

The South Downs Community Special School

Beechy Avenue, Eastbourne, BN20 8NU

Inspection dates 25–26 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The school provides a happy, caring and stimulating learning environment where pupils achieve outstandingly well. They are prepared very well for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points to the end of Key Stage 2, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as well as in their communication skills.
- Children attending the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress. They are prepared particularly well for learning. This eases their transition to the next stage of their education at the school.
- South Downs School is an orderly establishment, where high standards, hard work and sensible behaviour are the expected norm. This results in a very safe and happy environment. Pupils themselves say the school is a very safe place to be.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is excellent. Their attitudes to learning are outstanding because of interesting learning and the high level of quality support the pupils receive from all adults in the room.
- The executive headteacher's leadership and vision for the school underpin the high quality teamwork evident throughout. All staff are committed to making sure pupils achieve the best outcomes possible.
- The school's outreach service is valued highly by the schools it supports.
- The highly experienced Chair of the Governing Body and her governors know the school really well. They are highly effective in holding the school to account, checking pupils' achievements and progress, as well as the quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook 10 formal classroom observations of learning, featuring nine different teachers. Eight formal joint observations were undertaken with senior leaders. Other evidence relating to teaching and learning was scrutinised, including looking at a sample of pupils’ books and other sources of work produced by pupils.
- A meeting was held with a group of pupils at the East site. Meetings were also held with the executive headteacher and his senior leadership team, others with posts of responsibility, the Chair of the Governing Body, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding, and a representative from the local authority. Formal meetings were also held with small groups of parents and carers at both sites.
- Inspectors took account of 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 46 responses to the school’s most recent parent and carer questionnaire. In addition, inspectors took into account the 34 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 46 responses to the school’s most recent parent and carer questionnaire. In addition, responses to the pupils’ safety questionnaire were also taken into account.
- Inspectors observed the school’s practice and looked at a range of documentation, including its checks on how well it is doing, improvement planning, information on children’s and pupils’ progress, documents used by senior leaders to check the school’s work, and governing body documentation, as well as records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- The impact of the use of additional funding made available through the pupil premium was also evaluated by inspectors. In addition, the use of the recently-allocated primary school sport funding was also evaluated.

Inspection team

James Bowden, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jackie Blount

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions, communication and associated learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many also have complex learning difficulties, which include those with moderate, complex, severe, profound or multiple needs. A small minority has a medical treatment protocol in place.
- The school is on two sites some four miles apart. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is at the West site and primary-aged pupils are based at the East site. There are specialist classes for pupils on the autistic spectrum.
- The school has an outreach service working with 32 mainstream schools. This supports the needs of learners with speech, language and communication difficulties in mainstream schools.
- Currently, the large majority of pupils are boys. Most are of White British backgrounds. A few are from mixed backgrounds and a very few are of Black or Black British backgrounds. A few are from homes where English is not the home language. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs; although, at different times during the year, some will be assessed for a statement.
- The proportion of pupils at the school eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional government funding to support those known to be eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care, is above the national average. Currently, there are very few students in local authority care.
- Pupils new to the school are usually admitted in September, but there are also admissions and departures throughout the year, including a few who transfer to mainstream schools.
- Pupils travel from a very large catchment area, some spending over two hours travelling by taxi each day.
- The school is part of a hard federation with a secondary special school in Eastbourne. Both schools share the same governing body and the executive headteacher of South Downs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make the curriculum even more exciting, particularly for those pupils with increasingly complex needs, by:
 - using a greater range of new and improved technologies.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Careful assessment of children joining the Early Years Foundation Stage shows they are working at levels well below those expected for their ages. However, all make rapid progress against the early learning goals assessment targets and are ready to move on to learn in Year 1.
- By the end of Year 6, in relation to their starting points, pupils make outstanding progress in the key skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as their communication skills. They achieve exceptionally well as a result of high quality learning. This is the result of the outstanding teamwork of all adults working in the room, as well as the very effective contributions from different therapists and other specialist professionals. Achievement is outstanding, irrespective of individual pupils' special educational needs or disabilities.
- As a result of high quality learning and highly effective support for individuals, there are no particular differences in the rates of progress made by different groups of pupils. Pupils with different levels of learning difficulties do equally well, as do boys and girls. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, those from homes where English is not the home language and the very few children looked after by local authorities make rapid progress.
- More able pupils make outstanding progress because teachers set tasks that are hard enough to ensure they meet their individual targets. When appropriate these are modified during lessons and checked carefully at the end in order to identify further challenge for the next lessons.
- The progress of pupils eligible for support from pupil premium funding is in line with that of their classmates in literacy, numeracy and communication skills across the school. As with their classmates, their attainment levels in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 differ considerably because of the wide variation in their starting points.
- In almost all lessons, pupils' progress is typically outstanding. In a specialist class for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, high quality one-to-one support and the use of signing and visual communication cards resulted in excellent learning. This resulted in significant progress being made in relation to their individual learning targets.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Outstanding learning is the norm because of teachers' highly effective planning in all lessons to improve pupils' key skills of literacy, numeracy and communication. There is always an interesting variety of activities to enliven learning and motivate pupils to achieve their best. In a numeracy lesson, all had pupils had individual targets to support their learning – all were counting using coins. The higher attaining pupils were using a variety of coins, whereas others were still at the early stages of counting. A pupil who had a target of counting to 'five' made exceptional progress by actually counting to 'seven'. His smiling face in doing so was his immediate reaction when praised by the teacher.
- Highly effective use of praise and encouragement by all adults in the room is also the norm. In an Early Years Foundation Stage lesson, for example, this encouraged children to improve their communication skills as well as to reflect on their choices. One child used his hands to identify his choice. In addition, the sensory activities added to children's enjoyment of learning.
- Teachers and all adults in the room have high expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Their effective management of pupils' frustrations is instrumental in enabling pupils to make outstanding progress towards both their individual learning and behaviour targets.
- This was particularly effective in a science lesson where pupils were working in small groups to predict which materials and substances would dissolve in water. Pupils' enthusiasm was evident as one asked, 'Are we going to be scientists today?' Pupils also made excellent progress towards their individual speaking and listening targets.
- Teachers are adept at using a lively range of resources to support learning. However, senior leaders have recognised that there needs to be a greater range and use of new technologies to

enliven learning further and make the curriculum even more interesting and accessible.

- The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View consider their child is taught well. Older pupils who spoke with an inspector said they thought teaching was 'really nice' and helped their reading and writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is because the school is a particularly well-managed community with high levels of adult support. Pupils respond very well to the consistent routines in place at the start of the day. They arrive happily with lots of smiling faces and friendly greetings to adults meeting them. Confidence and interest remain high throughout the day because the whole day is used as learning time. Smiling faces and fond farewells are the norm at the end of the day as pupils leave.
- Underpinning this is staff's respect for pupils' dignity and well-being. Excellent relationships between all adults and pupils are the norm, including in formal social occasions such as lunchtimes and afternoon assemblies. This results in an enjoyable, purposeful and safe atmosphere throughout the whole school day. Pupils respect the fabric of the building and displays of their work in and around classrooms.
- Typically, behaviour over time is outstanding. There have been no recorded instances of bullying, homophobic bullying, sexual misconduct or racist incidents. In addition, there have been no permanent exclusions or instances where pupils have not been allowed to go to school for short periods of time because of poor behaviour.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. This is diligently overseen by the governing body. Internet safety has a high priority, with older pupils being taught about potential dangers when online.
- A resounding 'yes' was the response from a small group of older pupils who were asked by an inspector if they felt safe at the school. They added that all pupils get on well together and that the school would deal with any issues, if there were any.
- The school continues to be highly effective in maintaining high levels of attendance. Unauthorised absence is minimal. As all pupils are transported to school, punctuality at the start of the day depends on local traffic conditions.
- Without exception, all parents and carers who responded to Parent View report their child is well looked after at the school, is happy and feels safe. This was also confirmed by overwhelmingly positive responses to the staff questionnaire.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding because of the executive headteacher's inspirational drive and ambition for providing the best education possible for all. This vision is shared by all staff and governors. There have been sustained improvements in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection because senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led and managed. Children are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their learning at the school or elsewhere.
- The subjects and topics pupils study are fine tuned to match very well the abilities and individual needs of all. The strong focus on developing pupils' key skills of literacy, numeracy and communication prepares them very well for the next stage of their education. An impressive range of other activities is highly effective in supporting pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is clearly evident in the high quality displays of pupils' work around the school.
- The school's unyielding commitment to equality for all results in all pupils, regardless of circumstances or needs, making outstanding progress in relation to their starting points in their

learning and all-round personal development. This is enhanced further by high quality levels of support from other professionals and therapists working at the school.

■ The school maintains close links with parents and carers, including providing a range of appropriate information on its website and regular opportunities for meetings. Parents and carers appreciate this, as is evident in the overall positive responses of the very large majority to Parent View. Without exception, parents and carers feel the school is well led and managed and would recommend the school to another parent or carer.

■ The local authority provides light touch support for this outstanding school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The very experienced Chair of the Governing Body and her governors are highly effective in working closely with the school to support its drive for continuing improvement. They challenge senior leaders, if necessary, in order to sustain improvement. Governors' specific areas of expertise support their effectiveness in their roles. For example, there is a member with responsibility for safeguarding, which helps make sure procedures and protocols are robust and effective and that the school is a safe place to learn. The governing body has a strong understanding of performance data, the quality of teaching in the school and of the use of performance management. After checking the work of the executive headteacher and other staff, governors confirm decisions about how well they are working and any action that needs to be taken, as well as training opportunities and pay.
- Governors are highly effective in ensuring the school's finances are balanced and in carefully overseeing the use and impact of additional funds. Current pupil premium funding is being used effectively to further develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Allocated funding for the support of primary physical education and school sport was received late last year. Clear plans for the allocation of this funding are in place but there is, as yet, insufficient evidence of its impact.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114692
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	431595

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Neal
Executive Headteacher	Remo Palladino
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 July 2011
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