

Weatherfield School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137896
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	395845
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2012
Lead inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqui Hunt
Headteacher	Joe Selmes
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2009
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Age group	7–16
Inspection date(s)	1–2 March 2012
Inspection number	377974



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Introduction

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb

Additional inspector

Justina Ilochi

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed eight teachers teaching 10 lessons and a teaching assistant supporting a group of Key Stage 2 pupils with their reading. Five were joint observations with the headteacher. The lead inspector also carried out short observations across a range of subjects to look at levels of engagement and behaviour. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and spoke with many more pupils in lessons and on the school's farm. Meetings were held with eight representatives from the governing body, and with school staff, including middle and senior managers. The inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at a number of documents, including progress and exclusion data, the school improvement plan, safeguarding and equalities policies, governing body minutes and the school improvement partner reports. They attended an assembly, which launched the school as a new academy. There were no responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) available to help plan the inspection. Inspectors took account of 37 questionnaires returned by parents and carers during the inspection, as well as questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This special school was launched as an academy during the inspection. It is a small academy, but numbers have increased since the last inspection. The headteacher has been in post for 10 months. The nature and complexity of pupils' needs has increased since the last inspection. Weatherfield School provides an education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, multi-sensory impairment, autistic spectrum disorder, speech language and communication difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A few pupils have additional complex medical needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals. Most pupils are White British. Very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none are at an early stage of learning to speak English. There are a few Traveller and looked after pupils.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory academy. The academy is not good mainly because target-setting is insufficiently challenging. This is the main reason why few pupils make better than expected progress. Improvements to the curriculum and the range of accreditation opportunities have enabled more students than in the past to gain higher qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Pupils’ achievement is satisfactory. Within the core subjects, pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics and science. They also make satisfactory progress in reading and writing, although the rate of progress tends to lag behind that in mathematics.
- Teaching is satisfactory. There are pockets of strong teaching in some vocational subjects at Key Stage 4. In these subjects students make rapid gains in work-related skills. However, inconsistencies in the teaching of reading in particular slow the rate of pupils’ progress. In a few lessons observed, the planned activities did not enable all pupils to achieve their targets in reading, writing and mathematics. In the more successful lessons, teachers use assessments to plan activities to meet pupils’ needs.
- Behaviour is improving and is satisfactory. Fixed-term exclusions are falling. Parents and carers who returned questionnaires and pupils state the academy deals with bullying incidents effectively. Engagement with learning, though, is inconsistent across the school. Some English lessons lack challenge. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about how to assess risks and adopt safe practices in work-related environments.
- School leaders and the governing body have improved pupils’ attendance, raised attainment for Key Stage 4 students and improved teaching overall. Focused monitoring of teaching and targeted professional development have contributed to most teachers better matching activities to meet pupils’ needs, but some inconsistency still remains. The management of performance has become more rigorous, especially in the effectiveness of monitoring.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring

visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress relative to pupils' starting points, particularly in English, by ensuring that
 - accurate assessment on entry to the academy and again at the end of Key Stage 2 is used to set challenging targets in reading and writing
 - teachers use these targets to plan specific learning outcomes for pupils so as to raise their achievement in reading and writing
 - the senior leadership team and the governing body rigorously monitor pupils' progress over time so as to trigger immediate interventions to raise achievement where it is most needed.

- Improve teaching by making sure that:
 - planned activities in lessons are challenging and matched to pupils' needs and that expectations for learning are always clear for all pupils, specifically when moving from whole-class activity to group work
 - teachers model good writing at every opportunity so that pupils have clear examples against which to measure their success in writing.

- Equip all teachers and teaching assistants with the skills required to raise pupils' achievement in reading and ensure that the academy's strategy for teaching the sounds that letters make (phonics) is delivered with rigour across the academy.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' progress is satisfactory relative to their low starting points. Students' learning accelerates through Key Stage 4 because of the rigour of their accredited vocational courses. All Year 11 pupils who left last year successfully secured a college placement or apprenticeship. Attainment in a suitable range of nationally accredited courses, although below the national average by the end of Year 11, reflecting students' complex special educational needs, was significantly better in the summer of 2011 than the previous summer. More students are gaining higher-level qualifications by the end of Year 11 than in the past. Accreditation is well matched to needs and enables students to gain relevant job-related life skills.

Pupils make satisfactory progress during lessons. They are usually attentive and mostly have a positive attitude towards their work, but the level of challenge from staff is not always high enough. Pupils make better progress in lessons where teachers plan a range of different activities, based on their assessments of what pupils need to learn, so as to plug the important gaps pupils have in their knowledge and skills. In such lessons all pupils are engaged in learning and make important small stepped gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils with multi-sensory impairment and those with severe learning difficulties made good gains in understanding the concept because activities

were tailored to meet their specific needs. There is no significant difference in the progress made by pupils with different special educational needs. There is commitment to equal opportunity for all groups of pupils. Most parents and carers believe that their child achieves well at school. However, pupils' progress targets are not always set at a high enough level of challenge and this is the main reason why progress is more often satisfactory than good. Work in books shows satisfactory progress.

Progress is satisfactory in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. However, progress is slower in English than in other subjects. Most pupils make expected progress in reading and writing, relative to their low starting points, but few are doing better than this. Not all teaching assistants or teachers are sufficiently secure in their knowledge of teaching letter and word sounds to support pupils in making the progress required in their reading. In the best lessons, quality reading support from teaching assistants enables pupils to deepen their comprehension of the text, but this is inconsistent. On a few occasions, even where pupils have clear reading targets, the quality of support is variable in developing pupils' reading skills. Teachers gather ideas from pupils in English lessons, but do not then consistently use their ideas to model quality sentences for the pupils to refer back to in order to help pupils improve their writing.

Quality of teaching

In all lessons relationships are good and staff treat pupils with respect. Dignity and a commitment to equality of opportunity pervade lessons. Consequently, pupils are confident to ask questions, which deepen their learning. Most parents and carers believe that their child is taught well and, while this is the case in some lessons, it is not consistently so in all lessons. In the most successful lessons pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn and well-structured activities are planned to build on their prior understanding in the subject. On these occasions teaching is brisk, pupils' understanding is checked as the lesson moves along and all groups of pupils make good progress.

In some satisfactory lessons teaching is too adult-led and lacks sufficient challenge. In these lessons pupils are too passive or are not given enough time to contribute. Teachers make insufficient use of pupils' literacy and numeracy targets to plan specific learning outcomes to move them on in their learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson focusing on developing pupils' measuring skills, opportunities were missed to use targets for pupils with severe learning difficulties such as to grasp 'more than' and 'less than'. In an English lesson the teacher taught the whole class about how adjectives make a piece of writing interesting. Without having their understanding checked, they were then asked to identify adjectives in a poem. They struggled because they were not clear about what was expected of them.

Teaching of reading is inconsistent throughout the school. Many pupils think teaching is variable, particularly in their English lessons. They enjoy their vocational curriculum delivered through practical lessons, such as those on the school's farm. In an outstanding lesson on the farm students gained valuable work-related skills and made rapid gains in their understanding of the differences between male and female flowers. The beauty of the environment caused students to stop, stare and reflect so raising their spiritual awareness. Their social development was then significantly

enhanced as they carried out their responsibilities working in teams. Some were cleaning out the pig-sty and others putting manure in their dug-out trenches before planting vegetable seeds.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Engagement with learning is currently better in Years 10 and 11 when compared with previous years. Students in these year groups see the relevance of the recently increased range of accreditation opportunities linked to their vocational subjects. They know that by working hard they will gain qualifications which enable them to secure a place at college or start an apprenticeship. Overall, engagement with learning through the academy is satisfactory, but inconsistencies remain. Good learning behaviour occurs in lessons where activities are well-matched to pupils' needs, but where pupils are not fully secure about what is expected of them they do not engage sufficiently with learning.

Disputes between students which start outside of the academy occasionally spill over into the playground. Fights sometimes break-out, but they are quickly stopped by staff. Incidents of bullying linked to a break-up of girl-boy friendships occur. As soon as such instances of bullying are known to staff they are effectively tackled through programs of counselling and anger management. Pupils who experience cyber-bullying outside of the academy are well supported. There have been no incidents of racist bullying for two years. The few Traveller pupils say that they feel safe reflecting the academy's success in raising pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and commitment to equality for all pupils. There is no tolerance of any kind of discrimination. The number of short-term exclusions is lower this year compared to last. Pupils with challenging behaviours linked to their emotional needs are well supported and most have fewer outbursts of anger as a result. Instances of physical aggression and verbal abuse are declining. The majority of pupils are polite and courteous.

Overall, pupils feel safe. Overwhelmingly, parents and carers consider that their children are safe at the academy. Most also say that pupils behave well. Within the academy pupils have an adult in whom they trust. Students know how to keep safe when working on the school farm. For example, they understand the importance of carrying sharp tools safely. Students have a clear understanding of the risks associated with getting involved in gangs. They know that they must not chat with strangers when using a computer. An increasing number of students travel to the academy independently, having been equipped with important skills on how to keep themselves safe during their journey.

Attendance is average compared with all schools nationally and has improved year-on-year over the past three years. This partially reflects an improved Key Stage 4 curriculum, but also the successful implementation of robust procedures to tackle poor attendance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and governing body have successfully gained the support of parents and carers in moving the school to academy status. Throughout this time they have continued to make improvements. Attendance and pupil attainment at Key Stage 4 have improved. Monitoring of teaching has resulted in targeted professional

development where it is most needed. This has led to most teachers planning more activities in lessons to better meet the needs of the pupils, but inconsistency in practice remains. Analysis of progress in reading resulted in decisive action for improvement, but its full impact is not yet evident. A reading scheme launched in the primary department has contributed to pupils taking more books home, but not all staff are sufficiently confident in teaching phonics to ensure that all pupils get the support they need to make good progress in their reading.

The academy has introduced a system to track pupils' progress since the last inspection, but target setting is insufficiently challenging. At times assessments in reading and writing vary in their accuracy. However, given the overall improvements achieved since the headteacher has been in post the academy has sufficient capacity for further improvement.

Innovative changes to the curriculum in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 have better engaged pupils with learning and improved examination results in Year 11. Students are equipped for the world of work. However, the impact of the curriculum program for reading is inconsistent. Communication with parents and carers is good. A group meets regularly at the academy to give each other support. The curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual development as they wander in the sensory garden and gaze at the new birth of animals on the farm. They have responsible jobs linked to maintaining the academy's grounds and their cultural diversity is promoted well. Through the programmes of life skills and religious education pupils learn about people from different cultural backgrounds from themselves. They learn to respect people of different faiths from themselves and are challenged to reject any form of racial prejudice or discrimination. Pupils have a good understanding that any form of discrimination based on disability is wrong.

Management systems and procedures to ensure pupils are safe are robust. Child protection and safe staff recruitment procedures meet requirements.

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.



5 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Weatherfield School, Dunstable, LU6 1AF

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleague to your academy. We came on the first day of your school becoming a new academy. We enjoyed celebrating your new beginning as an academy. Weatherfield is a satisfactory academy and this means that another inspector may visit to see if improvements are being made.

- By Year 11 all of you are equipped jobs or college. You make satisfactory progress, but your rate of progress is slower in reading and writing than in mathematics and science.
- Your attendance is improving, particularly those of you in Key Stage 4. You told us that some of your lessons, particularly in English, do not sufficiently engage you in learning. Incidents of bullying are on the decline and you feel safe at school. You know the dangers of chatting to strangers over the computer and that involvement in a gang would lead you into trouble.
- You explained that you thought some lessons were better than others and we found that to be the case. Teaching is usually satisfactory and sometimes good. We have asked your teachers to give you more interesting activities which help meet your learning needs.
- We have asked your teachers to better help you improve your reading and writing. We want them to set you more challenging targets for you to work towards to help you improve your reading skills and to write with increased confidence and accuracy.
- The headteacher, staff and governors have worked successfully to make improvements at the school and we have asked that they speed up actions to improve English and the quality of teaching throughout the academy. We have asked them to speed up the progress you make.

Please help your academy to improve by attending regularly, behaving well and aspiring to always meet your academy motto, 'to do your best at all times'.

Yours sincerely

Jeffery Plumb
Lead inspector

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