School report

Holme Court School

Abington Woods, Church Lane, Little Abington, Cambridgeshire CB21 6BQ

Inspection dates 21–23 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	**Outstanding**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Outstanding**
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**Outstanding**
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Outstanding**
Outcomes for pupils	**Outstanding**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher ensures that her high expectations for equality of opportunity and achievement are shared and upheld by all.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. As a result, outcomes for pupils have improved since the previous inspection so that they are now outstanding.
- The learning environment is designed to meet the unique additional needs of pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Learning time is used to the full. Lessons are interesting and pupils are eager to learn. As a result, pupils make rapid progress.
- Staff use their excellent subject knowledge to deepen pupils' understanding and correct misconceptions.
- Teachers understand how pupils learn and what they can achieve. They set clear targets and make accurate assessment of pupils' needs so that all pupils have an equal chance to succeed from their low and varied starting points.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. They are delighted with the provision and the way the school is led.
- The rich curriculum and the outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contribute to pupils' excellent personal development.
- The school prepares pupils exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and for their future lives as British citizens.
- Pupils are taught how to become confident learners. They learn how to ask probing questions for themselves.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective and well implemented by all who work at the school.
- A consultant has specific responsibility for the governance of the school. He has the necessary knowledge to check that provision and achievement are the best they can be.
- In some areas of the curriculum, pupils have a good level of knowledge and work is too easy for them. The frequent sessions to develop pupils' coordination and motor skills are not sufficiently effective.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Identify more precisely areas of learning where pupils already have good levels of knowledge and understanding, and plan more demanding work for them to accelerate their progress.
- Review the content and improve the quality of the coordination and motor skills (CosMo) sessions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding

- The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. Soon after the previous inspection, she set her goals on making the school even better, and has done this successfully. She has a clear vision and ambition for the school, reflected in a well-devised development plan. She is an excellent role model for staff and pupils alike.
- The headteacher ensures that the whole school community shares her commitment to make each pupil succeed, however complex their needs. She promotes equal opportunities and inclusion. She has a passionate commitment to staff's continued learning. Teachers and learning support assistants appreciate the many opportunities they have to learn about the specific needs of dyslexic pupils and their associated emotional difficulties. As a result, pupils benefit from highly skilled teaching and make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development.
- The systems to manage the performance of staff are rigorous. This academic year, there is a slight delay in setting clear targets for staff but a schedule is in place for completion of this work by the end of the autumn term.
- The headteacher scrutinises information about pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching in great detail. Her evaluations are accurate and used well to inform key priorities and to refine actions so that they become even more effective. All the staff who completed the inspection questionnaire praise the school for the guidance they receive, the high morale and the excellent teamwork, which help them meet the high standards expected of them.
- The business manager contributes very effectively to the smooth running of the school. She knows exactly how the funding is used and she ensures that pupils get the support that they are entitled to.
- Pupils said that they love what they are learning and this was demonstrated very well during this inspection. The bespoke and broad curriculum motivates pupils. One pupil said that he just could not stop himself enjoying everything he was doing.
- Teachers' excellent knowledge of their subjects, and their understanding of how pupils in their groups learn best, mean that pupils are given many opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across a wide range of subjects. The curriculum includes additional workshops, learning science at a local school, applying practical skills during the weekly sessions for science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics, as well as a wealth of other cultural activities and visits.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely effective. The school's strong values and the staff's clear moral purpose permeate the whole culture of the school. Pupils have many opportunities to reflect on their rights and responsibilities. They develop a broad perspective on moral, social and cultural issues because of the wide range of topics planned for them over the year. For example, pupils have discussed the impact of working in factories during the Industrial Revolution and the differences between the lives of the lower and upper classes of society.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their future lives. They learn to understand the principles behind fundamental British values as well as how to apply them to their own

lives. One pupil explained that some pupils work on a farm on Mondays and that it was 'not as simple as people think'. This course, leading to accreditation in animal care, helps pupils understand the world of work from a young age.

- Parents are highly appreciative and complimentary about the leadership of the school. Several parents said that they had spent months looking for the right school for their children. Some were very emotional when they explained that their children had been excluded from other schools because of their special needs. They gave precise examples of how their children were helped and were now thriving at Holme Court. The number of parents who completed the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, is too low for a reliable analysis. However, all parents who spoke to the inspector would strongly recommend this school to others.
- The learning environment, indoors and outdoors, is safe. The field and woods are very pleasant and pupils are well supervised. The school places great importance on promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. Pupils were seen playing well together during break and lunchtime. Some pupils would welcome access to a wider range of more exciting equipment. The inspector agrees that there are limited resources outdoors and the frequent sessions to develop pupils' coordination and motor skills (CosMo) are too similar over time and not challenging enough.
- The headteacher is in the process of reviewing the website to make it even more attractive and accessible to parents. A few documents were uploaded during this inspection and the website now meets requirements.

Governance

- The directors of the International Schools Partnership have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- A consultant has been appointed to take responsibility for the governance of the school. His professional background, which includes the headship of a special school, means that he has the knowledge required to check the school's work.
- The consultant's visits to the school provide valuable support to the headteacher. He has entire confidence in the leadership of the headteacher. As a result, he keeps the level of challenge and external evaluations to their minimum. The headteacher makes effective use of other types of external review.
- While the consultant provides suitable challenge, a check of the independent school standards would be beneficial to ensure that the school continues to be highly successful. For example, pupils' progress is rapid, but in some areas work for specific pupils is too easy. In addition, swift action is needed to finalise access to the planned new facilities and to improve outdoor lighting.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead, places safeguarding at the top of her priorities. Frequent briefings are held to update staff. Policies are checked and implemented well.

- The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. It is comprehensive and meets current statutory requirements. The headteacher oversees effective arrangements for the recruitment of staff.
- All staff have had relevant training, including on preventing radicalisation, ensuring that pupils stay safe online and understanding the many facets of bullying.
- Incidents are recorded in sufficient detail. The designated safeguarding lead knows how and when to access early help services. Contact with local authorities is prompt and the thresholds to access social care services are understood.
- The school works effectively with external agencies to provide timely support to pupils. The education, health and care plans summarise pupils' emotional and academic challenges very well and identify well-planned provision to match these specific needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Outstanding

- Teachers expect pupils to work hard, and pupils respond to this extremely well. This is because, since the previous inspection, teachers have created a very positive learning atmosphere. They help pupils understand how to reflect on their work and to accept that people learn in different ways and at different speeds. Consequently, pupils concentrate, willingly ask for help, and progress rapidly in a climate of mutual respect.
- Teachers devote time and effort to understanding the specific needs of individual pupils and how they learn best. Teachers use this extensive knowledge to plan and teach interesting lessons. The quick bursts of learning in the short carousel sessions help pupils apply essential skills. They see the relevance of what they are doing, such as touch typing. They learn how and when to select the right technology to help their progress, such as using the electronic pen readers. This leads to their outstanding outcomes.
- Across years, pupils show a love for mathematics. A systematic approach to the teaching of this subject results in excellent progress for pupils from all starting points. The most able pupils have the necessary enthusiasm and passion for the subject to tackle more complex mathematical investigations. They apply their knowledge well across other subjects, such as in science and computing.
- Reading and writing are taught very effectively. Pupils learn to consider the style, mood and personalities of characters in books they are reading. Reading is given a high profile in the school.
- Speaking and listening are used very well to help pupils' reading. For example, during one-to-one sessions pupils listened carefully to the sounds of letters; they then practised these sounds carefully before learning how to read full words and sentences. Pupils' huge effort, concentration and wish to succeed, and determination to overcome their learning needs, was exemplary.
- Teachers make sure that pupils develop a deep understanding of how sentences and language work together to improve specific genres of writing or express a particular mood in a story. In an English lesson, for example, staff carefully planned small steps to introduce pupils to writing a formal letter. In another session, a video was used to create the right mood and conditions so that pupils felt comfortable when describing what they had seen.

- Teachers are working hard to improve the quality of pupils' handwriting, although this requires consolidation when pupils write in subjects other than English.
- Teachers and learning support assistants use accurate assessment and forensic questioning to check pupils' understanding and promptly address their misconceptions. They question pupils very effectively in English and mathematics although, across other subjects, some work lacks challenge.
- Learning support assistants are very knowledgeable about each individual pupil. The way they communicate with the class teachers ensures seamless learning and effective planning for pupils, especially those who have an education, health and care plan. The effective partnership between professionals and parents enables pupils to overcome barriers to their learning and personal development.
- The range of activities and the well-trained team of learning support assistants ensure that all pupils benefit from expert academic and welfare guidance. In addition, specialist professionals from health agencies, such as mental health therapists and speech and language specialists, complement the work of the class teachers very effectively.
- Strategies to identify pupils who have the potential to achieve highly in specific areas of the curriculum are not sufficiently effective to accelerate their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are well prepared for their learning and make confident and highly enthusiastic contributions in class. They are proud of their school and eager to do well.
- Parents gave many examples of how their children's attitude to their education had changed for the better since starting at Holme Court. Some said that they could not believe the positive transformation in their children's confidence. Staff help pupils develop into resilient and reflective individuals.
- Some pupils said that, for the first time, they did not feel frustrated or upset when they could not complete the work because they could ask the adults to help them do well. Pupils concentrate and try very hard. Some were developing good study skills when using a specialised dictionary to support their spelling. One pupil explained very clearly how his previously negative views of school had changed. He said it was really nice 'not to have his written work thrown in the bin'.
- Parents said, and the inspector agrees, that staff keep children safe and help them develop a good awareness of the risks to their personal safety and well-being, in and beyond the school, including when on the internet.
- Pupils are lively, active and know how to make healthy choices. They made the most of breaktime to play team games in the large field or use the swing in the wood. Some pupils find it difficult to coordinate their movements. Considering pupils' excellent personal development, their views are not sought enough about how to improve the quality of outdoor resources and the content of the coordination and motor skills sessions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils move around the school calmly and responsibly. They behave impeccably in and out of lessons even when unsupervised. They spontaneously thank staff for their help and understand that excellent behaviour is essential to their success in learning. A few pupils told the inspector that they were pleased with their conduct at this school because they had found it difficult to behave well at their previous school.
- Pupils play safely together and show consideration for the views of others. Bullying and other forms of discriminatory behaviour are very rare. When incidents happen, including those happening outside school, they are investigated very carefully. Pupils say that they know exactly what to do if they are worried about something. They have no hesitation in using the 'worry box' and the 'positive box'.
- Attendance is average and punctuality is exemplary. Despite some medical needs, pupils want to attend school. Pupils waste no time when they arrive in the morning. They settle very quickly to their daily handwriting activity.

Outcomes for pupils — Outstanding

- The aim of the school is to return pupils to mainstream education as soon as they are academically and emotionally able to meet the demands of a mainstream curriculum. The school does this well. Consequently, the turnover of pupils, including mid-year, is high. Several pupils are new to the school. Others left to join a larger school as a result of their good learning. From their varied starting points, current pupils make rapid progress across subjects.
- Since the previous inspection, outcomes for pupils have continued to improve and are now outstanding. This is in response to the close attention teachers and learning support assistants pay to the learning needs of individuals. It is also as a result of pupils' exceptionally positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils are making rapid progress in reading and writing. One parent said that her child did not want to read at all before starting at Holme Court. He is now asking to go to the bookshop and reads for pleasure. The school's focus on reading is particularly beneficial, as is the excellent parental support to encourage reading at home.
- One-to-one support helps pupils make accelerated progress in their understanding of letters, sounds and single words. They then apply their learning well to decipher unknown words and read sentences of increasing difficulty. Pupils' handwriting improves rapidly and letters are shaped accurately in the handwriting and English books. The quality of handwriting in subjects other than English is not as good as it could be.
- The school's performance information and pupils' books show that progress is strong in mathematics. Staff have high aspirations and check that pupils apply their numeracy skills in subjects other than in mathematics. The very effective teaching helps pupils link their work in mathematics to different contexts and concepts, for example referring to the pi number when dividing, and when working on magnet investigations and forces used in sport.
- The number of pupils is too small to report on differences in the achievement of particular

groups of pupils. However, the potential and specific capabilities of the most able pupils are not identified precisely enough across subjects. In some areas of the curriculum their progress is insufficient.

- The relentless practice of speaking and listening ensures that pupils make rapid progress in these skills. Speaking skills are high because staff are good role models. They speak clearly and insist on clarity of presentation when pupils speak aloud. The pupils were very confident to speak to the inspector. They were inquisitive and asked relevant questions, such as what she was looking at when she was visiting their classroom.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Some parents are worried about finding the right secondary school for their children as they approach Year 10, and the school is considering developing its expertise of the key stage 4 curriculum. The school is helping key stage 3 pupils to access a range of accreditations, such as in horticulture and animal care, to reward pupils for their effort and to get them used to preparing for formal examinations.

School details

Unique reference number	108886
DfE registration number	873/6051
Inspection number	10043517

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	International School Partnership
Headteacher	Anita Laws
Annual fees (day pupils)	£14,250
Telephone number	01223 778030
Website	www.holmecourt.com
Email address	admin@holmecourt.com
Date of previous inspection	10–12 March 2015

Information about this school

- Holme Court School is a small, independent, co-educational, day specialist school for pupils with dyslexia and associated difficulties. It is registered to admit 30 pupils aged from seven to 16 years.
- The school shares a site with Abington Woods Outdoor Education Centre in Little Abington. The school is owned by the International Schools Partnership Group.
- The school was previously inspected in March 2015.
- There are currently 16 pupils on roll, all of whom have special educational needs in the form of dyslexia. Six pupils have an education, health and care plan. Several pupils have missed significant amounts of school time before coming to Holme Court.

- The school provides short-term intensive programmes for pupils, who usually stay for between one and three years, after which most are expected to return to mainstream settings.
- The aim of the school is 'to help pupils to overcome their dyslexia by fulfilling their potential as learners through the use of a holistic approach, so that they can then move back to mainstream schooling'.
- The school uses a range of venues to support the curriculum, such as for physical education and science. The current school's premises are being improved further. Plans are in place to provide new toilets and shower facilities.
- The school does not use supply staff.
- The school is registered with the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and several sessions were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Throughout the inspection, the inspector spoke with pupils, individually and in groups, about their learning and safety.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading. She reviewed pupils' work in class and analysed samples of work in books, on display in classrooms and around the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the business manager and two directors of the International Schools Partnership Group. She had a telephone conversation with the school's consultant who has direct responsibility for the governance of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with staff and reviewed assessment and progress data with the headteacher and the mathematics specialist.
- The inspector looked at the school's external review of its own performance, its development plan and a number of key policies. She considered a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector spoke to about half of the parents. Nine staff completed the Ofsted staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Marianick Ellender-Gelé, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector

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