

Muntham House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126154
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	328456
Inspection date	1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	8–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	47
6th form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol King
Headteacher	Richard Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2005
School address	Barns Green Horsham RH13 0NJ
Telephone number	01403 730302
Fax number	01403 730510

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: • the procedures for evaluating pupils' progress and achievements and the use of assessment data in setting challenging targets • the effectiveness of systems for tracking and improving pupils' personal development • the impact of the residential provision in supporting and extending pupils' learning and personal development; and • the overall effectiveness of the post-16 provision. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, school documentation and assessment information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection 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

Muntham House is a day and residential school. About two thirds of the pupils are boarders. All of the pupils have a statement of special educational need associated with their behavioural, emotional and social learning difficulties, and most display very challenging behaviour. In addition, the majority have additional developmental disorders, such as autism. Pupils have generally been permanently excluded from their previous schools. The vast majority of pupils have a White British heritage and about 10% are in public care.

The school has been granted specialist status for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties with effect from September 2008. The school recently received Investor in Careers recognition. The present leadership team is relatively new. The three partnership managers have had their current responsibilities for about a year, and the headteacher joined the school in April of this year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Muntham House School does a good job in helping disaffected children and young people to turn around their lives. The residential units make a good contribution to this work. The post-16 provision is an excellent facility for preparing students to transfer from school to continuing education or into employment. The school's success is founded on its ability to help pupils to re-engage with school, to value education and to transform their attitudes and behaviour. As a result, the quality of relationships flourishes as pupils learn how to interact with others and to respect their views. One pupil summed this up as: 'The pupils are really encouraging when I get something wrong.' As the pupils experience success, the school gains their trust and the support of their families or carers. Not all parents support the school wholeheartedly, but a very large majority are very complimentary about the work that it does and express views such as: 'The school delivers everything that they promise in their aims.' Pupils, on the other hand, are unanimous in their view; they love being at school. Muntham House is very close to being an outstanding school, but its failure to use pupils' assessment data fully reduces its overall effectiveness.

The school is so effective because strong leadership and management have determined a clear set of principles under which it operates. School leaders and governors run a very efficient school and they have set a very clear direction. Leaders have established a culture of high expectation and an ethos of fairness and transparency. Appropriate behaviour is rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is consistently addressed by staff and remedied by the pupils themselves. The excellent links that leaders have forged with partners, such as the therapeutic counsellor and parents and carers through the school's family inclusion team, support their work very effectively. Governors provide excellent support. They are well informed, based on first-hand knowledge of the school, and balance support with challenge.

Pupils enter the school with very negative attitudes. They found it very difficult to cope in their previous schools and this led to either non-attendance or highly challenging, and often violent, behaviour in class. Therefore, they were excluded and many pupils have been out of school for some time before being admitted to Muntham House. They arrive with very chequered educational histories and poorly developed personal and social skills. Pupils leave the school as mature, confident, respectful young people. They have a positive approach to work and to their future lives, with feelings of anger and frustration replaced by optimism and self-belief. This turnaround occurs because pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. They attend school regularly, remain in class and show very good attitudes to their learning. They behave very well and develop an excellent understanding of right and wrong and an appreciation of the needs and rights of others. They make a good contribution to the work of the school, such as through the school council. Pupils have very good knowledge of how to stay fit and healthy, such as the importance of diet and exercise, and they understand how to remain safe and how to respond if they feel threatened. The school is a very safe place. High priority is placed on pupils' care and welfare and all child protection and safeguarding procedures are securely in place.

Pupils' excellent progress in their personal development results from the school's very good procedures for monitoring, supporting and guiding their social and emotional growth. All successes are celebrated publicly and pupils are kept fully informed as to how well they are doing via a points system that is used throughout the day. This very high quality pastoral support system has a great impact on making pupils responsible for their own actions. Procedures

for providing academic support and guidance are not so well refined. Pupils have individual education plans (IEPs) and short-term learning and behavioural targets, and they make good progress in achieving these. They also have annual performance targets linked to National Curriculum levels, but these are not shared with pupils, even older, secondary aged ones. Staff do not routinely draw pupils' attention to the criteria and descriptors of each NC level to show them what they need to do to move to the next level. This reduces the extent to which staff can involve pupils in evaluating their own learning through self-assessment.

The pupils make good academic progress even though standards are, inevitably, significantly below those expected of pupils of a similar age because of the disruptions in pupils' education. Pupils achieve well because they learn at a good rate and they follow an excellent curriculum. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. They provide activities that are interesting and matched to pupils' needs, although the school recognises that information and communication technology (ICT) is underused as both a teaching and learning tool. Pupils follow a rich and varied curriculum, with particular strengths in personal, social and health education and work-related learning. They follow a good range of accredited courses, which a few of the more capable pupils supplement with additional GCSEs studied at local mainstream schools. All pupils have the opportunity to pursue vocational courses at local colleges and to gain work experience in Key Stage 4. A very good programme of after-school activities, which are also available to day pupils, provides very many opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests outside the school day or to develop new ones. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for leaving school and when they do, they have the skills that are attractive to potential employers. They can work independently or collaboratively, have good attitudes and formal accreditation for their literacy and numeracy skills and vocational and work-based proficiency.

The school's leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. For instance, their monitoring of classroom practice identified the underuse of ICT and so they have taken steps to improve staff training. Their examination of pupils' achievements identifies individuals who could benefit from targeted interventions, such as in literacy, and the establishment of the Learning Centre has enabled staff to work with small groups of pupils with autism and more complex learning needs and behaviours. However, while annual assessment data are analysed at an individual pupil level, and targets set accordingly, leaders do not interrogate it to sufficient depth to unearth all the information that it might contain. For instance, no detailed information is readily available on how well different groups of pupils are performing, such as boarders and non-boarders. The school has established a rationale against which it measures pupils' progress. However, it does not routinely produce a report that shows how well pupils as a whole have performed against this criterion. Neither does it analyse effectively the comparative performances of different key stages or pupils' achievements in different subjects.

Muntham House is an ambitious school. In addition to preparing for its role as a specialist school, it is also driving forward other innovations with local schools, such as extending curriculum links with the establishment of joint courses with shared resources. There is good capacity for these ventures to be carried out successfully as the leadership team becomes increasingly established.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school has established a very innovative post-16 programme. All students attend local colleges, generally full-time, where they study a variety of vocational courses. These are all taught by college staff, who were not seen during the inspection, and so no judgement on the quality of teaching and learning is possible. However, the outcome of students' learning is evident in their successes. They all leave school to productive destinations, either in continuing education or work. Although students spend most of their time in college, their very successful academic and personal development owes much to the extended teaching and range of learning activities available in Muntham House. The promotion of students' self-help and independent life skills has a very high profile. For example, there is an expectation that students will travel independently to college when they have sufficient maturity to do so, and staff expect them to become increasingly involved with self-catering and the general running of the residential unit. Staff provide support to reinforce college-based learning and also give students the opportunity to gain further recognition for their endeavours through activities such as Challenge 21. This was created by the West Sussex Education Business Partnership, and it provides a structured framework for introducing students to the key skills needed for adult life.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Ofsted inspectors visited the residential areas in November 2007. They concluded that there was outstanding provision for helping children to achieve well and enjoy what they do, and for helping them to make a positive contribution to the community. Overall, the provision in the residential units was judged as good when measured against National Minimum Standards. This quality provision has a good impact on promoting and supporting pupils' and students' academic progress and personal development. Strong links between education and care staff, and shared behaviour plans, provide a consistent approach to the management of pupils. Common IEPs mean that all staff are aware of pupils' targets and so there is consistent and routine reinforcement. Residential care staff monitor and support pupils, including day pupils, with their homework. The recently established reading programme in the residential units is beginning to contribute towards raising standards in literacy.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share National Curriculum level targets with pupils and make more frequent use of the level descriptors to motivate pupils and show them what they need to do to make progress, thereby encouraging self-evaluation of their work.
- Interrogate pupils' assessment data more effectively and comprehensively in order to establish a fuller picture of how well all groups of pupils are performing in all subjects.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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 the learners' needs?	2	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

¹ Grade 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.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 July 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Muntham House School, Horsham RH13 0NJ

Thank you for the welcome that you gave me when I visited your school, and particular thanks to those who gave up their time to meet with me. I greatly enjoyed the day that I spent in your school.

Yours is a good school. The boarding units are good and the school provides an excellent education for post-16 students. Lessons are good and staff provide you with a very good variety of activities. Therefore, you make good progress in your work. This means that you are well prepared for leaving school. You are developing really well as young people. You are polite and thoughtful and support each other very well. You have an excellent understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle and you make a good contribution to the work and life of your school. The staff look after you very well.

The people who run the school do a good job and they have lots of ideas about how they can make things better. I have given them two extra things to focus on:

- Make sure that you know all of your learning targets and show you in more detail exactly what you need to do to improve, including how to assess your own work.
- Check in detail that every one of you is doing as well as you possibly can.

I know that you are proud of Muntham House and really enjoy being there. You can help your school to be even better by continuing to attend as much as possible and by maintaining the same very high levels of behaviour and positive attitudes in class.

Thank you once again. I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future, especially if you are leaving school this year.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell Lead inspector