

High Close School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110181
Local Authority	Wokingham Borough Council
Inspection number	310214
Inspection dates	21-22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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

Type of School	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	7-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Beswetherick
Headteacher	Mrs Rose Mahony
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Wiltshire Road Wokingham RG40 1TT
Telephone number	01189 785767
Fax number	01189 894220

Age group	7-16
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Introduction

This was a single integrated inspection of education and social care (welfare). Social care was inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000. An Additional Inspector and a Social Care Inspector carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

High Close is a mixed residential and day special school administered by the Barnardo's childcare charity. All pupils have a statement of special educational need associated with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. They come from a wide geographical area serving over 20 local authorities. A significant number of pupils join the school other than at the usual starting point. Pupils are predominantly of White British origin and none speaks English as an additional language. At present there are 34 pupils, aged eleven and above, resident in the weekday boarding provision. Varying numbers of pupils board on a fortnightly basis. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Bronze and Investors in Careers Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

High Close is a good school. Pupils' personal development is outstanding as is the care, guidance and support they receive. This ensures that all pupils, many of whom have had troubled and inconsistent schooling in the past, improve their behaviour and develop a desire to learn. Parents and carers are delighted with the school. As one commented, 'High Close is a credit to the education system'.

The good achievement of pupils of different backgrounds and abilities is based on good teaching and learning. By the age of 16, standards are below those in mainstream schools, but this represents good progress given pupils' low attainment on entry. Staff work very well as a team and they use praise very effectively to improve pupils' self-esteem, concentration and behaviour. Teachers plan lessons conscientiously, and make good use of resources, including interactive technology to make learning fun. Assessment is much improved since the last inspection. Staff are now effective in helping pupils review their learning and ensure that they are clear about what they need to do to improve further. There are models of outstanding teaching in a range of subjects such as art and science. However, there are occasions, in English lessons in Years 7 to 9, when staff do not fully challenge the learning of all pupils, particularly in writing. Consequently, pupils of different abilities do not achieve as well as they might in English.

Personal development is a cornerstone of the school's work and is an exceptionally strong feature of pupils' development. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and their attendance is good. This represents substantial improvement since pupils started at the school. This success is based on well-established systems to promote and reward their every effort. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to point out how it has helped them. For many it is like a second home, and one pupil said, 'I feel I have found a place where I belong'. Pupils enjoy the calm and purposeful lessons and speak extremely positively about the extra activities, such as fishing and horse riding, that they undertake. They have a very clear understanding about how to lead a healthy lifestyle and how to keep safe. There are few instances of bullying and pupils know what they should do if any occurs. The way that pupils learn to respect times of quiet reflection is a key feature in their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The care pupils receive is of extremely high quality. Health and safety are high on everyone's agenda and pupils feel safe and learn to trust others. They say that 'There is always an adult or a friend to turn to if we have a problem'. The support for those new to the school is handled sensitively to cater for pupils' individual needs and ensures that they start to make progress as quickly as possible.

Leadership is good overall. The principal leads by example and provides the commitment, enthusiasm and determination to ensure that every pupil reaches their potential. Along with the senior team, she gives a clear sense of direction. She has set a climate of strong teamwork amongst all adults so that everyone realises they have a part to play. Governors are effective in both supporting and challenging the school and act as its critical friend. They are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school's self-evaluation is robust and based on extremely rigorous and discerning monitoring by the principal and senior team. As a result, everyone is aware that pupils' achievements in English, notably in writing, in Years 7 to 9 are not as good as they should be. The school is well placed to improve even further.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The boarding provision is outstanding. The school continues to meet all the National Minimum Standards and it exceeds several of them.

There are a number of improvements based on recommendations from the previous social care report. More importantly, however, there are significant improvements in systems used to record and analyse incidents of concern. The school created a new post in order to facilitate this. These developments have been driven by both the school and Barnardo's. There are also major and useful developments in relation to collaboration with outside agencies, such as the

local Community Wardens, both inside school and in the community.

The school continues with healthy menus which are mostly appreciated by the young people. One young person said, 'Our cook makes healthy and tasty food for us' and another said, 'Vegetarian food is made just for me'. Staff make culturally appropriate food available when necessary and monitor this carefully.

When staff give any medication to young people it is recorded thoroughly and accurately. This is even true when young people are taken abroad. Medication fridges are available for any prescriptions which need to be kept cool and the temperatures are monitored regularly.

One young person said, 'I feel good in this school, it is a good school where I feel safe' and another said, 'I feel like I can talk to all the staff'. There are exceptionally secure and positive relationships between staff and young people. Unit staff take careful note of anything that raises child protection concerns and pass these on to the appropriate senior staff. The school's social worker and counsellor also work hard with young people, as well as outside agencies, to promote their safety. Staff respect young people's privacy and the process of beginning the day is calm and friendly. Staff speak quietly and gently at all times of day, although they can be firm when necessary. Although the young people know how to complain, they say that they talk to staff to resolve problems and so it is extremely rare for them to feel the need to make a formal complaint.

Young people report a small amount of bullying, but say that staff deal with it well. Staff address bullying clearly and consistently, with young people being very much involved in the process. One young person said, 'They're good at teaching people right from wrong'. Notices about bullying address issues such as not picking on people because of their colour. Staff record any incidents of poor behaviour particularly thoroughly and use clear rules about the behaviour that is expected from young people. This recording is now being transferred into the new database, allowing for easy and continuous monitoring of safeguarding. Staff are excited and not threatened by this development. The school's thorough recruitment processes, as well as detailed risk assessments, assist in keeping young people safe.

The young people love the range of activities available to them, both collectively and individually. These activities include annual trips to Goa and skiing trips. For example, several young people stated 'It's the best school I've ever been to'. One said, 'There's a good choice of all the things I like to do' and another was particularly pleased to be able to take part in her hobby at another school. On the day of inspection many of the young people were involved in a wonderful performance of The Wizard of Oz. This was attended by those pupils who wished to, as well as some parents and staff.

There is a high level of collaboration between care staff and teachers. Both groups support the work of the other to the clear benefit of the young people. Teachers understand the behavioural objectives of the care plans and care staff help young people to achieve their educational targets.

Equality and diversity are high on the agenda. Staff are improving policies and these influence practices. Staff and pupils are creative in finding solutions to diverse problems. All pupils have shown themselves to be able, at times, to be exceptionally understanding and flexible in order to meet other young people's needs.

Young people feel so confident about being listened to well by staff, that they are unusually able to express their opinions. They continue to do this to individual staff as well as in the school council. There are thorough assessments in place when young people join High Close and staff ensure that arrangements meet their needs.

There are well developed rewards schemes in both the units and the school as a whole.

All units are bright and homely, and in a good state of repair. Young people are proud to show visitors around. Artwork around the units is very varied and includes African paintings and posters. One evening meal was taken outside on new

garden furniture, which a young person had helped put together.

The older boarders are helped towards leaving by being supported to become more independent; one unit is piloting changes that allow a student to make their own meals and eat them in their own room, if they wish. Staff give career advice and also assist in finding and setting up placements. This helps young people to feel that there is a bridge between High Close and their new setting. Parents and young people are very positive about how well staff understand and meet the needs of the young people: 'They take care of everyone'; the school does well at 'Helping us if we're upset, giving us good advice and giving us a good education'; 'They've understood me'. Also one parent wrote this powerful statement 'This school saved our son'.

Training opportunities for staff are excellent and they report high quality courses. This means that they can request specific pieces of training to meet their needs, and that they are then able to work confidently with a diverse range of young people. High Close uses Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) techniques to manage behaviour. This is working well and restraints are kept to a minimum.

The previous principal retired and the deputy appointed in his place has maintained, or even improved the quality of all aspects of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, in English in Years 7 to 9, staff fully challenge pupils of different abilities so that all achieve of their best, particularly in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, pupils achieve well and reach their challenging targets. Over the past three years, Year 11 pupils have attained an average of three GCSE passes. All have gained an Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) award and many have received the Duke of Edinburgh award. Across the school, pupils make particularly good progress in mathematics, science and art. Since the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in the provision in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and pupils are now making good progress in developing their skills in this subject. The school has a focus on improving pupils' progress and achievements in English because they are not as good as in other subjects. Already this is starting to pay dividends, particularly in terms of speaking and listening, and reading, but there is still further to go to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they are capable, particularly in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Staff value pupils as individuals and they have high expectations of each one. As a result, all pupils make significant gains in developing confidence, independence and self-discipline. The ways in which pupils learn to think through their actions and the effects of these on others is impressive. This ensures that they work and play together in a harmonious atmosphere where everyone is able to share in moments of humour. This was exemplified particularly well during rehearsals for the school production of the Wizard of Oz. Pupils are very aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and the take-up at lunchtime of sporting activities, such as football and cricket, for both boys and girls is very high. In all

their activities, pupils pay particular attention to acting safely and look after each other extremely well. They make an excellent contribution to both their own and the wider community for example through the work of the school council and prefects, fund raising for a range of charities and by helping at a local animal sanctuary. College links and work placements are carefully organised and effectively help pupils gain work place skills. Along with the overall good development of pupils' key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT this means pupils are well prepared for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Orderly and purposeful lessons, underpinned by excellent relationships, are the order of the day. Staff treat pupils with respect and consideration and, in turn, pupils try hard. In all areas, staff are enthusiastic and motivate pupils to learn. They use resources and 'hands on' activities to make learning meaningful. There is some excellent teaching of English. For example in Year 10 staff set a very high expectation for each pupil and very effectively challenge them to achieve of their best. This practice, however, is not consistent across all year groups and there are lessons where pupils' achievements, particularly in writing, are not as good as they should be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum goes a long way to meeting pupils' needs with a very strong focus on personal development. There is an excellent level of enrichment, for instance, a small number of pupils have visited India, and Year 11 pupils have the opportunity to take part in a ski trip abroad. All of these extras add to pupils' enjoyment. In order to respond to both changing demands nationally and, also, the changing needs of the pupil population, the school is rightly reviewing and extending its curriculum because of its limited vocational content.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff make sure that all pupils, including those who arrive at different times, settle happily into school and feel confident about moving to the next stage of their education. The systems for supporting pupils' personal development are extremely effective with care and education staff all playing an important and complimentary role. There is comprehensive tracking of each pupil's academic and behavioural progress and this information is used well to organise extra support for individuals. It is also used well to set targets in each subject as well as for behaviour that the pupils are very keen to reach. There are thorough child protection and risk assessment procedures in place and safeguarding arrangements fully meet government requirements. Parents and carers are seen as partners in their child's education and the school works extremely well with them and with a wide range of outside agencies to support pupils' development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership is good overall. It has ensured that the school has improved since the last inspection and is focussing its efforts towards those areas that are most in need of further improvement. The principal provides a very strong lead and she is well supported by the senior team. Middle leaders are well informed and they actively develop the skills of their colleagues. In English, there is a well thought out action plan to improve practice. Governors are effective in supporting the school and ensure that it provides good value for money. All leaders have a great deal of information about the progress pupils make in both their personal and academic development. However, in its present form this is difficult to analyse to be certain that each pupil is achieving their best. Consequently, the school is working hard to develop an ICT based system to make it easier to interrogate data about pupils' progress. Staff development is given a high profile and staff approach key developments very enthusiastically. The school's track record shows that it is very well placed to improve in future.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
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?	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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
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	1
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 interest of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

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

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	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	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

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

10 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Close School, Wokingham, RG40 1TT

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your school on 23 May 2008. Many of you told us that you think that High Close is a good school where you make good progress. You say that you have made friends, and that everyone's behaviour is greatly improved. We agree with you. You also mentioned that the staff are always ready to help you and we could see that you are ready to help others. A good example of this is the school council, which makes decisions that improve school life. You clearly appreciate some of the extra activities you take part in and the trips out of school, such as the ski trip abroad. These are definitely strong features of the school. In addition, we also noticed the impressive way you took on roles in the production of the Wizard of Oz.

The principal and senior team have an extremely clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are keen to see it improve even further. We have asked them to work with the staff to improve the teaching of English in Years 7 to 9, to make sure that all of you, whatever your ability, always achieve your best, notably in writing. By trying your hardest at all times you can help.

Yours sincerely

Kay Charlton
Lead Inspector

