

Highfield School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110940
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	378200
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2012
Lead inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Thake
Headteacher	Simon Bainbridge
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2008
School address	Downham Road Ely CB1 6BD
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth

Additional Inspector

Lynda Morgan

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed eleven lessons led by ten teachers and one teaching assistant. Some of these were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, a member of the governing body, staff, and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including: pupils' progress data; safeguarding policies, procedures and records; school improvement plans; records of the quality of teaching and professional development; and a variety of information relating to pupils' behaviour and personal development. Questionnaires returned by 61 parents and carers were analysed, along with those returned by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Highfield School provides for pupils with wide-ranging complex needs. These include moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have additional medical, sensory, communication, physical and behavioural needs. Around one half of all pupils have autistic spectrum condition, and this proportion is increasing. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are twice as many boys as girls, which is typical for a school of this type. A broadly average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a very small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. There are six children in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are taught together with a few pupils in Year 1. Students in Years 12 to 14 are taught in mixed-age groups with pupils in Years 10 and 11. The headteacher has been in post since September 2011.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Highfield is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because not enough teaching is outstanding, and, although good, the achievement of pupils aged 14 to 19 years and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties is less marked than that of many of their peers.
- Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has stimulated a renewed drive towards excellence in all that the school does. This ambition is shared by staff and the governing body, and is appreciated by parents and carers. The school's strengths and weaknesses have been identified in detail and excellent plans have been set to improve them. Many systems and practices have been improved in the past year, with numerous developments planned. Improvements in the quality of provision and achievement are already evident.
- Achievement is good overall. It is outstanding for many, for example, those with autistic spectrum condition and those known to be eligible for free school meals. They, and many other individuals, often achieve levels above the best expected for their age and ability. However, not all pupils achieve this well.
- The sixth form is good and most pupils achieve well. It is not yet outstanding, though, because the mixed-age groups do not give these young adults sufficient autonomy, and there is insufficient choice in accreditation.
- Teaching is good. Rigorous performance management, support and professional development have resulted in there being no inadequate teaching and most teaching being good. However, relatively little teaching is outstanding. This is mainly due to inconsistencies in the use of technology and communication aids to support learning, and some staff's lack of expertise in working with the lowest attaining pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are outstanding. Their personal development,

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behaviour and attitudes to learning are exceptional.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Close the gaps between the achievement of different groups of pupils by:
 - re-structuring the provision and curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 19 to make a clear distinction between Key Stage 4 and the sixth form
 - increasing the breadth of accreditation available to both Key Stage 4 and sixth form pupils
 - reviewing the organisation of provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties
 - developing staff expertise in working with this group of pupils
 - ensuring that there is a suitable curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to run alongside the recently introduced assessment and target-setting programme.

- Increasing the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - improving the consistency of use of technology and communication aids to support teaching and learning
 - using the robust performance management system to identify which elements of teaching by individuals and the whole staff team should be improved.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is good, although their attainment on entry is low and, understandably, remains so when compared with national averages. Excellent systems for tracking and analysing achievement have been introduced since the previous inspection, which is a significant improvement. These show that many individuals and some groups make outstanding progress, for example, those with behavioural and emotional difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions. Pupils also usually achieve particularly well in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 3, and in information and communication technology. The school's records show that almost no pupils achieve less than expected. If they do, or appear to be underachieving, the reasons are thoroughly investigated and additional support provided. Interventions are implemented to improve individuals' progress if necessary, such as an on-line programme to improve some primary pupils' reading skills. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and above, and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties generally make good, rather than outstanding, progress. Work to narrow the gaps between the achievement of different groups of pupils is currently under way.

The very large majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire agree that their children are making good progress. Pupils say that they learn a lot in

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lessons and learning in the classroom is good. It is strongly supported by pupils' excellent behaviour for learning. For example, on one occasion, older pupils showed they were very keen to try mental multiplication, and were confident enough to 'rethink' and try again if they got the answer wrong. Throughout the school, pupils are given good opportunities to develop reading, writing and mathematical skills. Improving literacy in all age groups is a successful whole-school focus. However, lower attaining pupils are not always given enough opportunity to improve their communication and understanding by the consistent use of additional communication systems, such as symbols, pictures and technological aids.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good. Inspection findings confirm the very large majority of pupils', parents' and carers' views. The good teaching, combined with pupils' excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning, supports their progress very effectively. The new headteacher has introduced a robust system of observation and support to complement the well-established systems for performance management. This has resulted in improvements in teaching. The large majority is now good, although only a small amount is outstanding.

Common to all lessons is very good planning which indicates learning objectives for pupils of all abilities, and ties in exactly with curriculum planning. Reading and pre-reading skills are systematically taught and reinforced well during lessons throughout the school. Where teaching is at its best, teachers work seamlessly with support staff so that all contribute to individuals' engagement, learning and calm behaviour at all times. Pupils are given suitable praise and rewards for their success, which boosts their self-esteem. Behaviour is very well managed and staff create many opportunities for pupils to work independently as well as together, which supports their personal development. Staff engender excitement, fun and curiosity by the effective use of good quality resources. There is a strong emphasis on the assessment of pupils' skills and performance by questioning and discussion with higher-attaining pupils. Assiduous note-taking and photographs taken by support staff contribute to individuals' records of progress.

In less effective lessons, the use of technology for teaching and learning is inconsistent, as is the use of additional resources to support individuals' communication and understanding. Staff do not always enable pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to learn at every possible moment; for example, they may position themselves in such a way that pupils' view of an activity is blocked. Occasionally, staff do not challenge individuals sufficiently, or give feedback on how they are doing and could improve, which was noted by pupils themselves in their questionnaire returns.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning, behaviour and conduct around school are excellent. This finding is reflected in the overwhelming majority of questionnaires returned by

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parents and carers, as well as by pupils and staff. Pupils are quiet and responsive in class, and keen to participate and learn. Pupils' respect for each other is outstanding, and many instances of kindness and tolerance were observed. On one occasion, for example, a primary-aged pupil put his hand gently on another's head to keep it still so that he could see the 'well done sticker' that was being given to him.

Where they are able to, pupils say they feel safe and behave safely. They say there is no bullying, and the overwhelming majority of parents and carers agree. There have been no recent exclusions. Dealing with bullying and discrimination are included in the curriculum, and pupils are taught to keep themselves safe from a wide range of risks; from the dangers of the internet to using kitchen equipment. Pupils' behaviour is very well managed, underpinned by rigorous individual behaviour plans. Pupils enjoy the reward systems operated by the school, and, for example, are delighted to add a star or mark against their name on the classroom wall.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. A new and strengthened vision for the school is clear, well articulated and referred to by staff, parents, carers and the governing body. It encompasses a strong drive towards excellence in provision and in pupils' achievement, well-being and life chances. Central to this are the development of a supportive, open, collegiate approach among staff, led by the headteacher. The promotion of equality and discrimination-free practices are given high priority. Leadership capacity is developing in staff at all levels, including support staff, and middle managers are strongly encouraged to take more responsibility for whole-school issues. For example, subject leaders now have more opportunity to support their colleagues, and to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes in their subjects with a view to leading developments in both. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.

Following a detailed analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses in the headteacher's first term, detailed improvement plans were made. They included the introduction of new systems to improve the quality of teaching by more frequent observations, tackling weaknesses directly and strengthening performance management. Specific training on subjects such as letters and sounds has also helped improve the quality of teaching. These developments have already had good effect, although it now remains for the school to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching. The work of the governing body meets statutory requirements. It increasingly holds the school to account for its performance and members are beginning to have a greater presence in school which allows them to monitor its work more effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are very robust and meet all requirements.

The curriculum is satisfactory because, although it meets the needs of pupils in Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage well, there are shortcomings in the provision for older pupils. The organisation of classes and curriculum provision for pupils in the 14 to 19 years age group and for those with profound and multiple

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learning difficulties do not entirely meet these pupils' needs. Nevertheless, the introduction of a new assessment and target-setting system and other measures to support lower-attaining pupils is an improvement since the previous inspection. The supportive ethos of the school, promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Overall, the care and consideration given to pupils are outstanding. All parents and carers who answered the inspection questionnaire agree that the school looks after their children well. Many made very positive additional comments about their children's progress and the support they have received, although a small number said they felt communication could be improved. One parent said, 'because of the consistent encouragement, care and support that Highfield gives us as a family, we are 100% certain that this setting is just perfect for our children, and we are indebted to Highfield for all they have done'. Parents and carers very much appreciate the work and activities, such as fun days, organised by the school's family worker, and the opportunity for their children to attend the well-run after-school club. The school has many links with outside professionals and organisations such as the Lantern Dance Company, therapists and other schools in the Ely Schools' Partnership. These enhance pupils' curriculum experience, well-being and personal development. Highfield also provides support and advice for other schools, and for the parents and carers of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who attend them. The school's track record of improvement, plus the renewed enthusiasm and drive of everyone for excellence, indicates its capacity for continued, sustained improvement.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highfield School, Ely, CB1 6BD

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited your school last week. Thank you also to those of you who completed our questionnaire. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing how extremely well behaved you were in lessons. Of course, this helps you to learn well. We came to school to see how well you were all doing and to make suggestions about how you could learn even better. We found that Highfield is a good school. Your parents and carers agree with our view. These are some of the best things about Highfield.

- The headteacher is leading the school very well and has high, ambitious aims for your progress and personal development, which are shared by the staff and governing body.
- Teaching is good and helps you to learn well and make good progress.
- Some of you make excellent progress.
- Throughout the school, your attitude to work, your behaviour and your personal development are outstanding.
- The school is a warm, safe place, and you and your families are very well looked after and supported.
- The family worker and after-school clubs provide very well for you and your families, including your brothers and sisters.

We have asked the school to improve some aspects of its work, so that more of you make outstanding progress. Here are the most important of them:

- to improve teaching, which is mostly good, so that more of it is excellent
- to reorganise the classes and curriculum for the 14 to 19 year olds, so that there is more distinction between what goes on in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5
- to improve the curriculum, organisation and teaching for those of you with the most complex needs.

You can all help, too, by continuing to work hard, behave well and enjoy yourselves.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth
Lead inspector

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