

Heath Farm School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6060
Unique Reference Number	119009
Inspection number	330446
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Heath Farm School currently occupies a converted farm and outbuildings in a small village near Ashford in Kent, but will be rebuilt in its grounds later this year. The school opened in December 1988 and is approved for up to 70 students, aged 5 to 16 years, who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Although the school does not admit children into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), they can start in Year 1 and leave in Year 11. There were 41 students aged 7 to 16 on roll at the time of the inspection. The school departments include a small nurture group for pupils who, because of their backgrounds and needs are not ready to enter classroom life fully. There is a single class in the primary department, which is often divided into smaller age or ability groups for particular subjects and lessons. Students of secondary school age are grouped by year group.

The school is part of the Acorn Care and Education Group who own a number of similar schools across the country. The majority of Heath Farm students are looked after by their local authority. Most are with foster parents arranged through Heath Farm Family Services, although some are fostered with other independent agencies or live with their birth parents. Students' attainments upon entry to the school are low compared with others of their age, because of their disturbed education and disrupted family circumstances. All except one have English as their first language. The vast majority have a statement of special educational needs. Many have additional learning needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and attachment and attention deficit disorders. Almost all are from White British backgrounds, although there are a small number from mixed race, Asian and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds.

The school's aim is to 'meet the educational, social and welfare needs of children through the creation of a caring, supportive and stimulating atmosphere'.

The school was last inspected in March 2006

Evaluation of the school

Heath Farm School is a good school which meets its aims because of its good teaching, highly relevant curriculum and because its strong work with therapists, carers and parents ensures that students' needs are met in consistent ways. It makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development and their

willingness to learn. Students make good progress in their attendance, academic work, attitudes and behaviour and a significant percentage make sufficient progress in their behaviour and attitudes to return to their own local authority and mainstream schools. The overall quality of education has improved strongly since the last inspection and the school now meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

Heath Farm School provides a good quality of education. The curriculum is good. It contains all the elements it should and is strengthened by an excellent personal social, health and citizenship programme (PSHCE). The introduction of new literacy and mathematics schemes and a new, themed approach to the curriculum in Key Stage 3 is already helping to raise standards and motivate students. Some subjects, such as French and design and technology, are just now being planned in more detail to fit in with this development. The school is rightly focused on key skills such as literacy and numeracy, but arranges its groups and teaching in such a way that it is flexible and individual students' particular strengths can be identified and taught to; for example, one student gained a mathematics GCSE in Year 8 last year. A good range of accreditation is in place from Entry Level awards to GCSE courses. All this, together with the good teaching in lessons, means that students' progress academically and personally is good and sometimes better. Many leave in Year 11 with qualifications in seven or eight subjects, mainly at Entry Level 3 or GCSE Foundation level, including grade C passes. Those in the primary department make good progress in their literacy and numeracy skills.

Teaching and assessment are good. The strongest teaching, as seen in a primary literacy lesson and a Year 11 careers lesson, is well planned, does not waste a minute and gives students strong feedback as to how they are doing and what they now need to think about. Generally work is planned well, although sometimes at the end of lessons opportunities to review what has been learned are missed. A particular strength is the way in which the students are encouraged to think about their behaviour and are helped to see the relevance of what they are doing. Students say that teachers are so 'passionate' about subjects such as art, sports science and citizenship that they 'start to get interested' themselves and are inspired to try hard. They develop strong relationships with staff and, because of the effective support they receive in lessons, students who have previously found it hard to stay in class or engage in learning concentrate well. Parents and carers report the 'contact' books used as being 'invaluable' in also helping them to understand their children's needs. They, and the students, feel that homework could be used even more to extend their learning.

Such good provision means that students' progress is good and occasionally outstanding, particularly in personal development, art, literacy and mathematics, where they achieve well and sometimes exceptionally well, often from very low starting points. Assessment and monitoring have improved considerably over the last 18 months, particularly in English and mathematics. A new electronic commercial system for assessment is being introduced to build on this to ensure that teaching in

all subjects takes account of what is known about students' learning needs and that their progress over time is tightly monitored.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They say that this is 'a good school to be at because it changes your life' and that this is because staff are there 'pushing me along' and 'never give up on you'. Staff work hard with carers and others to re-engage students in education and this means that their attendance improves and is now good overall. Topics in geography, religious education and history, alongside enterprise activities and citizenship projects such as helping to maintain the local churchyard and charity work, really promote students' understanding of others' needs and cultures and how their contribution to the school and the broader community can make a difference. They say that because their teachers believe in them so much they start to think they 'can do well, sometimes for the first time ever'. They have a much clearer view of what is right and wrong and how they should take others' views and needs into account. The careful introduction to the school through the nurture group supports them well emotionally. The strongly relevant and personalised approach in the classroom helps all students to enjoy their education more and feel a sense of achievement as they meet their targets. This stands them in good stead for adult life and their future economic well-being.

Their particular needs mean that many students have difficult behaviour which they are learning to manage. Consistent management of behaviour, high expectations, good staff and therapist team work and a clear rewards and sanctions programme result in good behaviour overall, particularly in lessons. The improved behaviour policy and relatively new rewards programme, introduced since the last inspection, have had a good impact. They have reduced the numbers of incidents and exclusions and are helping students to manage and take responsibility for their own behaviour. Students understand the system and feel that staff deal fairly with any bullying or incidents that occur and that their voice is listened to.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Arrangements for students' welfare, health and safety are good. An ethos of care and concern underpins everything the school does. It is meticulous in following clear procedures in child protection, first aid, management of behaviour and for working with carers and local authorities to meet the needs of those students in local authority care. Staff training and induction procedures ensure that everyone is clear what to do. The medical and first aid facilities now meet regulations. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for premises, activities and for individuals as necessary and ensure that students are protected from harm. All appropriate fire and electrical checks are in place.

Through its curriculum and careful attention to health and safety the school provides a safe and caring environment which successfully promotes students' well-being and

their understanding of how to keep safe and to live healthily. The PSHCE programme from Key Stage 2 onwards makes a strong contribution to keeping students safe through an emphasis on their understanding of personal safety, drugs awareness and sex education. Students at all levels also develop a good understanding of healthy living. The physical education (PE), science and sports science programmes all promote healthy lifestyles well, although students themselves rightly identify that the outside play facilities currently offer only limited scope for such healthy activity. The school meets all the regulations in this area, including those relating to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have had the appropriate checks by the Criminal Records Bureau at the enhanced level. The school is careful to follow appropriate guidance as to the safe recruitment of all staff in order to meet all the regulations. A single central record of such checks is in place as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The school meets all the regulations in this area and provides a safe and effective learning environment. Staff work hard to make the buildings as attractive as possible and there are appropriate risk assessments in place. The new school buildings have been planned to minimise risk even further. PE facilities are currently limited on-site, but off-site community activities are used to extend students' opportunities. The school has considerable grounds but its outside play facilities, although adequate, are spartan. The older pupils wish for more varied equipment and social opportunities and say that there is little for them to do other than 'talk' and 'muck about' and this can sometimes impact on their behaviour.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school meets all but one of the regulations. It works well with parents, carers and local authorities to ensure sufficient information and that the students' needs are met in as consistent a way as possible. However, although the school provides a general breakdown of expenditure in relation to income and costs, it does not do so in relation to individual students placed by a local authority.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school meets all the regulations in this area.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below:

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of individual pupils submitted to local authorities (paragraph 6(7)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Further use of assessment to inform teaching and learning in all subjects and to monitor students' progress over time.
- Review of the role of homework and the amount set.
- Improvement of the outdoor play areas so that they provide more equipment and potential for activities for students at break times.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils		√		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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School details

Name of school	Heath Farm School		
DCSF number	886/6060		
Unique reference number	119009		
Type of school	Special school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	12 December 1988		
Age range of pupils	6–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 34	Girls: 7	Total: 41
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 30	Girls: 4	Total: 34
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 26	Girls: 6	Total: 32
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,595		
Address of school	Heath Farm Charing Heath Ashford Kent TN27 0AX		
Telephone number	01233 712030		
Fax number	01233 712066		
Email address	jcromwell@heathfarm.org		
Headteacher	Ms Elizabeth Cornish		
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education		
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis		
Dates of inspection	15–16 January 2009		