

The Quest School

Bell 3, The Hop Farm, Maidstone Road, Paddock Wood, Kent TN12 6PY

Inspection dates

13–15 March 2018

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- All staff and trustees are united in their goal to transform pupils' lives. They epitomise the school's motto: 'Achievement never thought possible'. Adults' deep commitment ensures that meeting pupils' varied and complex needs is at the heart of the school's work.
- Trustees, the headteacher and leaders at all levels are highly effective. They seek out strengths and weaknesses, and act swiftly should there be any areas to improve. The chair of trustees summed up the ethos of the school, saying, 'We want a culture of continual improvement'. This highly effective and improving school meets all of the independent school standards.
- High-quality teaching is consistent across the school. Staff have an excellent understanding of autism spectrum disorders and the precise needs of individual pupils. Teaching staff personalise learning into a series of small steps so that all pupils experience success.
- Trustees are uncompromising in their expectation that pupils should have the very best provision to meet their needs.
- Pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points, especially with their social and communication skills. Many develop the ability to use pictures and symbols to represent their views. Pupils show sheer joy as they understand others and in turn are understood. Pupils' behaviour improves significantly on joining the school.
- Staff care for and support pupils exceptionally well. Staff and parents agree that pupils are safe at school.
- Parents offer the highest praise for the school. Leaders make sure that parents are kept up to date with their child's progress through daily communication.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes are tailored to individuals' needs. All students are prepared to make a successful transition to education, training or employment.
- On very rare occasions, the most able pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise their literacy skills across the curriculum in order to deepen their learning.

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?

- Ensure that pupils have more opportunities to practise their literacy skills across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and trustees are compassionate leaders with a strong moral purpose. Pupils at this school have complex special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, together with severe learning difficulties. All pupils have autism spectrum disorder. Leaders hold high ambition for their pupils and are insistent that pupils make great gains in improving their social and communication skills. All staff are equally committed; as a member of staff said: 'We always prioritise the needs of pupils.'
- Leaders make sure that staff feel confident in their roles. Staff say that they support each other effectively and that the school is well led and managed. Leaders ensure that staff receive high-quality training, especially to understand how to support pupils' complex needs. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning very closely, taking swift and effective action should there be any concerns. Leaders are determined that pupils receive excellent learning experiences.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. Leaders regularly carry out parental surveys and adapt procedures to accommodate parents' views. Staff communicate with parents in a variety of ways, including through termly progress reports and highly detailed daily reports. As a consequence, there are positive relationships with parents. Parents responding to the Ofsted questionnaire made positive comments, including: 'An absolutely outstanding school who have focused on ability, not disability' and 'The Quest School is quite simply the best thing that has happened for my child'.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of their school. They ensure that the school meets the independent school standards in full. Leaders are not complacent, seeking the opinions of external advisers and readily taking on board any guidance. For example, a speech and language consultant who visits weekly said: 'If I put a recommendation in place it is always carried out.' Leaders' plans to improve the school are highly effective.
- Since the last inspection, leadership has strengthened. In recent years, middle leaders have developed well, so that they take on greater responsibility for the running of the school. They share the high expectations of senior leaders and are very effective as a group. The headteacher has ensured that middle leaders have honed their leadership skills and are the powerhouse of the school.
- The curriculum is rich and provides pupils with a broad range of experiences that are appropriate for their level of development. It is grounded in developing basic literacy, numeracy, social, motor and communication skills. Leaders ensure that art, music, drama, science, technology and humanities are interwoven throughout the basic curriculum. The most able pupils access a more academic curriculum and communicate through speaking, reading and writing. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is developed well and that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and knowledge of fundamental British values permeate most learning activities.
- Leaders ensure that there is ample opportunity for pupils to make visits into the community to practise their social, communication and life skills. For example, regular visits to the local supermarket and leisure centre take place for all pupils. Pupils say that

they enjoy their visits into the community.

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met well.

Governance

- Trustees are highly skilled and experienced. They have a very clear understanding of the level of need of pupils. Evaluation procedures are exceedingly thorough, and, as a result, trustees know the strengths and weaknesses of the school precisely. Trustees visit the school regularly to offer ideas and reassurance to the headteacher and leaders. Trustees' minutes show that their monitoring is rigorous and they challenge the headteacher about the effectiveness of the school. The chair of trustees reflected that, 'Nobody is (too) shy to ask a tough question.'
- Trustees are rightly considering how to ensure that the school is sustainable in the future. They strive to ensure that the school provides value for money and that pupils achieve well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and administrators manage safeguarding very effectively. Leaders make sure that all staff are carefully checked for their suitability to work at the school. Administrative records of checks are meticulous. Leaders have published a comprehensive safeguarding policy on the school's website that follows all current government requirements.
- Leaders' robust and clear policies ensure that pupils' welfare is paramount for all staff. Staff understand fully how to make sure that pupils are safe, keeping up to date with the latest advice and guidelines. Staff receive comprehensive training on a broad range of safeguarding issues such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.
- Staff are vigilant about safeguarding matters. Leaders make sure that there is an open culture, where staff discuss any concerns about pupils with their parents. Case studies show that leaders also communicate well and in a timely fashion with other external professionals should there be a safeguarding concern about a pupil.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching staff have consistently high expectations, and are determined that children achieve well. They have highly specialised knowledge, and know in detail how to make sure that pupils with autism spectrum disorder learn effectively. They take account of latest research about autism, continually reviewing and refining teaching strategies.
- Teaching staff know their pupils exceptionally well. They make sure that their first priority is to enable pupils to develop effective communication and learning behaviours. Teaching staff keep the balance between reward and challenge just right and, as a result, pupils make rapid progress in their learning behaviour. Teaching is meeting the needs of pupils very well.

- Teaching staff prepare highly bespoke sessions in which learning tasks are broken down into very small steps. Time is used exceedingly well, so that pupils have very effective learning activities and well-timed rewards.
- Teaching includes very precise assessment strategies, and staff monitor every small step of progress. Adults ask exactly the right questions to explore pupils' understanding. Furthermore, information about pupils' progress is used well to plan future work. Teaching staff give effective feedback, to which pupils respond eagerly and positively. Teaching is adjusted successfully, so that pupils receive work that is not too easy or too hard.
- Pupils are enabled to work very well together, including in close proximity, while undertaking different learning tasks. Pupils are supported successfully to develop practical skills safely, for example when cooking during food technology lessons and when undertaking construction tasks in technology activities.
- Teaching reinforces social skills successfully, including listening, responding and following instructions. Through their well-planned use of communication strategies, such as pictures and symbols, teaching staff encourage pupils to respond positively to any request.
- Teaching of mathematics is highly effective. Pupils are helped to understand number, for example, through real-life scenarios such as paying for items in a shop and receiving change, and through practical activities in the classroom. Teaching staff make sure that concepts of size, shape and time are explored appropriately.
- Teaching staff plan literacy activities appropriate to pupils' ability. Mark-making and writing is celebrated in pupils' work on display in communal areas. Pupils are encouraged to read widely, either on a laptop or using a book. Those pupils that are yet to decipher letters and words access pictorial representations. Pupils do not always practise the literacy skills that they demonstrate in their English sessions across the curriculum.
- Teaching staff support pupils' physical development well, such as when kicking and stopping a ball. Staff go to great lengths to help pupils understand what is required when carrying out a physical activity. Pupils participate eagerly because they are able to listen and respond.
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity effectively. Because they understand pupils' needs so well, they ensure that their disabilities are taken into account appropriately. There are too few pupils eligible for premium funding to consider how teaching meets this group's needs.
- Parents who responded to the online questionnaire say that their children are taught well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' well-being is of the highest priority and pastoral care is exceptional. Pupils' individual welfare needs are very well catered for. Staff organise effective strategies to

support pupils who may need a different level of care, for example where pupils new to the school may need an individual space.

- All staff members share information about pupils to ensure that there is an agreed way of working with pupils. This high degree of consistency supports pupils so that they feel safe. Their parents as well as staff agree that pupils are safe.
- An area to improve from the last inspection was that leaders should ensure that the lunch period is also an opportunity for adults to show pupils how to interact at the meal table. This has been successfully tackled. Adults are superb role models for pupils during break and lunchtimes. Pupils interact socially and get on well. Pupils are happy, and the atmosphere is calm and purposeful.
- Leaders take great care to develop pupils' independent living skills. They carefully balance support for pupils with encouraging them to be more independent. A skilled, impartial careers expert helps pupils to consider their futures well, including by accompanying pupils and their parents to future college placements. Outside speakers, such as police officers, visit to help pupils understand life outside school.
- Pupils are keen to learn, and express high satisfaction when they experience success. Pupils thrive in this positive learning environment. Pupils who were able to express themselves said that they enjoyed coming to school. Others typically had smiles on their faces and happily moved around the building. Pupils are kind to each other.
- Parents comment that their children are well looked after and happy at school.

Behaviour

- The management of pupils' behaviour is outstanding.
- The school's policies focus on the promotion and rewarding of pupils' positive behaviour. Leaders and staff place much emphasis on rewarding success in every small aspect of good behaviour and compliance. As a result, pupils gain confidence and are motivated to behave well.
- Adults manage pupils' occasional extreme behaviours, linked to their SEN and/or disabilities, very effectively. Strategies to manage each pupil are well known by staff, so that consistent and calm action is taken to dissipate incidents. Staff gently provide firm and consistent boundaries, reassuring pupils constantly. Staff monitor and review any triggers to unwanted behaviours very carefully. Resulting adjustments to provision enable the frequency of pupils' behavioural outbursts to decline over time.
- The school uses services such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, so that all pupils' needs are met extremely well. Because of excellent communication and shared knowledge between professionals, pupils make rapid progress in improving speech, language, communication skills and behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance is monitored well and most pupils attend school regularly. The very few pupils with low attendance levels are provided with exceptional support. Levels of attendance for these pupils are rising.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Typically, pupils enter the school at various ages with extreme and complex SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders have noticed a decline in pupils' starting abilities in recent years. Most pupils arrive with very weak communication skills. Many have experienced periods out of education or have failed to thrive in previous placements. When they first arrive, most pupils do not display the skills that will enable them to learn. Leaders rightly focus on initially helping pupils to communicate so they can be taught strategies that encourage learning behaviour. A parent responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire said: 'My child has transformed from a screaming, aggressive child to a polite, calm young person in five years. He is now confident, happy and attempting to talk.'
- Because of successful teaching strategies, pupils across all key stages make rapid progress in speech, language and communication skills. These great gains mean that they understand, and are understood, so levels of frustration and undesirable behaviour reduce and, in some cases, are eradicated. Often for the first time in their lives, pupils develop the skills to make their own choices on a regular basis.
- Staff help those pupils who have developed verbal skills to make strong progress in their understanding of a wide range of words and phrases. Early reading skills are developed well, so that pupils quickly match sounds to letters. The few most-able readers are encouraged to read widely and often, including at home.
- Early writing skills are developed well through mark-making, and pupils begin to develop fine motor control. For some, they practise more advanced writing and make at least good progress in the acquisition of grammar and spelling skills. Leaders agree that pupils' writing skills are not developed across the curriculum as well as they are in English.
- Pupils make good gains in their numeracy skills and learn to manipulate number and understand shape.
- Leaders compare their pupils' progress from their starting points to national progression figures. They also liaise with other similar schools to check teachers' assessment decisions. The majority of pupils make rapid progress.
- Since the last inspection, pupils have left the school with qualifications, including GCSEs, and entry level and vocational qualifications. Pupils' qualifications have covered a range of subjects, including mathematics, English, science, and information and communication technology. Current pupils are making substantial progress appropriate to their ability, including in other pre-vocational educational qualifications.
- Leaders' strong focus on improving pupils' life chances by helping them to understand and communicate with others leaves them very well prepared for the next stage of education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	134605
DfE registration number	886/6108
Inspection number	10008609

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Number in the sixth form	2
Proprietor	The Quest School
Chair	Ian Martin
Headteacher	Anne Martin
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,899 to £47,912
Telephone number	01732 522 700
Website	www.questschool.co.uk
Email address	office@questschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–21 June 2012

Information about this school

- The Quest School is an independent day special school for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder. Most pupils also have complex and severe learning needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans funded by their local authority.
- All pupils currently on roll are boys.
- The school moved its premises in April 2014 to Hop Farm. A material change inspection in May 2014 deemed the premises as suitable.

- The school was founded by a group of parents and applied-behaviour-analysis professionals in 2003.
- The teaching staff consists of teachers and highly qualified supervisors.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and a selection of other teaching and administration staff. The inspector also considered 25 responses from staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. The inspector observed teaching and learning in 10 lessons and also a speech and language session.
- The inspector met with three trustees, including the chair of trustees.
- A meeting was held with a speech and language therapist and a telephone call was held with a headteacher of a local special independent school. The inspector considered four responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire and the school's own stakeholder surveys.
- Inspector carried out scrutiny of pupils' work and photographic records across subjects. The inspector sought a number of pupils' views.
- Inspector looked at a number of documents, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; analysis of the school's performance data; information relating to the attendance and behaviour of pupils; safeguarding and child protection records; and minutes from trustee meetings.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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