

Kingsdown School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115442
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	357749
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts

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	3–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Davies
Headteacher	Margaret Rimmer
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Fifteen lessons were observed, involving 12 different teachers. Meetings were held with senior members of staff, representatives of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised many documents including the school's improvement plan, curriculum and lesson plans, records of pupils' standards and their work, 30 responses to the questionnaires from parents and carers, 20 from pupils and 26 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Has the school made sufficient progress since the previous inspection to justify its self-evaluation of a good capacity to improve further?
- Do teachers assess their pupils' progress and use the information to plan future lessons with appropriate activities for all groups of pupils in the school, ensuring that they are all making at least satisfactory progress?
- Have school leaders used the data about the progress made by groups of pupils to see why there might be differences, what interventions to put into place and how effective those interventions have been?

Information about the school

Kingsdown School is a smaller than the average sized special school. It originally admitted pupils aged 3 to 17 years who had physical difficulties and visual disabilities, but it changed its designation in September 2007. Several stages of new building have been undertaken since then and building work continues. Pupils with special educational needs of a physical nature only are no longer admitted, nor are pupils in Key Stage 4 or the sixth form. It now admits pupils with severe learning difficulties and has an increasing number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils also have visual impairments; others exhibit challenging behaviour and a small number have complex needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils are White British, with fewer than average being from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few who do not have English as their first language. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. A very small number of pupils are looked after by their local authority. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools award and five stars in the Food Hygiene award.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. In lessons, pupils learn well and develop good skills in communication, mobility, personal and social areas and in academic subjects such as English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. They behave well and are happy and friendly together. They learn how to look after themselves as much as possible. They have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy life and they say they feel safe in school. In the long term, pupils throughout the school make good progress and achieve well, whatever their particular learning needs may be.

School leaders accurately evaluated the school's needs following the major changes to the age and range of special needs of pupils who were to be admitted. They effectively managed the complex series of building changes and re-fitting of much of the premises. Members of the governing body are well organised, supportive and involved in many of the changes to the buildings, staffing and financial aspects of the school. They have not, however, been systematically effective in challenging proposals or monitoring pupils' progress. Leaders' correct evaluation of strengths and needs for staff development resulted in appropriate opportunities for staff training. Within each class, individual teachers now successfully evaluate the progress of the pupils in a variety of effective ways, and adapt future activities to meet the different learning needs of all groups of pupils in their own class.

The school has recently created a computer-based system to store information about pupils' progress. It uses this information to understand which school-wide changes to teaching and the curriculum have been most effective already. It is beginning to use the analyses to sharpen future planning and to set effective and realistic targets for groups of pupils, such as wheelchair users or those who have difficulty seeing. It is evident that the determination and teamwork among the staff have enabled the school to rise above the challenges of the recent changes and demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

The curriculum's outstanding strength lies in its flexibility in being accessible to all pupils regardless of their age or learning needs. The many and varied programmes for improving pupils' communications skills are particularly well developed and are used by staff in all classes. A huge range of additional activities is available to all pupils to take part in many events such as 'sleep-overs' in school if they cannot manage the out-of-school residential visits, or wheelchair dancing if pupils are not fully mobile. Similarly, support and welfare systems are outstanding, with all requirements fully met. Excellent support from many in-school personnel and outside agencies ensures that all pupils have the learning and care support they need. There is very close work with families, especially those in difficult circumstances and for pupils who are looked after by the local authority.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen future planning by:
 - building on the work already started to make greater use of the new computer-based analyses of the progress made by different groups of pupils
 - ensuring that the governing body challenges school leaders more effectively to explain and justify what is reported to them and what is proposed for the future.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their lessons and the extra activities that they take part in. They make good progress and achieve well because staff organise activities for them on a very individual basis, with staff support, activities and topics to motivate them well. Pupils with the most extreme or complex needs, for instance, learn to recognise different classmates, or touch a 'yes/no' switch, enabling them to make choices. Pupils with visual difficulties might learn Braille or use keyboards with very large letters and numbers to express their wishes and read information. Those with physical disabilities learn to stand or sit upright and move around school with various aids. Some learn to control simple or more complex switches that operate keyboards to 'talk' with recorded messages, perhaps to spell out exact wishes, or to access screens of information such as internet pages. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who do not have English as their first language, and those who are in the care of the local authority, make progress that is equal to that of their classmates. In many lessons, pupils learn a combination of subjects at the same time, such as in one lesson in which they were singing and counting, taking turns and being sociable, and choosing songs and pictures from an electronic teaching screen. An outstanding history lesson saw pupils gaining a basic understanding of time and how things have changed. They wore clothes and experienced sights and sounds from Victorian times, had lots of opportunities to socialise together, express their thoughts and practise their speaking and signing skills. Pupils develop their communication skills in all lessons through purposefully organised activities that encourage pupils to use cards with letters, names or pictures, to use signing, to speak single words or sentences, to use keyboards or write with pen and paper. They make a good contribution to the community through their involvement on the school council, support for 'Southend in Bloom', fund-raising and sharing facilities with other schools. Pupils' attendance is average, but it is improving dramatically as the school does more to motivate pupils and to encourage them not to stay at home.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are generally confident and enthusiastic and run their lessons at a good pace while still giving pupils time to answer or have their turn. They assess how well their pupils are progressing and make regular notes and summarise them periodically. They then plan their lessons well so that each individual is challenged to do their best. This might be in the type of questions they ask of pupils, the kind of support they give them or the way the whole activity is organised. Teachers and support assistants are capable and know how to support and teach all their pupils. Lessons are often practical, exciting and lively, such as the music lessons, or they may, equally valuably, be calm and purposeful, such as in the hydrotherapy pool or when the older pupils are learning to create newspaper pages.

The curriculum is extremely well adapted for each individual pupil. Pupils' access to all subjects is optimised; their opportunities to communicate are extremely varied and successful. Therapists come in to assist with speech, language, physical and practical skills. Many people from outside the school are involved in providing variety and support, such as care personnel, police and many other local schools. The range of out-of-school activities is tremendous, including, for instance, sailing, karaoke, cookery and art. Innumerable visits are undertaken to enhance pupils' learning, including to Holland for

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European wheelchair dancing championships, in which the school has won medals, including gold. The high level of motivation that the curriculum inspires is seen in the rapidly rising rate of attendance.

Pupils' feelings of safety and security are well justified by the very strong procedures that ensure that the school is a healthy and safe environment. There is an outstanding level and range of support for individual pupils' welfare from numerous agencies and school staff members. Vulnerable pupils are very well monitored and supported. Staff have extremely good knowledge of their responsibilities and what the correct procedures are. The home-school diaries are used well and parents are involved in school matters whenever possible. Advice and guidance are actively made available at all times. Therapists and specialist staff provide staff training as well as working with pupils and providing advice.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff share a common purpose and vision of how they wish to see the school develop. The headteacher's enthusiasm, drive and sense of purpose combine well with the skills of the relatively new team of senior staff. They work together with increasing effectiveness as they develop their skills and areas of responsibility. Members of the governing body are dedicated and knowledgeable and fulfil their role satisfactorily. They have undertaken appropriate training and some are becoming increasingly involved in the school, although they do not yet challenge school leaders sufficiently.

Leaders' accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses has led to a strong staffing force. Teachers are well able to plan the curriculum and teach all pupils within the new range of special educational needs. Decisive leadership ensures that all pupils have good access to all aspects of the curriculum regardless of the severity of their needs, age or background and that there is no discrimination. Pupils' achievement has risen well as a result. The quality of the welfare and care system has strengthened enormously and pupils are well safeguarded because of the very effective staff training and high level of well-integrated awareness of safety and security matters throughout the school.

Leaders have built up an impressive circle of supportive partners who come in regularly or on special occasions. These might be, for example, for training in signing, first aid or communications systems, using the hydrotherapy pool, hosting a conference and holiday clubs and sharing lessons with pupils from other schools. The school provides occasional outreach to local mainstream schools to provide help and support for pupils with

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communication difficulties. The headteacher is a leading figure in several local educational initiatives.

Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. There are many opportunities for pupils to be part of the community, share facilities with other schools and services and raise money for charities. Leaders have begun to develop and promote a wider role in the community beyond the local area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's good progress is seen most evidently in their early learning of social and communication skills. Many arrive with very low levels of skill but quickly settle and begin to recognise each other and staff, know the basic routines, enjoy the snacks and drinks and take part in the imaginative range of stimulating activities that is planned for them. Although some children are only able to experience some activities with staff help, they can enjoy different tastes and smells, for example, choose an activity by pointing with their eyes and begin to operate simple switches that perhaps play a song or a greeting.

The staff team is relatively new, but members are experienced in teaching children of this age and with these learning difficulties. Under the good leadership of a member of the school leadership team, they work together with dedication and enthusiasm. Staff have very positive relationships with their children and make their lessons challenging as well as enjoyable and stimulating, so that children's learning is supported well. They plan their lessons carefully to ensure that pupils have a full range of experiences, including outdoors, in the hall and in the hydrotherapy pool. They join in with older pupils, for example, for singing together. The curriculum is being altered so that it fits closely with the programme of activities that pupils in Key Stage 1 enjoy. Relationships with parents are extremely positive and contact is very regular.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The great majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the whole ethos of the school. Virtually all of the comments praised what was being done for the pupils. 'This is a wonderful happy school,' wrote one, while another said her son, 'absolutely loves it here'. A few parents thought that some types of support from outside the school could be more regular, but this is beyond the control of the school. A very small number of parents thought that staff were not always consistent in the way they managed pupils' behaviour. The inspection team saw very consistent behaviour management, with the only differences being in the management of pupils who could choose to behave well or otherwise, and those whose apparently poor behaviour resulted from their special needs.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Kingsdown School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 82 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	83	5	17	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	80	6	20	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	70	9	30	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	60	11	37	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	80	6	20	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	67	9	30	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	70	8	27	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	14	47	10	33	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	67	6	20	2	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	47	12	40	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	57	9	30	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	63	11	37	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	77	7	23	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



11 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Kingsdown School, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6XT

I expect that many of you will remember when the inspectors visited your school recently. Thank you for talking with us and being so friendly, polite and helpful. Thank you also for telling us what you think and showing us what you do in class.

We found that you go to a good school. There are a lot of excellent things going on. You make good progress in your lessons, especially in learning how to communicate in different ways, getting on with each other and with the adults around you, and in learning all the different subjects that you have such as the hydrotherapy, drama and computer lessons. You also have many very good extra things to do and places to go and have many fine clubs like gardening, story and playing the game of boccia. Your teachers plan really good activities that you find interesting. They are often fun and exciting. You told us that you feel safe in school, and many of you told us about all the different ways in which you can stay fit and healthy.

This is a new school for many of you and there are still changes going on with the building and the way teachers plan things for you. The people in charge of the school are doing a good job in seeing that things are done really well for you, so you will carry on learning well and enjoying what you do.

There is one thing we think will help the school's leaders to manage the school even better.

Make future planning even sharper by checking more carefully how well different groups of you are learning, and by asking governors to do a little more by making sure that school leaders have really thought about why they want to change some things.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Watts

Lead inspector

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