

West Sussex Alternative Provision College

Cuckfield Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 8RE

Inspection dates 8–9 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2	
Quality of teaching	Good	2	
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2	
Leadership and management	Good	2	

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in their learning and development. A good proportion of pupils make faster progress than expected. This is helping them to catch up with work they have missed.
- The reading skills of pupils in primary classes develop well. Their improving knowledge of the sounds letters make gives them greater confidence and ability.
- The needs of individual pupils are considered effectively. Those pupils who successfully return to mainstream schools are well prepared to continue their studies.
- Teaching is good. The work given to pupils takes good account of what they already know and can do. This supports their re-engagement with education well.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They respond well to the help and direction given to them by staff. There is little disruption to lessons. Bullying and racism are infrequent.
- Pupils typically develop more positive attitudes to learning than they showed in their mainstream schools. They treat staff and facilities with appropriate respect.
- Leadership of the college is well structured and effective. A good start has been made in establishing consistent practice across sites. Monitoring of the quality of learning and teaching is routine and frequent.
- The governing body supports and challenges the college's leaders diligently. They have a good knowledge of the work of the college, together with its strengths and aspirations.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Outstanding teaching and learning are not frequent and widespread across all sites of the college.
- The college and local authority have not successfully ensured that all pupils attend regularly enough to make rapid progress.
- Too few pupils return to mainstream school. Some pupils spend too long on roll at the college when reintegration to mainstream schools would be more appropriate.
- The local authority's direction and support for the college have lacked focus.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors, together with senior leaders, observed teaching and learning in 17 lessons taught by 17 teachers or appropriately qualified support staff. Each of the six sites and one of the alternative providers used by the college were visited as part of the inspection and pupils' learning was observed.
- During the inspection, pupils from the Burgess Hill site were participating in off-site activities on the first day.
- Although the college teaches pupils in Year 11, none were present during the inspection as it took place after the school leaving date.
- Pupils and staff met with the inspectors to discuss the college's work.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked carefully at a range of documents including the college's tracking of pupils' progress, the college's checks on the effectiveness of teaching and leadership and its plans to make improvements. They also considered safeguarding arrangements and records of meetings held by the governing body.
- It was not possible to consider the views of parents and carers responding to the Parent View questionnaire because there were too few responses. The college has not conducted surveys of parents' and carers' views. Inspectors also considered the views of 79 staff who completed questionnaires.

Inspection team

Jon Carter, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jason Hughes

Additional Inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The West Sussex Alternative Provision College opened in September 2013 as a result of the merger of The Links College North and The Links College South pupil referral units.
- The college provides education for pupils who are at risk of being or have been permanently excluded from both primary and secondary mainstream schools, those who are out of school for medical reasons and those too sick to attend school.
- The college was led by an interim executive headteacher between September and December 2013. The college is now led by two co-headteachers, one with responsibility for the north of the area and one for the south.
- The college operates from six sites:
 - Fletcher Place, Chichester, where 24 pupils are on roll
 - The Flintstone Centre, Littlehampton, where 27 pupils are on roll
 - 14–16 Centre, Northbrook College, Worthing where 15 pupils are on roll
 - Freshbrook Centre, Lancing, where 34 pupils are on roll
 - Burgess Hill, where 50 pupils are on roll
 - Worth Annexe, Crawley, where 32 pupils are on roll.
- The remaining pupils on the roll of the college are taught through the home-based learning service. This provides mentoring in the home and at college sites as well as virtual teaching via the internet. The college also has an inclusion team who work with pupils in mainstream schools in order to prevent exclusion.
- The number of boys is usually more than the number of girls on the roll of the college.
- Although the college teaches primary and secondary age groups, most pupils on the roll are in Years 9, 10 and 11. The average length of stay at the college is between nine and 12 months.
- Most pupils have special educational needs that are supported through school action plus. A small minority have a statement of special educational needs. Typically, the needs of pupils educated by the college are behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some pupils, particularly those receiving home-based learning, have mental health needs.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average. This is additional government funding provided to give extra support to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after. The college does not receive primary school sports funding or the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The college uses a small range of alternative provision from external providers to meet pupils' varying needs. This includes:
 - Releasing Potential, a charity delivering outdoor education
 - Chichester College, including the Brinsbury campus
 - Northbrook College.
- The college offers early entry to GCSE examinations for some students enrolled for home-based learning in Years 9 and 10 in English, mathematics and computing.
- At the request of the local authority, the college is overseen by a governing body rather than a management committee, which is the norm for a pupil referral unit.
- The governing body and one of the co-headteachers are also responsible for the oversight of the Chalkhill Education Centre at Chalkhill Hospital on the Princess Royal Hospital site in Haywards Heath and the Beechfield Secure Children's Home in Crawley. Both of these provisions are subject to separate inspections by Ofsted.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' learning, progress and successful reintegration to mainstream education, by:
 - ensuring that outstanding teaching and learning occurs more consistently across the college
 - increasing pupils' attendance so that they benefit more frequently from good quality teaching
 - setting target exit dates for pupils on admission so that teachers and pupils are better focused on reintegration to mainstream school.
 - Improve the leadership and management of the college, by:
 - ensuring that the local authority urgently establishes a clear written agreement about the scope of the provision and the role of the local authority in its management
 - developing consistent and more effective systems, including target setting, for improving pupils' attendance.
 - An external review of the college's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- During lessons and over time, pupils make good progress at the college. This includes more able pupils as well as those who have a home-based or virtual learning programme. Pupils of all ages typically learn at a good pace in a range of subjects. Some pupils make outstanding progress in lessons and over time. For example, the seven pupils in Key Stage 1 have all made very quick progress in reading, writing and mathematics over the past year. However, this level of achievement is not yet consistent across the college.
- The literacy skills of pupils in primary classes develop well over time. Pupils' confidence and reading ability improve quickly because there is a focused approach to teaching the sounds that letters make.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics has improved steadily. For most year groups, the proportion of pupils making the expected amount of progress is similar to the national figures for all pupils. A higher than average proportion of pupils are now making faster than expected progress.
- The progress made by those pupils who are supported by additional funding has improved over the past year. There are no longer any significant gaps between their performance and that of other pupils at the college. This indicates that the college is successful in ensuring that all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed academically.
- Pupils entered early for GCSE examinations achieve good grades. The college's use of early entry is appropriate because it enables pupils with mental health needs to achieve accredited qualifications without causing them increased anxiety.
- Good attention is given to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development during their placement at the college. For example, as part of a project to improve pupils' knowledge of democracy, a group visited the United Kingdom and European parliaments. As a result, there was a significant increase in their understanding about how government worked.
- Pupils' learning and development are successfully enhanced by the use of external providers. During the inspection, for example, pupils participating in a session run by Releasing Potential learned skills relevant to independent living, self-reliance and working as part of a team.
- Although pupils make good progress, their attainment at the end of each key stage typically remains below average. For most pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, this is because there has not been enough time for the college to have a greater impact on previous underachievement. For Key Stage 4 pupils, the limited range of subjects available at examination level restricts what they can achieve. A curriculum review is currently addressing this issue.
- A smaller than typical proportion of pupils successfully return to mainstream school. The progress they make at the college helps them to be well prepared for reintegration. This is because their learning at college is planned to match the courses and subjects taught at the mainstream school. However, clear target dates for pupils to return to mainstream are not established when they are admitted. As a result, the college is not reintegrating pupils frequently enough.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching over time is good. It is not outstanding because there remains some variation in quality across the college's different centres. Pupils in most centres are happy with the quality of teaching they receive. One pupil explained that, 'Teaching is better here; I've made good progress and I'm looking forward to going back to another school.'
- The content of lessons is generally well matched to pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers make good use of assessment information when planning work. This often ensures that learning tasks are personalised to individual pupils' needs effectively. As a result, those pupils returning to mainstream schools are able to continue their studies in English, mathematics and science with minimal disruption to their learning.

- Much teaching is adapted well to developing and changing circumstances. For example, in an art lesson for Year 10, only one pupil was present. The teacher used this opportunity to engage the pupil in a high-quality discussion about pop art.
- Sometimes teaching did not take account of the level and nature of pupils' interests and the content was not always suitably adapted as the lesson progressed to maintain pupils' engagement. Opportunities were sometimes missed to explore relevant questions brought up by pupils in response to stimulating resources.
- Pupils' books show that they make good use of the written guidance provided when teachers mark their work. This is effective in helping them learn well and make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They make good progress over time in improving their behaviour, which is often a reason for their referral to the college. Inspectors also observed examples of exemplary behaviour in most centres during the inspection. The number of fixed-term exclusions is falling over time.
- In lessons, pupils typically demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. This represents improvement because pupils have usually experienced significant disengagement from education before their referral to the college. They show respect in their relationships with others and look after the college environment.
- Behaviour management systems used by staff are consistently effective in keeping pupils focused on learning on most sites. Supportive work with pupils successfully helps them to overcome the behavioural difficulties they have experienced in the past.
- The college's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff receives regular training to help them respond positively to difficult and disruptive behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance requires improvement. The college's work to secure good attendance has had limited success. Some pupils do not attend college frequently enough to make rapid progress. The college has a step-by-step target system for pupils' academic progress. It does not have a similar system for setting realistic and achievable targets for improving individual pupils' attendance. Nevertheless, a majority of pupils improve their attendance while at the college.
- The college is successful in fostering good relations between students and tackling discrimination. Pupils say that bullying and racism are rare; this is confirmed by the school's rigorous recording systems. Awareness of stereotyping and discrimination, such as homophobia, is developed successfully through well-chosen resources across the college.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers work well together sharing the responsibilities of running and improving the college. The leadership structure is good. Each site operates smoothly on a day-to-day basis.
- Members of the leadership team share a common view about the direction of the college and the improvements it needs to make. Some leaders are new in post and developing in their role. Established leaders have a more comprehensive understanding of the impact they have on pupils' progress. Middle leaders are making an increasingly effective contribution to school leadership and development.
- The monitoring of the quality of learning and teaching is frequent and regular across the college. The co-headteachers, together with the assistant headteachers responsible for each site, make good use of the information they gather. This ensures that action is taken quickly to support staff where necessary.
- Targets for teachers are well linked to the needs of the college identified in the quality improvement plan. Training for staff is effective in helping staff to meet their targets and drive improvement across the college.
- School leaders have demonstrated the capacity to continue to improve the college in the actions

they have taken to tackle weaknesses and build a new leadership team. Improvements have been made, for example, in pupils' performance in mathematics and in closing gaps in achievement between groups of pupils.

- College leaders are not having enough impact on improving pupils' attendance. The issue does not have a sufficiently high profile around the college. There is an inconsistent approach to tackling the problem across the college because a common system for managing absence is not well established.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. Each centre has appropriately trained staff to manage issues that arise locally. Procedures for reporting to senior leaders and making referrals are clear.
- The support and direction provided by the local authority have been of limited help in improving pupils' learning, progress, attendance and reintegration. School leaders and the governing body are unclear about the role of the authority in the management of the college and the support it should expect. This is because a clear written agreement has not yet been provided by the local authority. The local authority has not been proactive enough in ensuring that mainstream schools take pupils for reintegration through their established programme of meetings with headteachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The members of the governing body have a variety of educational expertise which allows them to challenge and support college leaders in a realistic and relevant way. They also recognise that the views of parents and carers are under-represented on the board.
 - The governing body has a good understanding of the work of the college and its performance data. Governors have gained this through personal visits and through relevant meetings with a wide range of staff. They have a good awareness of the quality of teaching at each of the sites and across the college. This ensures that they oversee how leaders set targets for teachers effectively. They have an appropriate awareness of links between teachers' pay and pupils' achievement.
 - Issues with communication with the local authority have contributed to misunderstandings about additional funding. Consequently pupil premium funding has not yet been allocated or spent appropriately.

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	131182
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	431580

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Sheila Carroll (Co-headteacher - North) Doug Thomas (Co-headteacher - South)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01444 231236
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