

Whitstone Head School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134062
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	381598
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2012
Lead inspector	Mick Megee

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	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Smith
Principal	David McLean-Thorne
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2008
School address	Whitstone Holsworthy EX22 6TJ
Telephone number	01288 341251
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Email address	whitstonehead@btconnect.com
Social care unique reference number	SC041515
Social care inspector	Sharron Escott

Age group	10–16
Inspection date(s)	19–20 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mick Megee

Additional Inspector

Sharron Escott

Social Care Inspector

Thomas Webber

Social Care Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes involving six lessons and six teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and with some senior and middle leaders. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including the school's plans for development, records related to pupils' welfare and progress and a sample of pupils' work. The care inspectors spent time in the residential accommodation, including in the evening, and held discussions with staff and pupils. Inspectors read the questionnaire responses from six parents and carers and questionnaires from pupils, including from residential pupils and from staff.

Information about the school

Whitstone Head School is a small day and residential school that admits pupils from all parts of England. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which specifies behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, and all pupils have diagnosed additional mental health needs. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. There is a small number of looked after children. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The residential accommodation is located in four converted buildings in the school grounds. Almost all pupils occupy residential places for seven days a week during the school term. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Plus Award.

Since the last inspection, the senior management team has been re-organised, with a principal who has responsibility for mental health provision and oversees the work of a head of education and a head of care. The previous head of education has retired and a new head of education has been appointed. There have been a number of staffing difficulties over the last year or two, including the absence of the bursar and the head of education.

A serious incident, that occurred at the school since the previous education inspection, is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind. The welfare provision in the school was evaluated against the regulations that are in place and inspection judgements are based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school, where pupils feel safe and make great strides in overcoming the personal difficulties which have hampered their learning. It is not outstanding because there are areas for improvement in teaching and in the residential provision, which is satisfactory.
- Pupils achieve well academically and personally. They make good progress often from a very low starting point when joining the school.
- Teaching is of good quality, and there is a positive atmosphere in lessons. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and work hard to increase the pupils' enjoyment of learning. However, there is some inconsistency in the performance of individual teachers in matching activities to pupils' needs, managing behaviour and in ensuring that pupils know clearly their priorities for improvement in learning.
- Pupils behave well, feel safe and act safely, paying good attention to the feelings and sensibilities of other pupils. Pupils have limited opportunities to make their views known as a group and as individuals.
- Leadership and management, including the leadership of teaching and the management of performance, are good. Although the school has experienced staffing difficulties, which could have slowed down the drive for improvement, school systems, such as those to manage and improve teachers' performance, have continued to be effective. Systems to track pupils' academic progress, behaviour and attendance are being upgraded. This development is still too new to have had a marked impact upon raising achievement.
- The residential provision is satisfactory overall, and pupils enjoy a good range of activities and achieve good personal outcomes. Leadership and management of the residential provision, while satisfactory, is not quite as effective as previously and this has meant that there are a number of national minimum standards that are no longer being met.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - consistently matching lesson activities to meet the differing needs and capabilities of pupils in the class
 - ensuring that pupils always know their next steps in learning, for example by using individual learning targets that are frequently emphasised in lessons and shared with parents and carers
 - ensuring that behaviour is consistently well managed throughout the day by all education staff.
- Make use of the new tracking information to raise achievement further and to judge even more accurately the effectiveness of educational initiatives.
- Increase the opportunities for the pupils' voice to be heard, for example by a school council or pupil forums.
- Ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools that have not been met.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' learning and performance in the classroom, as observed during the inspection, are good. Lessons are characterised by eager and attentive pupils, working well together and speaking respectfully to each other and members of staff. Pupils say that they feel that they make much better progress at Whitstone Head than they have done before at their previous schools, and the school's information supports this view. Many of the pupils arrive at the school with a poor experience of education in the past, and most have had significant gaps in their schooling. Their attainment on entry is low, and many have poor literacy skills. Although attainment remains below average by the time they leave, pupils make good progress during their time at the school. They recover their confidence in their own abilities and their basic skills in reading and numeracy improve in leaps and bounds. All pupils achieve some form of public qualification by the end of school, and each year almost all go on to work, training or further education.

Parents and carers are pleased with the progress that their children are making, typically saying things like, 'My other son told me that the school has given me back the brother I thought I'd never have again.' The school's data and observation of lessons show that pupils achieve well, especially in practical subjects such as art, physical education and food technology. For example, Years 9 and 10 pupils made very good progress in a food technology lesson, baking Victoria sponges and learning about how to make sure the sponge was 'springy'. There is no discernible difference between the different groups of pupils such as key stage groups or boys and girls. The quality of learning for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is such that they make the same good progress as other pupils.

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Quality of teaching

Teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects that they teach, for example in the teaching of reading, and all classroom staff interact with the pupils respectfully and courteously to promote pupils' social development. As a consequence, pupils who are new to the school feel secure and valued and regain their self-esteem and enjoyment of learning. Parents, carers and pupils agree that the teaching is consistently good in the school, and teaching takes good account of any disabled pupils in the class and those with special educational needs. Most teachers do a good job using their assessment information to customise their lessons to the differing requirements of the pupils in the class, and making lessons enjoyable. Occasionally, the match is not quite right and the work is too easy or too hard for one or two pupils. This holds progress back.

Teaching clearly supports pupils' social and moral development in developing a clear sense of right and wrong, and helps pupils to adopt more socially acceptable behaviour. Teachers and support staff work well together in the classroom, modelling what can be achieved through cooperation and tolerance. Skilful classroom management helps pupils to develop strategies in managing their own problems. In an art lesson seen during the inspection, for example, the atmosphere was very conducive and calm, with pupils knowing what they needed to do and being encouraged and supported very well by the teacher. One pupil said that she really enjoyed the lessons as it helped her to become calm and positive about her life and the future. When children become upset or lose control, there is a good system in place to restore order within the classroom quickly so as not to disrupt the learning of others. One or two teachers are not quite as skilful at using this system as others, for example they might encourage the pupil experiencing difficulties to leave the classroom under supervision at an earlier stage than necessary.

When asked what their key learning target is, say in reading, pupils are sometimes at a loss to say what this is. This is because individual learning targets, particularly in basic skills, are not sufficiently emphasised across all lessons. This holds pupils back from developing full independence in learning. Parents and carers say they would welcome more opportunities to assist their children's learning at home, by sharing in the development of such targets.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are respectful to visitors, cheerful in most circumstances and willing to have a go at new tasks. Parents, pupils and carers justifiably say that there is some disruption to learning when a pupil loses control, but they recognise this is understandable given the difficulties of the pupils. They say, and this was verified in the inspection, that staff deal with these incidents quickly and that, over time, their children get back on track and their behaviour becomes much less volatile.

Pupils' attendance, although below average, improves often dramatically after joining the school. Pupils show a good understanding of the different types of bullying –

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including racist or homophobic bullying – and say that it happens rarely and, where it does occur, staff manage it firmly and consistently. Pupils say they feel very safe in lessons and in the residential accommodation, and that they all have someone to turn to if they are in difficulty with a personal problem. Parents and carers support this view. Pupils have many good ideas about how the educational and residential provision could be improved, but feel, with some justification, that there are not sufficient formal channels through which they can make their views known.

Leadership and management

Despite the recent staffing problems, particularly among the senior leadership team, the school has done well to maintain good outcomes for pupils through a difficult period. Staff on the ground have willingly taken on leadership roles where possible. The principal is dedicated to the improvement of the school and what it offers pupils. He is respected and liked by staff, parents, carers and pupils and has maintained staff morale well. Links between residential and educational staff have recently been strengthened and all staff say that this has had a number of benefits to the pupils' academic and personal development. The residential provision is satisfactory overall with good outcomes for pupils, although a number of standards are no longer met.

The staff make it a high priority to promote equality and to tackle discrimination, for example by ensuring that pupils with a mental health difficulty have equal access to a full range of school services. The temporary appointment of a small team of senior staff to oversee the educational provision has meant that school development has continued to accelerate. The team is enthusiastic and very committed to promoting the best interests of the pupils, and taking the school forward. The members are aware of what needs to be done, have made a good start and there is clear capacity for further improvement. Monitoring systems for the performance of educational staff and the tracking systems for behaviour and attendance have been maintained at a good level, although some innovations have taken a longer time than anticipated to get up and running. A good range of professional development activities are provided to the staff. The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs and aspirations of the pupils and it promotes their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. The governing body is supportive of the school and has ensured that all the required safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. However, it has not ensured that all the national minimum standards are met in the residential provision.

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Residential provision

The quality of the residential provision is satisfactory. Although the quality of care and personal outcomes are good, leadership is satisfactory rather than good because a number of national minimum standards are no longer being met, and there are some shortcomings in the monitoring and appraising of the performance and professional development needs of residential staff.

Residential pupils enjoy productive and harmonious relationships with staff that promote their self-esteem, confidence and independence. They make significant progress in improving and managing their own behaviours more effectively. They enjoy the wide range of activities and new experiences they are offered at the school, and locally, which promote their personal interests and contribute to their physical and emotional health. A high level of supervision and the calm atmosphere mean that the pupils feel safe and free from bullying. They speak enthusiastically about their overall experience of living at the school and how this has impacted positively on their education and behaviour. The school promotes pupils' understanding and preference for a healthy life by offering pupils a varied and nutritious diet that takes their personal preferences into account.

Residential staff are committed, experienced and enthusiastic and provide a consistency of care that engenders a friendly, caring and homely atmosphere. Domestic routines run very smoothly. Most staff have received training and all are competent in meeting the pupils' needs. However, additional specialist training, such as in the management of challenging behaviour, has not been given to all staff.

Effective systems are in place that ensure good communication is maintained between care and education staff. However, information sharing with parents and carers is not always consistently regular across all the residential units and this reduces the opportunities for some parents and carers to support their children's learning at home. Residential pupils have some opportunities to voice their wishes and feelings as individuals, for example through the daily meeting, but there are limited opportunities for them to make their opinions on school decisions known formally as a group.

Staff advocate strongly on behalf of residential pupils to ensure that they are suitably safeguarded. However, some pupils and staff expressed concern about inconsistent care practices within the school, which are being followed up by the school leaders. Recruitment practices are well established for the protection of pupils.

The records relating to complaints, restraints, sanctions and unexplained absences, although in place, are not always consistently maintained to a high standard in all of the residential units. Health and safety checks are completed as required, and fire evacuations are frequent and well managed.

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National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- Staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and where relevant the local authority's policy, in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy. Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with the police where appropriate. (NMS 15.6)
- Children have an opportunity to contribute their views to the operation of residential provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Children are not penalised for raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith. (NMS 17.1)
- The school has, and follows, an appropriate policy on responding to complaints that is compliant with the relevant regulatory requirements (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 18)
- Staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. Training keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the school. (NMS 19.1)
- The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated if necessary. (NMS 19.4)

These are the grades for the residential provision

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	3
Outcomes for residential pupils	2
Quality of residential provision and care	2
Residential pupils' safety	3
Leadership and management of the residential provision	3

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitstone Head School, Holsworthy EX22 6TJ

You may remember that some inspectors visited your school recently. Thank you for the welcome you gave us, and special thanks to those who came to tell us what you thought of the school. You told us that your school is a good one that has made a difference to your lives, and we agree with you. You are clearly doing well and making good progress in both your learning and in your personal development. Your behaviour was especially good, and you said you felt safe. We found that the teaching is good, as you said it is. Leadership and management continue to be good even though the school has not had the benefit of a number of senior staff for some time. The residential provision is satisfactory.

To make the school even better, we have asked the school to make sure that:

- the residential provision has all the correct procedures in place
- you are given more of a say in the running of the school
- teachers give you work at the right level, and that you know what you have to learn next
- all classroom staff manage your behaviour in the same way
- the leaders of the school check up even more thoroughly on how well you are doing.

When the school gives you opportunities to have a say, please do your best to say what you think, as the pupils who met with me did.

It was a great pleasure to meet you and we wish you all the best for the future

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee
Lead inspector

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