

Saxon Hill School

Kings Hill Road, Lichfield, WS14 9DE

Inspection dates 17–18 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Saxon Hill School provides pupils with a range of physical and learning needs with a good education.
- Pupils' achievement is good, some pupils make outstanding progress.
- The sixth form is outstanding and provides excellent opportunities for students to put their skills into practice in the local community, such as at the garden centre and enterprise business park.
- Leaders, managers and governors have made sure that the school is improving, that pupils achieve well and that teaching and learning are good.
- The school has developed an innovative range of subjects and methods that meet the needs of less-able pupils very well.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding because they have extremely positive attitudes to learning, to the staff and to each other.
- The school meets all the national minimum standards for residential special schools, and often exceeds them. The residential provision is outstanding, and makes an excellent contribution to pupils' behaviour, safety and enjoyment of school.
- The school has excellent links with the local community and these support pupils' learning and personal development exceptionally well.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage class enables children to settle into school well. They make good progress and are well prepared for Key Stage 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Outstanding teaching is not yet spread widely enough across the school and some teaching lacks variety, pace and imagination.
- Pupils do not use information and communication technology enough to support their learning.
- Marking does not make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work.
- The recording of pupils' progress does not easily allow comparisons to be made with how well pupils are performing nationally.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 12 lessons, or part lessons, 11 of which were joint lesson observations with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- There were only four responses from parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View), but the team also considered the school's recent parental survey.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on pupils' progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils, as well as 38 responses to a staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rowena Green

Additional Inspector

Trevor Hall

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with a wide range of physical disabilities, medical and increasingly complex learning needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Pupils are drawn mostly from South Staffordshire and all pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of pupils, in this case, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and who are looked after by the local authority) is above average. No pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The school provides respite, residential experiences and extended days. The 'sleepover club' is for pupils aged 4 to 19 years, and they spend varying amounts of time in the residential provision, according to need.
- The school provides help and support for pupils with physical disabilities, through the physical disability support service (PDSS), who attend local schools in the county. This service supports up to 100 pupils in mainstream schools.
- Some pupils attend off-site activities at a local garden centre and enterprise business park. The headteacher took up his post in the spring term of 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and further pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that teaching includes a greater variety of imaginative and creative methods to improve the pace of lessons
 - spreading the current outstanding practice more widely across the school
 - improving the marking of pupils' work so that they know what they need to do to improve
 - encouraging more extensive use of information and communication technology by pupils to help them in their learning.
- Develop clearer methods for measuring pupils' progress to allow comparisons of progress to be made more easily with national expectations to bring about greater challenge.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The school carefully analyses information about pupils' progress. The school's information about pupils' progress indicates that most pupils are making at least expected progress and some make outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics. This is confirmed by inspection evidence. It also shows that all pupils, irrespective of background, need or gender, achieve equally well.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress given their starting points. They learn how to play, explore their surroundings and become more active in learning. They develop early communication skills through the use of signs and symbols. Good routines are established to encourage their readiness for Year 1.
- Leaders and staff have worked hard to improve the use of alternative forms of communication and, as a result, many pupils have become more confident communicators. The school has developed good systems for non-verbal pupils to read through the use of eye pointing. Some children read instructions in lessons out loud and persevere with unfamiliar words, and younger children learn letter sounds by using play dough to form letters.
- Pupils' numeracy is promoted well. It is most effective when teachers use interesting methods and resources to capture pupils' interest. For example in one lesson, pupils counted out numbers of objects up to 10, using a variety of novelty items such as frisbees, shoe horns and ice cube moulds. This made learning very motivating and pupils were engrossed in the activity and thoroughly enjoyed the lesson.
- Pupils who receive additional funding through the pupil premium make progress in English and mathematics equal to their classmates. This is because funding has enabled smaller groups and allowed help to be targeted more precisely, by organising some classes according to their learning needs. It has enabled some pupils to move on a 'fast track' into older classes, so that they can follow accredited Entry Level courses for a longer period of time. Early entry to examinations is not used.
- Sixth form students make outstanding progress in developing and extending the skills that they have learned in the wider community. Work-experience programmes and learning in various offsite venues promote their independence well, including through retail and horticultural experiences.
- The residential provision promotes pupils' learning exceptionally well. They are able to follow up tasks in the evenings and take part in an enjoyable range of activities, and pupils speak warmly of the 'sleepover club.'
- In lessons, pupils are keen to learn. More-able students confidently ask and answer questions and work well together. In one history lesson, pupils enjoyed making model air raid shelters and listened with interest to air raid warning sounds.
- Funding for physical education has successfully promoted the use of a specialised movement programme for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to improve their mobility.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is generally good, and some is outstanding. This enables pupils to make good progress and achieve well in relation to their abilities.
- Teachers have developed good expertise in using sensory activities for less-able pupils and as a result, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make small but significant steps of progress.
- Through the focus on encouraging pupils' sensory development, less-able pupils have become more aware of their surroundings and other people. Some pupils who were resistant to touch and tactile methods, have become more accepting and tolerant of touch and exploring new objects.
- Symbols and signing are used well to increase pupils' communication skills. For example, staff use 'on-body signing' for less-able pupils and this helps them to develop their understanding well.
- The use of switches to enable pupils to make choices and the use of synthesised speech machines makes a vital contribution to pupils' ability to communicate well.
- Teachers give time to pupils to respond and they know the best ways to get the most out of them. For example, they are meticulous in ensuring that pupils are placed in their best positions such as lying or on standing boards, so that they can learn in the way which suits them best.
- Planning is detailed and highly personalised, so that work is well matched to different abilities in each class.
- Staff work well together to create a supportive and positive climate for learning and this helps pupils to thrive and encourages positive attitudes to learning and to other people.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children are provided with a rich environment. The teaching in the sixth form is outstanding because of the innovative and well-planned vocational opportunities students receive to put their skills into practice within the locality. This prepares them well for life after school.
- In some lessons, activities to teach concepts in mathematics and English are too mundane and learning lacks pace so that pupils lose concentration, which limits their progress. Not enough imaginative or creative methods are used in these lessons and on occasions, activities go on for too long.
- Teachers do not promote the use of information and communication technology enough to support pupils' learning routinely in lessons. Marking is does not indicate clearly enough the next steps that pupils need to learn.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Parents and carers hold the school in high regard and feel that their children are happy, safe and exceptionally well looked after. One parent commented: 'We feel our son has made tremendous progress.' Parents who spoke to the inspector when dropping off their children on arrival were equally positive about how well the school helped their children settle in and the degree of enjoyment by their son or daughter.

- The extremely positive attitudes exhibited by pupils does much to promote their good achievement. They are eager learners and enjoy lessons a great deal.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is promoted exceptionally well. They enjoy a wide range of activities in the local and wider community. The community cafe gives pupils opportunities to gain work experience and socialising skills with a range of people in the locality. Pupils enjoy celebrating different cultures and learn about these by going on visits. A recent trip to Paris was hugely enjoyable and memorable for pupils.
- The attendance of some pupils is below average, but this is mainly due to ill-health or hospitalisation, and most pupils attend regularly.
- The residential provision, whereby pupils have either an extended day or overnight stay, actively supports and promotes pupils' outstanding behaviour and safety.
- Lunchtimes are sociable occasions and pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school is outstanding. Pupils who are able to, enjoy talking to visitors and showing them what they have achieved.
- The school is a harmonious place. The encouraging and supportive atmosphere and positive relationships that staff create give pupils the best opportunity to achieve.
- Where appropriate, pupils have an active voice in the running of the school through the school council. They report and make suggestions for improvements, for example in relation to the computer club and school library.

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership and management of the school are good and include some outstanding features. Senior leaders have introduced some innovative practices, such as offsite work-related learning placements that provide high quality learning in a mature and adult setting. They have also redesigned the subjects and experiences that pupils receive to promote their independence and sensory development more effectively.
- The headteacher and senior leaders, together with the governing body, have set high expectations for staff and pupils and are ambitious for the school to achieve outstanding teaching and learning.
- All teachers are regarded as leaders and have specific subject and management responsibilities. They have risen well to this increased expectation and they are developing their areas with enthusiasm, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form.
- School assessment information is not always used with sufficient clarity and sharpness to demonstrate easily how well pupils are making progress relative to similar pupils nationally, and thereby to challenge leaders and staff to make still more rapid improvements.
- The performance of teachers and non-teaching staff is closely and regularly checked and this has helped to improve the quality of teaching. Senior leaders are keen to spread the pockets of outstanding teaching more widely throughout the school.

- The relationship between the pay of staff, including higher level teaching assistants, and their effectiveness is appropriate, and regular observations and appraisal have secured good and some outstanding teaching. Suitable training needs for staff have been identified and this has contributed to a knowledgeable and well-skilled workforce.
- Pupil premium funding has been appropriately spent and has made a positive difference for pupils in preparing them for life after school, through the excellent opportunities they are afforded.
- The outreach support, which provides advice and support for pupils with physical disabilities in other schools in the authority, is highly valued and well organised.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage, whether that be from the Early Years Foundation Stage or for older sixth form students. The strong development of work-place learning and community links are major factors in preparing older students for life after school. Where appropriate, students and parents are given suitable independent advice on options for the future.
- The school has successfully introduced methods to very effectively meet the needs of those pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This has been based on university research and aims to promote pupils’ learning in the areas of physical development, thinking skills, care and independence.
- The school fosters good relationships between different groups of pupils and tackles discrimination well.
- The local authority rightly views the school with confidence and provides ‘light touch’ support.
- Safeguarding arrangements, including where learning takes place off-site, are thorough and pupils are safe and say that they feel safe.

■ **The governance of the school:**

Governors are passionate about the school and are deeply committed to improving it further. They recognise its many strengths, but also acknowledge that not enough teaching is yet outstanding. Governors have been instrumental in providing clear direction and support for the school. They have tackled issues of weaker staff performance and work well in conjunction with school leaders to improve aspects of the school. They know how the pupil premium has been spent but are less clear about its impact on pupils. Nevertheless, governors are generally well informed. They have ensured that there is a suitable link between pay and the quality of teaching. They have a sound understanding of the school assessment information, but recognise that this needs to be simplified to help them to make comparisons with national performance more easily. They have a strong focus on the budget and ensure that the school is financially secure. They have received training in safeguarding, finance and the curriculum and this has helped to them to check the work of the school effectively.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	is outstanding
Residential pupils’ safety	is outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	is outstanding

- Children benefit from a specialist service that is highly supportive and is tailored to their ages, abilities and special educational needs. All children who use the sleepover club experience new social and personal situations enabling them to develop their independence and to grow in confidence. Young people make significant individual progress, in a wide range of areas that affect both their personal development and their families or carers, while enjoying spending time with their friends.
- Children receive a professional service that supports them to achieve well. The admissions process is thorough, introductions to residential stays are specific to each young person and their family. The staff team consults with parents and young people to ensure the mix of residents each night is compatible.
- All aspects of planning and practice are highly personalised to meet the individual needs of each child. They are well focused, detailed and rigorously implemented and have a highly beneficial impact on their outcomes. Staff know each young person exceptionally well, either from working with them over a long period of time, or from the multi-disciplinary information available on each of them.
- Children are kept safe because staff have a clear understanding of what their key roles and responsibilities are in terms of protection. All staff undertake child protection training relevant to young people with complex disabilities, which is regularly updated. They are well informed and take appropriate action to ensure any welfare issues are addressed. Responsible individuals effectively respond to significant issues.
- There is a whole school ethos of care for the children, this ensures any concerns raised are documented and acted on. All safeguarding procedures are robust and regularly reviewed and are compatible with local authority guidelines and protocols.
- Children's safety is promoted by an established health and safety policy, which ensures risks are identified and appropriate action is taken to manage and reduce them. All staff are appropriately trained in health and safety matters, including first aid and fire awareness. The school regularly updates risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds. Children are protected by the school's robust recruitment systems.
- The 'sleepover club' forms an important part of the whole school structure and fully contributes to the education component of the school. The senior managers responsible for the residential provision provide excellent leadership and have the expertise, skills and knowledge to effectively manage the service. The school has a strong leadership and management team which has high aspirations for children's development, and has created in the 'sleepover club' a nurturing culture of children being supported to succeed.
- Children are central to all decisions and make outstanding progress within the residential unit. A key strength of the service is the high ratio of professional staff, and they are skilled in meeting the complex needs of children. The staff team is professional and passionate about their work. They place the well-being of their children at the centre of their practice and ensure that the children's achievements are acknowledged and celebrated.

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>

Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	124520
Social care unique reference number	SCO38728
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	426907

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	18
Number of boarders on roll	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Wood
Headteacher	Jon Thickett
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2010
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