

Harlow Fields School and College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131838
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	381412
Inspection dates	7–8 February 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	95
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	41
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Brian Surtees
Headteacher	Sue Davies
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth

Additional inspector

Debra McCarthy

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by 12 different teachers. On all of these observations the inspectors were accompanied by the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and the school's improvement consultant. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including that relating to pupils' learning and behaviour, safeguarding, teaching and self-evaluation. They considered the responses to questionnaires from pupils, staff and 30 parents and carers.

Information about the school

Harlow Fields School and College is about average in size for its type. It provides for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils have a range of complex needs including severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. In recent years, the complexity of pupils' needs on entry to the younger age groups has increased. About one quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is broadly average, although fewer of these than typically found speak English as an additional language. A higher than average percentage of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school received a progress monitoring visit two years ago.

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- Harlow Fields School and College is a good school that has improved significantly since its previous inspection. The very large majority of parents and carers agree with this finding. Good leadership and management have improved the provision and pupils' outcomes. They have built up the professional capacity of staff to help sustain the improvements and drive the school forwards. Numerous developments have been successfully instigated to achieve this. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is good because it is now in a position to realise its outward-looking vision and work towards excellence.
- All pupils achieve well. They make outstanding progress in English and communication, and personal development. The sixth form is good and prepares pupils well for their adult lives. Learning and progress are carefully tracked and used to identify where interventions might be needed to improve achievement. Consequently, all pupils have equal opportunities for learning and making progress.
- The quality of teaching has improved and is now good, with some that is outstanding. A very small amount is less effective. Teaching is supported by a well-planned curriculum for all age groups. Common strengths in the best teaching include high expectations of pupils' achievement, independence and thinking skills, many opportunities for personal development, and seamless team work between class staff. In less effective lessons, staff do not share, refer to and review learning targets with pupils sufficiently well. The quality of lesson planning is weaker so that tasks do not always fully match pupils' needs.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety is good. The school has a number of effective systems and practices which support good behaviour and attendance and positive attitudes. Pupils' conduct in school and lessons is good and often excellent. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Behaviour management is good, and challenging behaviour is managed well by intensive support and tailored provision and curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching by:
 - consolidating the practice and improving the effectiveness of sharing, referring to and reviewing learning targets with all groups of pupils
 - improving lesson planning so that the learning intentions of the lesson are always clear and at the centre of all activities
 - ensuring that tasks and activities always meet the needs of all individuals in the group.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agree that their children are making good progress and are developing their skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. These views agree with those of the pupils and with the inspection findings. While pupils' attainment on entry is well below average, and remains so in comparison to age-related expectations, all pupils achieve well.

Pupils join Harlow Fields at any time during their school career, including the sixth form and the Early Years Foundation Stage. They settle quickly, and flourish in the supportive, learning-focused environment. One respondent to the parental questionnaire said: 'All children are happy, safe and learn – sometimes when you think that might be impossible.' Analysis of learning shows that pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress overall. They make outstanding progress in developing English and communication skills, including reading and pre-reading skills which are promoted appropriately in all age groups. Some pupils learn to read and write and use these skills across the curriculum. However, achievement in mathematics is less marked. Pupils' progress in personal development is also outstanding. By the time they leave the sixth form, pupils have gained various national accredited awards at a level suited to their particular ability, interests and needs. These young adults are well prepared for the next step in their lives, socially, emotionally and academically.

Pupils' enjoyment of school and willingness to learn is clearly evident in almost all lessons. For example, a class of three- and four-year-olds with very complex needs smiled mischievously in their music lesson, waiting in clear anticipation for the music to begin so that they could start using their percussion instruments. At the other end of the age range, a group of sixth formers discussed the ending of 'The Boy in Striped Pyjamas'. They were clearly moved by this discussion which very effectively extended their understanding about book and film endings, their speaking, listening and literacy skills, and their spiritual and personal development.

Quality of teaching

The very large majority of parents, carers and pupils who answered the inspection questionnaire confirm the inspection findings that teaching is good. Teaching has improved since the last inspection due to the clear focus on improving staff skills and

pupils' outcomes. Throughout the school, the curriculum is well planned to include specific learning targets which support teaching and learning. In most lessons, curriculum planning is effectively used together with assessment data to plan work and lessons that meet the precise needs of each individual. Staff have high expectations of pupils' achievement, and provide tasks that offer the right amount of challenge and interest. This contributes well to pupils' learning and progress. In the small number of weaker lessons, this is not the case.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted by teaching. For example, higher attaining pupils are encouraged to discuss issues such as persecution and to be considerate of others less fortunate than themselves. Teaching generally encourages all pupils to be as independent as possible in their learning, while also ensuring that they have plenty of opportunity for developing their social and communication skills. For example, a group of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder worked quietly and happily together round a table, each working on creating mathematical patterns at a level to suit their particular ability. At appropriate times, they independently chose a reward activity, or took themselves to the 'time away' area for a few minutes' break before resuming work.

When required, most support staff work very effectively with pupils and ensure they achieve the lesson's learning objectives. Staff tell pupils when they meet their personal learning targets, which are cross-curricular and apply to all lessons and situations. However, staff have made less progress in explicitly sharing, referring to and reviewing learning targets with all groups of pupils. Additionally, the quality of lesson planning is variable. While generally good, lesson planning is sometimes too woolly or brief to make the purpose of the lesson clear. Teaching in these lessons tends to be less effective.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are kind to one another, polite to staff and visitors, and respect their school environment. They are tolerant and supportive, for example waiting patiently in the lunch queue and praising one another spontaneously for 'good reading!' Pupils conduct themselves sensibly around the school, stopping to talk to adults and each other in a friendly way. Parents, carers and pupils say that they generally feel safe in school and that there is no bullying. Nevertheless, staff maintain a constant focus on this, for example, through 'friendship week'. They ensure that pupils understand the difference between bullying and a disagreement, and heighten pupils' awareness of all types of bullying, including cyber bullying. The school encourages pupils to take responsibility for their actions and to be aware of risks in all that they do. Consequently, pupils increasingly assess and manage potential risks, such as using a knife in food technology or crossing the road, and keep themselves safe to the best of their ability.

Pupils respond very well to the school's reward system. They take great pride in receiving awards and certificates in assemblies and asked for their efforts to be commended in shields and medals to take home. Pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons are usually exemplary. They listen carefully to staff, work well in small groups when they are able to, and take part in practical activities with enthusiasm.

Questionnaire responses from a few parents and a small minority of pupils and staff indicate that the behaviour of some pupils is of concern to them. The inspection found that such instances are almost always due to a few individuals' very complex, challenging behaviour. Through intensive personalised support, the school does all it can to minimise the disruption to others, keep these pupils in school rather than exclude them, and help them to overcome their difficulties. Guidance for staff is clear and well implemented, and records of incidents are carefully recorded. In general, pupils who join the school with a history of challenging behaviour calm quickly as their needs are met. Detailed individual behaviour management plans outline pupils' particular difficulties and the strategies for supporting and improving them. Records show that behavioural difficulties usually diminish over time.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders and managers, including the Governing Body, have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, they have been focused on improving the provision and pupils' outcomes by setting higher expectations for staff and pupils' performance. This has been successful and, as described by the Chair of the Governing Body, the school is 'moving from survival to striving for excellence'. Policies and their implementation are regularly reviewed and adjusted if necessary to securely underpin practice. Safeguarding arrangements are increasingly robust and meet current government requirements. The school is now beginning to implement the second stage of its ambitious vision which includes extending its provision and support to a wider group of pupils and adults. The use of performance data to identify potential differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils, or unexpected variations in individuals' progress, has improved significantly. Senior leaders act on this information to instigate interventions such as referrals to in-school therapists or external professionals, individual tuition for pupils in danger of underachieving, and the forthcoming curriculum developments for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This promotes equality of opportunity for all pupils and ensures that none are discriminated against because of their particular circumstances.

Considerable work has gone into developing the skills of the staff. This has been achieved by rigorous performance management together with mentoring and coaching, and by providing and supporting wide-ranging training for the whole staff and for individuals. Responsibility for some aspects of the school's provision, such as assessment and communication, has been delegated to middle managers and some teaching assistants. The role of the subject leaders, which was found to be a weakness in the last inspection, has improved. Subject leaders are now responsible for the standards and provision in their subjects, and are clear about how they would like to develop their roles further. Staff at all levels are now contributing to the school's leadership and management and to its good capacity to improve further.

The curriculum is well established and provides a range of appropriate activities which are designed to meet the needs and interests of all age and ability groups, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school constantly seeks to implement strategies and initiatives to improve achievement, such as a new phonics approach to the teaching of reading for higher ability pupils. The sixth form curriculum now includes a wider range of accredited courses since the time of the

previous inspection, to take account of pupils' differing needs and interests. The use of community links and partnerships for curriculum enrichment and to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good throughout the school.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	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 2010 to 31 August 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.
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.



9 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Harlow Fields School and College, Harlow, CM18 6RN

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn in lessons. We came to school to see how well you were all doing and how happy you were. We found that Harlow Fields is a good school and has many strengths. Some of the best aspects are:

- your good behaviour
- your enthusiasm for school and your very positive attitudes to learning
- the good progress you make overall, and the particularly good progress you make in English, communication and personal development
- the way that staff plan lessons to help you meet your personal targets as well as learn in subjects
- the way that all the staff want to provide you with the very best education and care that they can
- the sixth form, which prepares you so well for your adult lives
- the staff's commitment to improving the school, and to helping your parents and carers and others in the community.

We have asked the school to do three things to become even better. These are:

- to help you all understand the learning targets in lessons, and whether you have achieved them
- to make sure that lessons are always focused on helping you learn
- to make sure that all the activities you take part in are never too easy or too difficult for you.

You can all help, too, by continuing to behave well and try hard.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth
Lead inspector

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