

Sidestrand Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121254
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	327435
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Dorrit Andrews

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Adrian Frais
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Fee
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2006
School address	Cromer Road Sidestrand Norfolk NR27 0NH
Telephone number	01263 578144
Fax number	01263 579287

Age group	7-16
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Inspection number	327435

© Crown copyright 2009

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 of the school was carried out by an Additional Inspector and the inspection of boarding by a Social Care Inspector.

The inspection of the school evaluated its overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement, especially in English; the school's management of pupils with difficult behaviour and the use of exclusion; and the impact of leaders at all levels, especially through the monitoring and evaluation of subject performance.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Sidestrand Hall is a long-established residential special school, located in a rural part of northeast Norfolk. Pupils come from a wide area and up to 20 can board for up to four nights per week; there are currently 16 registered.

Pupils are admitted with a range of different needs; these are becoming increasingly complex. All have statements of special educational needs and the vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. Pupils enter the school with attainment which is generally low compared with that expected for their age. Most have moderate learning difficulties; some are autistic, have severe learning difficulties or have communication difficulties. The number of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties is also growing; about a third of the school exhibits severe, challenging behaviour. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is high, and a few are looked after by their local authorities.

The school has a number of prestigious awards for sport, health and has the award of Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sidestrand is a good school. It is led by a headteacher who clearly knows where it is heading and how it will get there. This is an extensive organisation; the site is vast and pupils' needs are increasingly complex. Nevertheless, it is a calm place where pupils develop good personal and social skills and achieve well educationally. Leadership and management are good. Leaders are insightful and, through their actions, show that they clearly have the best interests of pupils at heart. The school has a good range of ways to check how well it is doing, and makes an accurate assessment of its effectiveness.

Good, 24-hour, education and care are provided. Safeguarding requirements are met. The school assists its pupils and their families well through the efforts of its parent- support worker, and by providing much valued boarding arrangements. Nearly all parents are very positive about the school and their numerous comments praise its work effusively. One parent expressed: 'My son....has progressed...to a higher standard than I would have imagined. His behaviour is excellent.... He could not have gone to a better school.' Others emphasise the good progress their children have made, especially in managing their own behaviour. One stated: 'This school is the best thing that has happened.' Another wrote: 'I wish he could have come sooner.'

Many pupils had negative experiences of school before joining, but they flourish because of the good support for their individual needs, and the positive impact of residence on the personal development of boarders. Excellent trusting relationships with adults and the positive feedback that pupils get, help them to feel good about themselves. Overall, their personal development is good. They grow into confident young adults, well prepared, socially, emotionally and educationally, for the next stage of life at 16..This is usually at local colleges, but some pupils also go straight into employment.

Pupils enjoy school, find lessons interesting and enthuse about the vast range of additional activities, such as, 'star club', offsite visits and the vocational programme. As a result, attendance is good and has improved since the last inspection. Pupils feel part of a big family and know they are looked after well. The support for, and their knowledge about, keeping healthy, and their participation in sport are excellent.

Pupils keep themselves safe and try very hard to be friendly to one another. They know who to go to if there is a problem, and say that staff deal quickly and effectively with the very small amount of bullying that exists. The school has a good range of effective strategies to manage and support the vast majority of pupils with behavioural difficulties. As a result, the behaviour of most pupils is good. The rewards and sanctions are well known by pupils. The restorative-justice processes help pupils to reflect on what they have done and to understand why they need to make amends. The regular emphasis on how pupils should respect and respond to each other helps them learn how to behave, know right from wrong and improve their social development. The nurture class does this particularly well.

However, the school also admits a few pupils that have been very hard to place, and it is often these who are the most challenging. In addition, dealing with some of the rare, but extreme, behaviours that do occur in such an expansive environment of 14 acres, also provides great logistical difficulties for the school. While the number of exclusions has reduced since the last inspection and, although only used as a final step, the figures are still too high.

The school council is a strong voice for pupils and helps support learning about their rights and responsibilities. 'Eco' understanding is developing well and, through fund-raising efforts, pupils

know it is important to think about others and not just about themselves. There are good, strong, local-community links, and some international links are just beginning through a British Council project. Support to promote community harmony is good. Despite this being almost entirely an all-white community, much is done to promote awareness of other faiths and cultures and pupils are prepared well to live in a multi-cultural society.

Inter-school sporting events provide a good avenue for local inclusion and a few pupils have opportunities to learn at mainstream schools. College links, as part of an extended Key Stage 4 provision, are limited, mainly because there are few resources locally. However, due to a recent relocation of college provision, discussions are taking place about how courses might be designed to support Sidestrand pupils.

Pupils make good progress throughout the school because the curriculum is good and much has been done to personalise it for them. It is very responsive to pupils' needs and is particularly strong in providing vocational and work-related learning opportunities. The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Youth Award also helps to set well-matched challenges for pupils which lead to many achieving bronze and silver standard. Older pupils' academic needs are met well through Entry Level and GCSE courses. The curriculum is planned effectively so that learning in Key Stage 2 is built upon well through Key Stages 3 and 4.

Achievement is also good because teaching is effective and teachers ensure that activities are planned well to interest pupils. Staff give pupils the confidence to work hard by constantly checking that each one understands the learning intended. Questioning is probing and helps to extend pupils' understanding. In many lessons, pupils' concentration is excellent and they try their very best. Teaching usually makes clear what is to be learned at the beginning of lessons. The best practice enables pupils to know the criteria by which their work will be assessed, so they know when they have achieved the goals set. Although activities are planned for different groups, there is just one set of criteria applied to assess all pupils. The school recognises that by also matching the criteria to each individual learner, it could help make the assessment of learning even sharper and challenge some pupils further.

There is a good focus on supporting pupils' literacy skills in most lessons. Nearly every opportunity is taken to help them develop their reading and writing in a variety of contexts. Information and communication technology (ICT) is now more embedded in lessons, both for teaching and to help pupils learn. However, some staff do not yet make full use of the interactive features of the white-boards available. Personal target-cards in English and mathematics are much valued by pupils and they take their responsibilities for working towards their targets very seriously.

There is no significant difference in the achievement of different groups across the school. Occasionally, some groups find aspects of a subject difficult because of their particular needs, such as some autistic pupils in using their mathematical skills. The school has worked hard to ensure that the information that it keeps about pupils' progress is used to set challenging targets. It has a clear view on how it decides whether good progress is being made, and works hard to support pupils who appear to be falling behind.

Pupils make good progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In English, rated the less strong subject at the last inspection, progress is currently slightly better than that in mathematics. The standards that pupils attain overall remain low throughout the school because of their learning difficulties. Nevertheless, in 2008 slightly over half of the Year 11 pupils gained GCSE grades D to G in mathematics and science. At Entry Level, pupils' attained

grades in English, mathematics and science, some at the higher Level 3. Pupils also do well to attain a range of other vocational awards. All this represents good achievement.

The headteacher is ably supported by the two assistant headteachers, as well as by curriculum leaders. The senior leaders are an effective force for the good of the school, and the addition of the head of care has strengthened the partnership between residence and the other provision. Through the strong relationship with other schools locally, governors and the leadership team are developing Sidestrand on a number of fronts. These include providing more accurate assessment through staff from different schools working together to agree pupils' levels of attainment. The school's collection of assessment information and analyses of trends and patterns of pupils' progress are improving, although the full use of this information is at an early stage. In addition, not all subjects have the same amount of assessment information as is recorded by the best.

The work of subject leaders is competent. Their roles are well established in terms of their responsibilities, such as for planning, use of resources and reporting to governors. While they collect information about pupils' assessments and levels, their use of the data to examine the effectiveness of provision is just beginning. Governance is good. The governing body is well organised and takes seriously its role in checking how well the school is doing. Governors visit classes regularly and the Chair of the Governing Body has done some sterling work in supporting the development of the English provision. Governors receive information about how well pupils are doing, but do not yet have a more detailed analysis pupils' progress in subjects so they can have an even closer view of the school's effectiveness.

Nevertheless, through the hard work of the headteacher, senior staff and governors, the school has improved well since the last inspection, and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of boarding is good. The school meets nearly all key National Minimum Standards, and exceeds them in healthy eating, the individual support offered to boarding pupils and the development of boarders' life-skills. With regard to the previous inspection report, 10 of the 13 recommendations have been fully acted upon and work is progressing in the remainder. These include regular, formal staff supervision, the completion of staff appraisals and finalising the staffing policy for boarding provision.

Pastoral care is a strength of the school and boarders receive outstanding individual support tailored to their assessed needs. Pupils' physical and emotional health are promoted and supported extremely well in partnership with a wide range of other professionals visiting the school or working with individual families. Qualified first-aid staff are always on duty and clear procedures are in place for the management and administration of medication. Significant emphasis is placed on a whole-school approach to healthy eating and physical activity. This has been further strengthened by the school's participation in 'activate' sessions before lessons and close working with the Schools' Food Council. Pupils contribute to menus and boarders are involved in planning, shopping and cooking their evening meal. A number of pupils referred positively to their favourite meals, and how learning to cook 'means I can look after myself when I leave'.

Policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard pupils' welfare. All staff receive appropriate child-protection training and are regularly updated. Strong working partnerships are in place with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children which support the

school's work with individual pupils. Information regarding help-lines and external agencies of support is given to pupils. However, pupils lack clarification about the role of the local-authority visitor. Bullying is not identified as a problem by the residential pupils and they have a clear understanding of what they should do if someone is making them unhappy. Staff are reported to listen to any concerns raised and pupils are confident that staff will 'sort things out'. The management of behaviour is based on establishing positive relationships with pupils and being consistent. Very few sanctions are used by residential staff and physical intervention within the boarding provision is extremely rare.

Health and safety matters are a priority, and a range of policies and procedures are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment. Good procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff and the monitoring of visitors.

The school's boarding provision provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop life-skills and knowledge in a nurturing environment, which effectively supports pupils' educational progress. A warm and welcoming atmosphere prevails. Many pupils clearly enjoy the experience of boarding, particularly the activities, trips and one-to-one time spent with staff.

Pupils are actively consulted and encouraged to express their views and contribute ideas to the development of the whole school. Current forums include a very active school council, class tutorials and one-to-one time. Recent developments from the school council include a go-karting circuit, research into changes to school uniform, input into activities and the possibility of a pupils' newsletter. Boarders have also contributed ideas to the refurbishment of their lounge.

Boarding accommodation is warm, clean and suitably furnished. Many areas have been re-decorated since the last inspection. Staff work hard to provide a welcoming environment for boarders.

Organisation is good. The leadership and management of the boarding are strong and the standard of care delivered contributes highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. Staffing levels outside teaching time are sufficient for the numbers of boarders and the activities in which they are involved. However, the staffing policy for this area is under review and yet to be formalised. Boarders know which staff are responsible for them and who is staying at night.

The residential staff team are very experienced, competent and highly committed to their role. They understand the needs of the young people in their care and help them to develop and achieve further. Good systems of support and training opportunities are available, but the frequency of formal supervision does not fully meet the required standard.

Systems are in place for the monitoring of pupils' welfare both internally, by senior managers and governors, and externally, by the local authority. However, not all copies of local-authority visits are on file.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the senior leadership team, governors and subject leaders make full use of the assessment information they have to analyse further pupils' progress, to identify trends and patterns across all subjects and to gain a more informed view of the effectiveness of provision.
- Reduce further the number of exclusions.

In order to meet the National Minimum Standards the school must:

- clarify the role of the local authority visitor to boarders (NMS 22.8)
- ensure completion of the staffing policy for the school's residential provision (NMS 28.2)
- provide regular formal supervision for all residential staff (NMS 30.2).

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sidestrand Hall School, Sidestrand near Cromer, NR27 0NH

Well done! You go to a good school and you are a credit to it. You are proud of your achievements and rightly so. You spoke confidently to me about your learning and your hopes. You do well and make good progress. Some of the oldest ones among you often achieve GCSE or Entry Level passes, as well as awards in ASDAN Bronze or Silver and Skills for Working Life. A number of you already have lots of AQA awards. You told me there is a good range of activities and you enjoy these well. I agree. The school helps you learn about keeping healthy and fit and this is excellent.

The school is good at helping you with your difficulties and your parents get good support too. Your attendance has improved and your behaviour has got better - well done! A very small number of pupils still have difficulties managing in lessons and around the school, and sometimes they are sent home. I have asked Mrs Fee to find more ways to help keep them learning in school.

The school keeps a track of your progress and knows how well you are doing in English, mathematics and science. I have asked the senior staff, governors and other staff to lead subjects to use the new systems they have to find out more about your learning and progress.

Good luck for the future

Yours sincerely

George Derby

Lead inspector