

# Ifield School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119040
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	358484
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Kell

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	184
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	28
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Jacqui Mander
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Pam Jones
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18–19 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Cedar Avenue Gravesend Kent DA12 5JT
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<b>Age group</b>	4–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	8–9 June 2011
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors spent in excess of nine hours observing 22 lessons, which involved 18 different teachers. They also observed five reading sessions, a number of the sporting activities that took place on the physical education enrichment afternoon, and school clubs. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, governors, teaching assistants, school leaders and members of the extended leadership team. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, such as assessment data, development planning and safeguarding policies and procedures. The 76 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed, as were those completed by staff and pupils.

## Information about the school

Ifield is a much larger than average special school that is designated to admit pupils with severe, profound and complex needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, almost three quarters for autism or severe learning difficulties. Approximately three quarters of pupils are boys. A quarter of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, and a few are looked after children. About three quarters of pupils have a White British heritage; the other pupils span a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. One in 10 pupils speaks English as an additional language. All post-16 students are based at North West Kent College, taught by Ifield staff.

The school runs the SMILE centre (Supporting Multi-Professional Inclusive Learning and Education), providing outreach support, staff training and specialist resources for 38 schools in the Gravesham area. It also owns and manages the school woodland, for which it has received a National Forestry Commission award. This six acre site provides an outdoor classroom for many learning activities. Since the previous inspection, Ifield has had its specialist school status for communication and interaction reaffirmed, and it has acquired an International School Award from the British Council.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Achievement</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety</b>	<b>1</b>
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

## Key findings

- Ifield is an outstanding school. It is ambitious and outward looking, constantly seeking out innovative practices and additional opportunities to improve the quality and depth of education that it offers.
- Very reflective, perceptive and highly skilled leaders provide a clear sense of purpose and direction. Staff and the governing body provide a closely unified team approach to school improvement.
- Teaching is good overall. In general, lessons are exceptionally well planned and focused on individuals' learning needs, although on a few occasions, pupils work as a whole class for too long. Questioning is good but occasionally teachers do not wait long enough for answers.
- Pupils' achievements are outstanding. The good progress that they make in lessons is supplemented exceptionally well by the very high quality learning that takes place throughout the whole school day and beyond. Excellent use is made of the spacious and inspiring accommodation to enrich pupils' learning and personal development.
- The school takes exceptional care of its pupils. Very secure safeguarding arrangements support their safety and well-being.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They mature into respectful, courteous, confident and rounded young people. They are outstanding ambassadors for the school.
- Outstanding partnerships have been forged with schools and other agencies. The school makes excellent use of its specialist status and the SMILE centre to support the learning of Ifield pupils and those in local and partner schools.
- Excellent links with parents and carers encourage them to be fully involved in supporting their children's education.
- The relentless pursuit of removing barriers to learning ensures that all pupils have the same opportunity to benefit from what the school offers. Learning and personal development are promoted exceptionally well because support and

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guidance are finely tuned to every pupil's needs, learning style and communication requirements.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers accelerate learning in lessons by:
  - being more selective about the number of occasions on which they engage pupils in whole-class work
  - routinely allowing enough thinking time for pupils to respond to questions.

## Main report

Ifield School is a happy, vibrant and close-knit community with a highly unified sense of purpose and direction. Pupils love going to school. Attendance is high. A very effective and astute governing body shares school leaders' ideals and aspirations, and it appreciates the actions that are needed to fulfil these ambitions. The vast majority of parents and carers confirm that their children are happy and that they achieve as well as they can. The school prides itself on knowing all the pupils and their family, something acknowledged by the carer who commented, 'His special needs are well understood, but also his looked after child's needs are taken into account and understood.'

Since the previous inspection, the school has lived up to the judgement that it had an excellent capacity for improvement. Outstanding leadership and management have maximised the benefits afforded by the excellent new accommodation and the specialist school funding. All areas of the school, both internally and outside, are stimulating and motivating. They provoke pupils' imagination and inquisitiveness. Internal spaces are bright and attractive. Displays are a mixture of beautifully presented pupils' work and informative posters. Externally, an excellent combination of spacious grounds, fixed apparatus and a variety of other equipment provide very many opportunities for imaginative play, team games or simply social interactions in quiet areas. Very many clubs, both physically active ones and others such as photography and cooking, enable pupils to follow their interests or pursue new ones. Their appeal is evident in the very high take-up rate. Staff are always on hand to help pupils to access these additional learning opportunities that surround them, and to support their personal development. As a result, a vast amount of supplementary learning and personal development takes place throughout the school day and beyond. Coupled with the good teaching, it results in excellent achievement.

Ifieldlife typifies how leaders have creatively targeted funding on improvement of the premises to provide outstanding facilities for accelerating learning beyond the classroom. This new four bedroom house on the school grounds enables pupils of all ages to practise life skills in a meaningful context. Furthermore, students in Years 10 to 13 are offered supported overnight stays there. These provide invaluable opportunities to learn about community living and appreciating the needs of others.

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The nature and severity of pupils' learning difficulties mean that they enter the school with low attainment. Children get off to a good start when they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage. During their time in Reception, they make good progress in all areas of learning as they develop pre-writing and reading skills, and make significant gains in playing and working alongside others. The pace of learning is maintained as pupils move through the school and in the post-16 provision. By the end of Years 6 and 11, though attainment remains below average compared to all pupils nationally, the gap is reducing. Pupils have acquired new skills and knowledge at such a rate that they are working at a standard that places them in a very favourable position compared with the performance of pupils with similar starting points nationally. Additional, planned reading sessions on four days each week for all pupils in Years 5 to 9 has paid a rich dividend in raising pupils' reading and other literacy skills. These, along with numeracy and information and communication technology skills, are also promoted by all subjects. Consequently, older pupils and post-16 students are successful in a variety of recognised subjects and courses, especially accreditation in functional skills.

Overall, in the lessons observed, teaching was good. In a minority of lessons, it was outstanding. Pupils of all abilities are engaged and challenged, and they respond with enthusiasm in lessons because meticulous lesson planning makes very good use of information on their attainment and previous learning. Group activities are very closely matched to what pupils can do and what they need to do next to consolidate or extend their learning. Pupils work independently insofar as they are able because interventions are well timed: very well-briefed teaching assistants know when to prompt, question or support in other ways. The communication needs of all students are met very effectively. Some question-and-answer sessions are conducted exceptionally well as teachers skilfully use a mixture of types of question to target individuals. In a minority of cases, however, learning slows because staff do not allow sufficient time for pupils to answer, or do not reword the question sufficiently differently to elicit a response. This is most apparent when pupils with a wide range of attainment levels come together for introductory or plenary sessions. While this has occasional value in giving those pupils with lower attainment an opportunity to learn from their classmates, on the whole it does not represent the most efficient use of time. It is when these pupils are doing intensive group work that their learning really flourishes.

The innovative and carefully considered curriculum is a very important contributory factor in pupils' outstanding achievement. It is very well matched to pupils' needs by being tailored to meet the interests of different age groups. Personal, social and health education features highly. A comprehensive programme contributes greatly to pupils' ability to recognise and then to respond appropriately to potentially unsafe situations. The curriculum makes a powerful contribution to promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They make excellent progress in these aspects of personal growth. Their developing maturity is evident in their excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to school. They are supportive and caring of each other, celebrating their classmates' achievements. Relationships are excellent throughout the school. Pupils have extensive opportunities to broaden their

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horizons through a growing understanding of their own and others' cultures. An exchange programme with a French school enables pupils to spend time there, and a funded ski trip allows them to benefit from this experience. A range of educational visits, including residential stays in locations as far apart as Devon and North Wales for outdoor education, enrich and extend pupils' appreciation of localities outside their day-to-day experience. The school woodland is a very atmospheric setting for subjects such as drama, and a practical one for field work.

A very high quality 14–19 curriculum prepares students exceptionally well for leaving school. From the beginning of Year 9, students follow learning pathways that best fit their capabilities and learning styles. In the case of a few higher attaining students, this includes inclusion opportunities in a partner secondary school. A partnership also supports the school's vocational education programme very well, which is one part of the very effective work-related curriculum that includes work experience and enterprise activities. Post-16 students benefit greatly, both academically and socially, from being located in a mainstream college.

Personal development, including aspects such as communication, independence and self-help skills, is tracked very carefully. When individuals are identified as requiring additional support and guidance, they are referred to the speech, language, interaction and communication team. The great impact that this team has on enabling individuals to benefit fully from their time in the school represents excellent use of specialist school funding, which is used in part to fund specialist posts, such as speech and language therapists and an occupational therapist. Such provision is indicative of leaders' determination to provide equality of opportunity for all pupils. This commitment is equally evident in their determination to stamp out bullying and to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Any occurrences are dealt with very well. A very large majority of pupils and their parents and carers believe that behaviour is good. A similar proportion of parents and carers, and all staff, confirm that children are safe in Ifield School.

Leaders also make sure that all pupils learn as well as they are capable of doing. The performance of individuals and different groups, such as pupils with English as an additional language or those known to be eligible for free school meals, is interrogated. No groups, including those pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, perform significantly differently to others. Leaders and managers at all levels are very clear about their specific roles and responsibilities, and they carry them out very efficiently. Ifield's contributions to an extensive range of partnerships add great value to the school's effectiveness in the community as well as the school. In addition to the work of the SMILE centre staff and the outreach through Ifield's specialist status, staff support mainstream teachers in a fully integrated nursery in an adjacent primary school in which up to 12 children are placed for assessment purposes.

Despite its achievements over the past few years, Ifield School is not complacent. It remains a progressive community that is constantly seeking to improve, and it is very well placed to do so. There is an excellent capacity to develop further because the

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vision for the future is in place and understood by all, and the management systems that give leaders the ongoing information that they require are embedded, and they work.



### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ifield 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 76 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 184 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	54	71	18	24	3	4	1	1
Q2 My child feels safe at school	53	70	20	26	1	1	1	1
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	53	70	19	25	1	1	1	1
Q4 The school meets my child’s particular needs	52	68	16	21	2	3	3	4
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	55	72	17	22	0	0	2	3
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	53	70	17	22	1	1	1	1
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	41	54	29	38	2	3	1	1
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	29	38	34	45	8	11	1	1
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	40	53	26	34	1	1	1	1
Q10 The school helps me to support my child’s learning	48	63	20	26	1	1	3	4
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	50	66	20	26	1	1	4	5
Q12 The school is well led and managed	56	74	13	17	0	0	5	7

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ the achievement of all pupils</li><li>■ behaviour and safety</li><li>■ the quality of teaching</li><li>■ the effectiveness of leadership and management</li></ul> <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.</li></ul>
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.**



10 June 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Ifield School, Gravesend DA12 5JT**

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. Special thanks go to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us. You told us that you love going to school, and certainly most of you attend each day. We can see why. Your school is excellent. The staff give you many fun things to do. You learn a lot in lessons and make good progress in your work. You also have very many other exciting activities to do, like staying in France and going skiing, and there are lots of clubs you can go to in school. I expect you enjoy staying in Ifieldlife! Those of you who go to college benefit a great deal from being there.

You impressed us a great deal with your behaviour and the way that you get on with each other. You are very polite and helpful. The staff take very good care of you and you told us that you feel safe in school. You also know how to keep yourselves safe. Your school is very good at helping you if you find work hard and when you find it difficult to control your behaviour. It also does a very good job in making sure that all of you can communicate.

The people who run your school do a great job. They want to make the school even better. We have given them some ideas how they can do that.

- Let you work in small groups in lessons as much as possible.
- Always give you enough time to answer questions in lessons.

You can help them by continuing to go to school as often as you possibly can, and by carrying on working hard and behaving so very well. Finally, I wish each of you success in the future, especially if you are taking examinations and leaving school or college this year.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell  
Lead inspector

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