting learning activities ensure students' enjoyment of school. Consequently, the attendance of the vast majority is good and they behave well and display good attitudes. One student described this as, 'Things are definitely better. Students are getting better at controlling themselves. They do not lose their temper as much.' Students do not walk out of classes so often, serious incidents are less common, and the number of fixed term exclusions has dropped by a half in twelve months. The result is that students feel safer and spend more time involved in good quality learning activities that are disrupted less often by others' inappropriate behaviour.

Students have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle. They have growing awareness of how their actions affect other people and of the needs of others. For instance, they work with a wheelchair basketball team that uses the school's facilities. They contribute to the school community insofar as they are able, but the oldest pupils in particular are not given enough opportunities to do more, such as acting as a buddy or mentor. Accredited courses and the work related learning programme prepare students well for leaving school. Its success is evident in the destinations of leavers in 2008. All of them went into employment or to college and they are all sustaining their placements and succeeding, reflecting the good workplace and study skills and the personal qualities that were developed at school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have a good understanding of their students' learning needs because they have an accurate assessment of their previous achievements. Therefore, they provide learning activities that provide the right level of challenge and so lessons proceed at a good pace. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching assistants support individual students well and help to maintain their focus. When students are reluctant to learn, staff manage them appropriately and in line with the school's procedures. Generally, this results in students re-engaging with learning and so disruption is kept to a minimum. Teachers are particularly adept at using students' individual targets as a vehicle for motivation. The students know their NC level targets and they act as a goal towards which they can aim. Teachers use them to inform their planning and when assessing students' work. There is good dialogue between teachers and students when evaluating the level of work that has been done and considering how it can be improved in order to move on to the next level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of learning opportunities. The needs of the few girls are met effectively and a weekly Girls' Group supplements what is provided. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad, although all students are disapplied from studying a modern foreign language. A good focus on developing students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills is supported by a comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. As a result, students do well in accredited examinations that they take in Year 9, such as Entry Level Certificates in ICT and PSHE. The well-planned Key Stage 4 curriculum provides accredited subjects and courses that are appropriate to students' age and interests, including a choice of options. The introduction of the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness is a good innovation to enable students to acquire life skills, such as decision making. Additional accreditation, including vocational qualifications, is available through the school's links with local colleges and schools. The curriculum is enriched well. All students have access to a residential week that promotes personal qualities like teamwork through a variety of outdoor pursuits. A focus week each term pays particular attention to community links, business and enterprise and healthy lifestyles respectively and includes all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support enable the high quality teaching and curriculum to have a strong impact. Leaders' very good monitoring of individual students' academic and personal development enables them to accumulate a great deal of data about their progress. This information is interrogated closely and individual guidance and support are targeted effectively and in a variety of ways. This might be weekly one to one sessions to accelerate the acquisition of literacy skills, or it could be by the production of an individual education plan with small, short term objectives. In the case of other students, for whom the self-management of behaviour is difficult, the school determines personalised coping strategies and provides staff with detailed guidance on how to manage these particular students. Effective links with other agencies, such as Connexions and local medical services, also help to develop a team approach to providing

students with the guidance and support that they require. The school meets students' day-to-day welfare needs well, and it complies with all the required safeguarding and child protection procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders' clarity of thought and their implementation of robust systems for checking how well the school is doing have been powerful driving forces in moving the school forward. With the help of the local authority, leaders focused on the most important priorities and monitored routinely the impact that their actions were having. They maintained this depth of self audit and they use the outcomes of monitoring to set challenging targets and to deploy resources efficiently. At one level, this may be a whole school target, such as to attain Healthy School status. However, self-evaluation data is used equally effectively to promote individual students' development. The strong commitment to equality of opportunity means that provision is in place to meet all students' needs; the school contributes well to promoting community cohesion. Governors have a secure understanding of where the school is now and where it wants to get. They are now in a position to be more actively involved in plotting this journey, such as securing the permanent leadership of the school, as they extend their influence in finding out for themselves what is happening in the school.

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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	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which 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	3
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	3
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**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Cornfield School, Littlehampton BN17 6HY

Thank you for making us feel welcome when we visited your school and a special thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us. Your school has improved a great deal since it was inspected last year. You and your parents think that Cornfield is a good school and we agree with you.

Lessons are generally good and you learn a lot. The school gives you interesting subjects and courses to follow, some of which are at local schools and colleges. Therefore, you make good progress in your work. Staff take good care of you and support you well with your learning and your development as young people. As a result, you know a great deal about staying safe and healthy. Most of you go to school regularly and the majority follow classroom rules. This helps to prepare you well for leaving school and going to college or into work. Those who run your school are doing a good job and they want to make it even better. We have given them two ways that can help them to do this.

- Make sure that you learn as quickly and make the same progress in mathematics as you do in other subjects.
- Give you opportunities to contribute to the school community by taking on extra responsibilities, such as being a buddy or mentor, as you move through the school.

You can help your school to develop further by continuing to attend as often as you can, by behaving well in lessons, and always working hard. I hope that you are able to do this. Thank you once again and I wish you all the best of luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell Lead inspector