



Whitstone Head School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134062
LEA Cornwall
Inspection number 282438
Inspection dates 22 June 2006 to 22 June 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Redpath HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Whitstone
School category	Non-maintained		Holsworthy
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Devon EX22 6TJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01288 341251
Number on roll	32	Fax number	01288 341207
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr David McLean-Thorne

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	22 June 2006 - 22 June 2006	282438

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Whitstone Head School is a small residential special school providing education for boys and girls who have emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties (EBS), incorporating emotionally fragile and vulnerable pupils. Pupils come from all parts of England and Wales. Three quarters of pupils currently occupy residential places and approximately one fifth of pupils on roll are girls. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and their home language is English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Whitstone Head School is a good school. It is successful in achieving its primary aim: to establish an atmosphere in which pupils' learning and development can be enjoyable and productive.

There are very positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves. Pupils are treated with respect and have their achievements recognised. This helps them to behave very well and make good progress. Attendance is excellent. Pupils enjoy coming to school and many participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities.

Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very effectively, but make insufficient use of assessment information to plan their lessons. As a result, pupils do not always know how to improve their work, and in some lessons a lack of suitable challenge means that pupils make slower than expected progress. Pupils make good progress overall, due to the quality of the curriculum and the thorough transition arrangements which ensure all pupils leave with appropriate destinations.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The high quality of residential care makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and the delivery of a 24-hour curriculum.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides a clear approach to meeting the needs of children with EBSD, which is promoted by senior leaders and followed consistently by staff. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. However, the school's judgements of its own performance are sometimes slightly higher than inspection evidence suggests. The monitoring of teaching is adequate but does not give sufficient guidance to teachers to help them improve further. Most of the issues raised in the last inspection report and the more recent Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report have been tackled. Given these improvements and the quality of education provided, the school demonstrates a capacity for further improvement and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 9

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding and it plays an important part in the overall effectiveness of the school. Good communication links between class-based staff and the care team ensure that pupils' needs are met consistently. Pupils thoroughly enjoy being in residence and know they are very well cared for. A recent CSCI report confirmed the high standards of care by grading all aspects to be up to the national standards and judging many aspects to exceed them. Pupils benefit from an excellent range of structured evening activities as well as good opportunities to be on their own or with their friends.

What the school should do to improve further

- use assessment information to ensure all lessons are suitably challenging, and pupils are clear about how they can improve
- use the results of more thorough monitoring to improve the quality of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress overall and notable progress in their emotional and social development. This is because the school creates an environment where pupils feel safe and where they are encouraged to achieve. Most pupils have a history of disrupted schooling prior to attending Whitstone Head and as a result, many function below their chronological age. During their time at the school, pupils become more confident young people and develop positive work habits.

Each year, pupils achieve a range of GCSE and Entry level examination passes in several subjects. Most pupils acquire employment skills through the work experience programme and a few complete vocational courses at local colleges. All pupils leave at the end of Year 11 with a future place secured in education, employment or training. This represents a considerable achievement which is far better than the national average for pupils with EBSD.

Targets are used successfully for improving pupils' behaviour but they are not used consistently by all teachers to improve pupils' academic work. Consequently, in some subjects, pupils have insufficient understanding of their level of work and what they need to do to improve further.

Girls are in a minority at the school. However, they achieve as well as boys and feel they are included fully in the life of the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. Group meetings and individual counselling help pupils to become more confident and to have a greater understanding of themselves. Pupils behave very well and display positive attitudes towards others. They enjoy their education and recognise how much they have improved since coming to the school. "I've made three friends", one boy commented proudly, when asked what he liked best about the school. This positive outlook is reflected in pupils' excellent attendance.

Pupils feel safe and report that if bullying was ever a difficulty, staff would react promptly. Pupils learn to keep fit through engaging in a very good range of physical activities, which includes swimming, gymnastics, dance and outdoor pursuits. An emphasis on healthy diets and careful attention to pupils' emotional health ensure pupils understand the benefits of healthy living. Pupils also understand the negative effects of drug abuse and smoking.

Pupils make a good contribution to school life and to the wider community, for example when they tidy away after mealtimes, grow vegetables or raise funds for victims of an earthquake. Pupils put forward their ideas in school meetings. The school is considering formalising pupils' involvement by setting up a school council. Workplace skills are developed well through the work experience programme.

The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils develop a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. They learn to discuss their views and listen to the views of others in school and residential meetings. Cultural development is supported through the religious education (RE) curriculum and by visits to places of cultural interest. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Whilst there are good opportunities to celebrate the achievements of each other, time for reflection or collective worship is limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour with patience and sensitivity. They are very successful in establishing trusting relations with pupils and this results in a calm and productive atmosphere in lessons. Praise and encouragement are used effectively to help pupils keep on task. Teachers have been very creative in extending their subject knowledge to offer pupils a wide range of examination courses. They have also begun to use some of the national strategy resources to help pupils to improve their literacy. Early indications suggest this is having a positive effect in raising standards in reading. Learning support assistants make a significant contribution to lessons, skilfully prompting pupils to keep them involved in their learning. In several subjects, assessment information is not used effectively to plan lessons and to set targets for pupils to aim higher. Teachers' lesson plans generally state what pupils will be doing, rather than what they are expected to learn. As a result, sometimes there is a lack of suitable challenge and pupils make slower than expected progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Lessons are of a suitable duration for pupils with EBSD and there is an appropriate inclusion of community visits and outdoor pursuits. The curriculum is strengthened by the very good range of extra-curricular activities and work in the residential care setting, which ensure a unified 24-hour curriculum is provided.

At Key Stage 4, the school provides a good range of examination courses. Subjects taken each year include a core of English, mathematics, science, personal, social and health education (PSHE). Additional examination courses have been provided for some pupils in physical education (PE), food technology, history, geography and RE. The PSHE and vocational curriculum prepare pupils very well for leaving school.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved provision for information and communication technology and PE. The quality of the PE curriculum was recognised by the school's recent achievement of the Sportsmark Award. The curricula for art and design technology are underdeveloped and are the school's next priority for improvement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils is good. There is strong teamwork between the residential care staff and education staff. Safeguarding procedures ensure pupils are safe and staff receive appropriate training in child protection. Behaviour management systems are very effective and enable pupils to understand the consequences of their actions. Exclusions are only used for health and safety reasons. Pupils have their achievements recognised in school assemblies and when they receive certificates.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. There is very good careers advice and thorough transition arrangements to ensure pupils have suitable destinations when they leave. Marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and in a few subjects, pupils are not always sure how well they are achieving or what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides a clear approach to meeting the needs of children with EBSD and carefully manages the admission of new pupils to ensure their needs are compatible with the school's provision. He is ably supported by other senior leaders. Boarding facilities are managed very effectively by the head of care, who ensures a high level of consistency in the care and support pupils receive throughout the teaching day and in the evenings.

The school has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development, although the school's judgements of its own performance are sometimes slightly higher than inspection evidence suggests. Views of parents and pupils are sought and acted upon. The school has also established close links with other professionals and local employers which have resulted in pupils being well prepared for leaving school. The monitoring of teaching is adequate but does not give sufficient guidance to teachers to help them improve. Most of the issues raised in the last inspection and the more recent CSCI reports have been tackled and there are realistic plans for the school's further improvement.

There are good levels of staffing and staff are suitably skilled in managing pupils' behaviour. Deployment of resources and arrangements for financial management are effective. Governors make regular visits to the school and ensure that statutory requirements are met. They are currently extending their role to provide closer monitoring and increased challenge.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Recently I visited your school with another inspector. Thanks to those of you who spoke to us about your work and gave us your views of the school. You were very polite and helpful. I am writing to let you know what we thought about the school.

The things we liked best are:

- it is a good school which provides a lot for you to do
- you enjoy coming to school and your attendance is excellent
- you behave very well and have positive attitudes
- you make good progress with your learning
- the school is effectively managed and adults look after you well
- the residential care is of a high quality and is closely linked with your daytime education.

Your school could get even better by:

- letting teachers know more about how well they teach and how they can get even better
- checking you are set the right level of work in lessons. You can help by discussing your work with teachers.