

Uplands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126555
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	360108
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Stephen McShane HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
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	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barbara Shaw
Headteacher	Jackie Smith
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2008
School address	The Learning Campus Tadpole Lane Swindon SN25 2NB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed 16 lessons led by 15 teachers. They met with governors, staff, parents and carers and groups of pupils and looked at a range of other evidence, including data on pupils' progress, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, and minutes of meetings. The responses to questionnaires by 43 parents and carers, 57 pupils and 49 staff were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The learning and progress of different groups of pupils.
- How the new curriculum is tailored to so that it is challenging for all pupils across different subjects and adapted to the particular needs of pupils with different disabilities.
- Whether self-evaluation is accurate and how it has led to recent improvements.

Information about the school

Uplands admits pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many students have additional needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), visual or hearing impairments or complex medical needs. A few pupils are looked after by the local authority. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The number of pupils the school admits has increased since the last inspection. The local authority has plans to increase this still further. It is anticipated that building work will begin soon. The headteacher joined the school in April 2009.

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

Uplands is a good school. It is a happy community where the achievements of everyone are valued and celebrated whatever their particular special needs or disability. Pupils are pleased and proud to attend their school, enjoy the things they do and contribute readily. Engagement with parents and carers is excellent. All those who responded to the questionnaire said that they were happy with their children's experience at the school.

Aspects of the school are outstanding. Pupils are cared for very well. Staff, in close and excellent partnership with other agencies, ensure pupils' particular needs, including their medical requirements, are met well. More able pupils talk readily about how they can keep themselves safe. Pupils with the most significant needs show that they feel very safe by the way they are calm and relax, with any potential distress being short lived. Pupils are polite, welcoming and engaging; behaviour is excellent. Consistent approaches to manage behaviour, as well as individual programmes, mean that pupils who have previously exhibited significant and challenging behaviour have made considerable improvements and incidents are much less frequent. These pupils are now much more ready to learn. There are excellent partnerships with other agencies such as other schools, partners in health and the local authority as well as businesses and community groups that contribute well to pupils' care and to the curriculum.

Pupils make good progress in acquiring literacy, numeracy and communication skills, as well as appropriate life skills to prepare them for adulthood. Many of them develop good self-confidence and overcome significant barriers to learning. This is due to the close care and attention each pupil receives from staff, a well planned curriculum that offers many opportunities, as well as systematic work toward achieving challenging individual targets that are regularly monitored and evaluated.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Some good teaching was observed during the inspection, but it is inconsistent. Although pupils make good progress over time, in some lessons it is not as positive as it should be. Good lessons are well paced and lead to individual pupils being highly engaged and making significant progress, for example developing their literacy and communication skills. However, progress is not as good as this in those lessons where pupils are required to wait for too long for their turn to respond and engage. Too often aspects of questioning, learning objectives, activities or support are not sufficiently targeted to the level the pupil is working at. These weaknesses are not always accurately identified because monitoring, although regular, is not always sufficiently rigorous.

The headteacher has made a number of significant improvements since her arrival, supported by the governing body and staff. Good self-evaluation has identified that assessment is more secure and pupil progress is being analysed much more effectively to ensure good achievement. Improved curriculum organisation means that pupils' particular

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needs are being addressed much more successfully. Staff morale is very good and the energy to embrace improvements is clearly evident in the way these changes have been led and adopted. Staff and governors have now identified further areas they wish to improve that are appropriate, particularly in the light of increased pupil numbers. Capacity to improve therefore is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that by summer 2012 it is consistently good or better by:
 - using pupil assessment information to plan lesson objectives, success criteria and activities so that they challenge all pupils to make rapid progress
 - maximising opportunities to learn through increasing the engagement and active involvement of all pupils in lessons
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching is sufficiently rigorous to identify and address weaknesses.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The school's assessment data show all groups of pupils make at least good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics during their time at Uplands. This is due to the close care and attention each pupil receives from staff and a systematic focus on helping pupils to achieve challenging individual targets that are regularly monitored and evaluated. Pupils respond well to this challenge and want to do well. Pupils for whom it is appropriate develop a good knowledge of symbols, acquire good communication skills as well as the ability to make choices and express their views. Other pupils learn to use switches or facial expression and eye-pointing to communicate. Pupils are diligent and engage readily with work. As they move up the school pupils become increasingly independent and self-confident. Pupils leave the school with a Qualification in Personal Progress from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), adapted to individuals' particular levels. An effectively planned curriculum is matched well to pupils' individual needs and offers many opportunities for pupils to develop their interests, skills and knowledge with the result that, despite the fact that teaching is sometimes less than stimulating, they make good progress over time.

The excellent school choir is just one example of pupils' highly energetic contribution to the school and the community. Pupils are at the centre of their own annual reviews, undertake roles of responsibility, such as membership of the school council, and participate eagerly in a range of community projects with other agencies. Social relationships between pupils are very strong. They are very respectful of each other and accepting of each others' difficulties. The newly-established memorial garden and the school's ceremonies have enabled pupils to reflect well on recent bereavements. Pupils participate appropriately in events and visits to explore other cultures. The school recognises, however, that offering more systematic opportunities is an area for development. Pupils stay healthy through eating well at lunch time and good participation in sports, particularly trampolining and swimming. They gain a range of sporting awards and use physical exercise and the hydrotherapy pool to be energetic and to relax.

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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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	2
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?

All lessons are underpinned by positive relationships between staff and pupils and pupils themselves. Classes have a clear routine. There is a high staff to pupil ratio. Learning is supported successfully by pictorial timetables and symbols. Pupils therefore feel secure and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. However, there is a considerable inconsistency in the quality of teaching in the school, which is the reason that teaching is satisfactory rather than good. In a few lessons the learning objective was not precise enough to sufficiently guide the lesson and there was an inappropriate match of resources and activities to individuals' needs. Some activities on offer were mundane. In many lessons pupils are asked to wait too long for their turn, particularly in routine activities. The best learning seen was when pupils were working independently or in small groups on specific targets. In these lessons resources, including information and communication technology or sensory experiences, were well prepared and well matched to the needs of individuals. Learning was closely assessed by the adult and the level of challenge and encouragement was consistently appropriate. The school has improved its systems for developing individual education plans and recording and assessing progress.

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However, there remains inconsistency between classes in the use of assessment information to plan lessons.

The thematic curriculum is well organised and is planned to meet the different needs and abilities of pupils. It gives important emphasis on the development of key skills and personal development. Specialist approaches, such as Picture Exchange Communication System, are used well. The curriculum is flexible so that pupils can access provision in other classes or local schools. The 'Rainbow' curriculum enriches pupils understanding of personal and social issues through focusing on whole-school themes.

The high standard of care is underpinned by the close partnership with parents and carers. The school's pastoral team ensures effective coordination and appropriate focus on the needs of individuals and further school developments. Staff are well trained, for example in medical procedures, dealing with bereavement and the needs of pupils with ASD. Thorough arrangements are in place to ensure pupils settle well when they join the school. Older pupils receive very good support to prepare them well for appropriate destinations for when they leave.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Led effectively by the headteacher, staff are committed to providing the very best for every pupil. They have responded very well to the challenges of introducing a new curriculum and the organisation of the school. They remain flexible and responsive to the changing needs of pupils. Detailed knowledge of individuals ensures that no pupil underachieves, whatever their disability, age, culture or gender. Governors are supportive of the school. They have successfully steered the school through a period of significant change to leadership, a new school building and planned expansion. They have a secure understanding of the school's strengths but are not fully aware of its weaknesses and areas for development. Safeguarding procedures are good. The school takes the protection of its pupils very seriously and effective procedures are in place. Rigorous attention is given to health and safety. The school works hard to develop pupils' appreciation of 'community,' and this is most clearly evident in the successful and cohesive community of Uplands and the very successful links and partnerships in Swindon and the wider local area.

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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	3
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	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress, particularly in their individual targets and developing the key skills they will need as adults. They transfer successfully to a number of destinations including college and supported living environments. The student-run 'Coffee Shop', opportunities to experience horticulture and 'Money Matters' programme are examples of a varied curriculum that provide appropriate opportunities to develop good skills. As in the rest of the school, the quality of teaching is inconsistent, displaying similar strengths and weaknesses. Leaders and managers have continued to improve the curriculum on offer and maintain high quality care and a very positive atmosphere. They have identified appropriate improvement activities, for example the further expansion of work-related learning. However, they have not sufficiently tackled weaknesses in teaching.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers hold extremely positive views about the school and appreciate how their children enjoy attending. Those parents and carers who made additional comments recognised the improvements the headteacher has made and the happy and welcoming atmosphere of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Uplands 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 43 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 95 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	88	4	9	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	84	6	14	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	35	81	6	14	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	81	6	14	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	79	7	16	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	72	10	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	65	13	30	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)	30	70	11	26	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	79	9	21	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	74	8	19	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	81	7	16	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	81	6	14	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	93	2	5	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	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).

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">■ 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.



17 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Uplands School, Swindon SN25 2NB

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. Thank you for telling us all about your school. We enjoyed seeing your hard work, sampling your cakes at the 'Coffee Shop' and hearing you sing in the choir. We were impressed by the memorial garden you have made. We felt it is a very beautiful place to sit and remember.

We found out that:

- Uplands is a good school.
- You are making good progress.
- Your behaviour is outstanding, you are very kind to each other and very thoughtful.
- Adults care for you very well and you feel very safe.
- Your school works very well with others, including your parents and carers.
- Your school is managed well.

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and teachers to make sure the teaching is always good, in every lesson. You can help by continuing to try your best.

It was a privilege to visit your school and meet you all.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane

Her Majesty's Inspector

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