

Southbrook School

Bishop Westall Road, Exeter, EX2 6JB

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well given their starting points, gain several national qualifications, and are thoroughly prepared to choose the right courses when they leave school.
- Teaching and learning are good because teachers have high expectations and provide interesting lessons which students enjoy.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding because students are taught to work together and respect each other, and staff are very skilled at managing any anxious behaviour.
- The school works closely with parents and carers, local schools, colleges and the wider community to provide an outstanding range of learning experiences for students.
- The new senior leadership team has successfully engaged staff in a collective drive to raise standards.
- Leaders and governors are effective in ensuring that teaching and achievement are good and have a clear understanding of the next steps needed to improve the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- In a few lessons work is not set at the right level to help all students make fast progress and marking does not always help students understand clearly how to improve their work.
- Students are not given enough help to improve their writing in some subjects.
- Senior leaders and the governing body are not always able to check in detail how well the school is performing because improvement plans do not always have sharp enough targets for measuring success.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, two of which were joint observations with the headteacher, and a school assembly.
- Meetings and discussions were held with the headteacher, staff and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with a group of students, held informal conversations with students at break and lunchtime, and heard some students read.
- The views of parents and carers were gained through eight responses to the online Parent View survey, analysis of the school’s own questionnaires for parents and carers, and discussions with a small number of parents and carers who visited the school. The views of staff were gathered from their questionnaire returns.
- A range of documents were looked at, including the school’s plans for improvement, information on students’ progress, lesson plans, work in students’ books and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Andrew Redpath, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Fran Ashworth

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Southbrook is a special school which provides education for students with a wide range of needs, including moderate and severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum conditions and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs and attend from Exeter and the surrounding area.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding made available by the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, are in the care of the local authority, or have parents or carers in the armed services) is above average.
- In September 2012, the school became part of a foundation trust together with nine other local authority special schools.
- The school has specialist status for cognition and learning and provides training in aspects of special education to local schools.
- The school uses alternative education provided by The Breakthrough Transformation Trust, based at a school farm at Dartington in Devon, for young people who have complex behaviour and emotional difficulties.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed and several other changes have taken place in senior leadership positions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement by:
 - using information on students' levels of ability more consistently to set work that is suitably challenging for all students
 - marking work in more detail so all students know how to improve their work
 - sharing across the school the best practice that exists in teaching writing.
- Provide sharper targets for measuring success in the school's plans for improvement so that senior leaders and the governing body are better able to check the school's performance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment is low overall due to students' special educational needs. However, given their starting points, students make good progress and there is a trend of improvement. Over half of students leave with at least one A* to G GCSE pass and others gain Entry Level passes and work-related qualifications.
- Results in art and design are outstanding with several students gaining higher grade GCSE passes.
- Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is particularly strong. In the past, a few older students have not been entered for sufficiently challenging courses. This has improved recently, helped by the school arranging for more capable students to take additional GCSE courses at local secondary schools.
- Students' reading skills are developing well and many use their skills in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) confidently to read new words. Communication skills are taught effectively across the school, with visual prompts being used appropriately to help some students follow instructions and make choices. While there are some very good examples of students improving their writing, particularly in English, these skills are not taught consistently in all subjects across the school.
- The school's information shows that there is no difference in the rate of progress made by different groups. Observations in lessons show that sometimes progress slows when work is not set at the right level for individual students in the class.
- The school has targeted the funding it receives through the pupil premium to provide individual support to help raise standards in numeracy and reading. Early evidence using students' reading scores shows that this is helping to quicken students' progress and some are closing the gap with their peers. However, the school has not set clear targets for improvement in reading and so does not know how well it is using the pupil premium.
- All students who left the school at the end of Year 11 found suitable destinations in colleges or schools with sixth forms.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because teachers typically have high expectations and use their subject knowledge to plan lessons which contain a good variety of activities. This helps students to try their best and to learn well. Good examples occur when students use instruments to make rhythms in music, conduct an experiment on light in science, use cards to learn addition in mathematics, or score their results in a range of fitness activities in a physical education lesson.
- Good use of questioning helps to promote students' speaking and listening skills. Students also learn to discuss their ideas when they work in pairs or in small groups.
- Examples of outstanding teaching were observed, for example, in an English lesson when students acted out scenes from a set text. Students were encouraged to discuss each other's work and teaching assistants gave just the right level of support so students did as much as possible on their own. Students were absorbed throughout and made rapid progress in their learning.
- Students are often organised in smaller groups for part of a lesson. This makes good use of teaching assistants' skills and maintains the pace of learning for all students.
- In a small number of lessons students make slower progress because the work set does not provide the right level of challenge for all students. This can result in work being too hard for some students who then need too much help from the teaching assistant to finish it. Also, some of the more capable students do not have sufficient opportunity to look at the topic in more depth or to develop their own ideas.

- Teachers check students' progress regularly against levels of the National Curriculum. There are some very good examples of this information being used carefully to set small but challenging targets which are then linked to the marking of students' work. Occasionally marking lacks detail on how students might improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students really enjoy coming to school and taking part in the wide range of clubs, trips and musical performances. They display extremely positive attitudes to learning and mix freely around the school. They arrive on time to lessons and their attendance is high when compared with other special schools.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about how the school keeps their children safe and recognise that behaviour is outstanding. Students report how friendly the school is, that bullying is rare, and how the individual support they receive has helped them to improve their learning since they joined the school.
- Some students find the behaviour of a few other students irritating, but feel safe and think staff deal effectively with any problems. Occasional incidents of misbehaviour do occur, often linked to students' communication and learning difficulties. Staff manage these skilfully to ensure they do not interfere with the learning of other students.
- Students eagerly discuss their 'points' at the end of lessons, which are awarded for effort and achievement and enable students to gain certificates and trips out for their class.
- The personal, social and health education programme gives students a good understanding of how to keep safe and make healthy choices. Topics include cyber-bullying and relationships education, which is taught in single sex groups with help from the school nurse.
- Students have many opportunities to take on responsibilities and contribute to the life of the school. For example, they run the school tuck shop, help with fetes or participate in the school council.
- Older students' independent skills are developed very well through the work experience placements and part-time college courses. They are trained to become independent travellers whenever possible.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet statutory requirements. The school works closely with the alternative education provider to ensure any pupils who use it are attending and are safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leaders provide strong leadership. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development and are continually looking for ways to improve its performance.
- Teaching is monitored regularly and linked to targets for improving teachers' performance. Links with partner schools in the foundation trust are used effectively to support the professional development of staff, for example through joint training on the needs of children with an autistic spectrum condition.
- Staff at all levels help to create an open and welcoming school where students and parents and carers feel welcome. The school works very closely with parents and carers, which helps to raise attendance and enables students with complex needs to settle and feel valued.
- The range of subjects taught, supplemented by the trips, visits and clubs, is very successful in supporting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These include cultural theme days, school shows and residential trips to environmental and outdoor pursuits centres.
- Several positive changes have been introduced recently which have improved students' learning, for example: the strengthening of links with local schools, colleges and the community; guidance

for students when they leave; and the reorganisation of trips to enable more students to take part.

- Some of the work being done to improve numeracy, reading and writing or to raise the achievement of students who receive the pupil premium lacks clear targets for measuring success.
- The local authority School Improvement Partner has discussed the school's performance with the headteacher and governors and provided useful reports on the school's overall performance.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The governing body has a clear vision for the school. It possesses a broad range of skills and has received appropriate training to ensure that all its responsibilities, including safeguarding, are carried out effectively. The budget is used prudently and the governing body has reviewed senior leadership positions and teachers' allowances to improve the school's performance. The governing body is aware of the quality of teaching across the school and is involved in the management of staff performance. It receives detailed information on students' attainment and understands how use of the pupil premium is helping some students to catch up.

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	113634
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	403788

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Sanders
Headteacher	Ms Bronwen Caschere
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2009
Telephone number	01392 258373
Fax number	01392 494036
Email address	admin@southbrook.devon.sch.uk

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