

# Whitfield and Aspen School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	118459
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	379622
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 June 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Wendy Simmons

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	426
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Glynn Stevens
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrew Lamb
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3–4 December 2008
<b>School address</b>	Mayfield Road Dover Kent CT16 3LJ
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<b>Fax number</b>	01304 827300
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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	25–26 June 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	379622



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Wendy Simmons

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Howard Jones

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 40 lessons or part lessons, which included joint observations with members of the school's senior management team. In total, 22 teachers were observed. Discussions were held with teachers, teaching assistants, representatives of the governing body, and the school's leadership team. Inspectors held two meetings with pupils, heard some read and looked at samples of pupils' work. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, especially linked to pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The inspectors evaluated the responses to the questionnaires from pupils, staff and 133 parents and carers.

## Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average.

The main school is two-form entry and has provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Nursery and two Reception classes. In addition, Aspen has specialist provision for children assessed as having severe and/or profound multiple disabilities and special educational needs. Some pupils work exclusively in the Aspen provision, whilst others take part in a mixture of mainstream and Aspen support. In the school as a whole, the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs far exceeds the national average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average. Notably, more than a third of all pupils have support at school action plus level and a quarter of all pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. However, other ethnic groups are represented; they often speak English as an additional language. Nepalese, Ghurkha service families make up the largest minority ethnic group.

The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

**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>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- Whitfeld and Aspen is a good school where pupils work in a highly inclusive ethos. However, the school is not yet outstanding as elements of achievement and teaching remain a focus for development. Nonetheless, the work of the Aspen provision is inspirational, ensuring that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, some of which are highly complex, achieve outstandingly well and are fully included in school life. Those who speak English as an additional language also do outstandingly well.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well in the mainstream part of the school because of the combination of good teaching and a rich and interesting curriculum. Although some teaching is outstanding, there is not enough of this. The challenges provided for the most able pupils are sometimes not demanding enough in mathematics. While reading and writing skills are improving well, there remains inconsistency in the quality of opportunities for reading and teachers' marking to ensure that pupils' progress is as impressive as possible.
- Parents and carers have immense confidence in the school and pupils are rightly proud of their school. As one parent so accurately commented, 'The teachers are committed to providing a solid but exciting education, enhanced by the many extra-curricular activities.' The children in mainstream develop a very special understanding and acceptance of their friends in Aspen.
- Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are typical of school life. Pupils, parents, carers and inspectors agree that the school provides a safe and nurturing atmosphere.
- There is very strong leadership by the headteacher and other senior members of staff. They are already working to make teaching as impressive as possible through effective performance management. While teamwork is strong, the roles of middle leaders are sometimes underdeveloped, which hampers leadership from being outstanding overall.

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

- By July 2013, make the quality of teaching and achievement outstanding by:

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- ensuring that there is greater consistency in the quality and frequency of opportunities that pupils have to read, especially by developing the guided reading programme
  - providing greater challenge and progressive development of skills for the most able pupils, especially in mathematics
  - improving the quality of marking so that it is highly effective throughout the school, to ensure that pupils know exactly how to improve their work.
- By January 2013, raise the quality of leadership to outstanding by:
- widening the roles of middle managers so that they are more involved in checking the whole school's quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Pupils' skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are much lower than would usually be expected. Pupils overall make good progress as they move through each stage of education to Year 6. Parents and carers agree that their children do well. When taking the pupils who have extreme cognitive difficulties out of the whole school data, the attainment of mainstream pupils, by the end of Year 6, is average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in all areas of learning. There is a strong rising trend in attainment linked to their language and communication skills, as seen when children were finding out about dolphins and confidently used their phonic skills (sounds that letters make) to read and write independently. The whole school focus on phonics is having a marked effect on pupils' ability to read by blending sounds together and to spell by segmenting the sounds. However, sometimes reading books are too easy or not changed regularly enough to accelerate their progress to outstanding. By the end of Year 2, reading skills are currently on track to be at the expected level, an improvement on previously below average attainment. In Key Stage 2, the focus on helping boys to do as well as girls is securely closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment.

When writing, pupils were observed throughout the school confidently editing and improving their sentences with the intention of reaching their challenging targets. In Year 1, for instance, pupils made posters using exciting descriptive words to capture the troll in the story of the *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Skills build up effectively so that, in Year 6, pupils write at length. They were observed using catch phrases, complex sentences and alliteration when planning radio advertisements.

Pupils use basic mathematical calculation skills well to solve a variety of real life problem solving tasks; they enjoy mathematics. The lessons seen confirmed that the most able pupils were not consistently well challenged. For example, pupils concentrated hard on an investigation to work out fractions using sixths, but were not challenged to add different and more complex fractions.

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The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is exceptionally good overall. Pupils who receive additional interventions do very well in accelerating progress as they move through the school. Aspen pupils do outstandingly well due to the superb emphasis on promoting multi-sensory learning. As a result, pupils engage in eye contact, gesturing and often vocalise. For example, pupils began to vocalise their enthusiasm for brushing their own hair and they showed considerable enjoyment when participating in musical activities. Pupils in Aspen become emotionally more confident showing increasing resilience and focus.

Pupils who speak English as an additional language often make outstanding progress due to the exceptionally strong focus on promoting communication skills in the school as a whole.

### **Quality of teaching**

Parents and carers are right to have considerable confidence in the teaching. Pupils agree that staff help them to learn new things well. Throughout the school, teachers make lessons interesting. They use time well so that learning usually moves on at a swift pace. Teachers make purposeful use of different questions to probe pupils' understanding. Sometimes marking in books is of high quality, although overall the quality is inconsistent. As a result, pupils are not being given the highest quality guidance in all classes about how to improve their work and skills. Lesson planning takes mostly suitable account of pupils' differing abilities, although the emphasis on the needs of the most able is uneven. Where teaching is sometimes outstanding it is highly inspirational and challenging for all abilities.

Teachers make good use of different resources both inside and outside school to help pupils to learn in different ways. The use of information and communication technology (ICT), visits out and links between subjects are particular strengths of the curriculum and teaching. As a consequence, pupils are curious, motivated to learn and concentrate well. During the inspection for example, Year 1 were excited by a visit from an ambulance crew and this helped them to write with enthusiasm. Year 3, on the other hand, learnt much about animals when visiting Howletts Zoo.

Impressive signing of songs, during assemblies, ensures that all pupils are actively engaged in learning. Teaching encourages pupils to reflect and gain a strong spiritual awareness. Subjects such as music and art are also well taught and aid pupils' wider personal development.

Teaching ensures that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are given the support that they need. For example, Aspen pupils benefit from often very inspiring teaching that enables pupils to make very pronounced progress in their emotional, physical and communication skills.

The teaching and curriculum for reading are improving, as evident in the way that boys were observed enjoying the new Alex Rider books. Equally, Year 6 pupils spoke

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about a wide range of authors and delighted in reading factual information about expeditions to Everest, as part of their work on mountains. However, guided reading is not as well developed in Key Stage 1 as it is in Key Stage 2.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' good behaviour typifies the daily life of the school, reflecting the respect that pupils show for each other. Parents, carers and pupils confirm that pupils are safe at school and behave well; inspectors endorse this view. Rates of attendance are average overall and this includes pupils who have to take time off for medical needs; excluding this group, rates of attendance are above average.

Incidences of racism and bullying are very low; firm action is taken to address this if they should occur. Pupils understand about such things as how to handle bullying if it should occur to vulnerable pupils, such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils know for example about why gay and lesbian families should be respected and free from any form of bullying. They also know about cyber bullying and persistent name calling. A few Nepalese pupils commented that there is some name calling, which they do not like; the school takes this very seriously.

A few parents and/or carers identified concerns about a few pupils who have very complex behaviour difficulties. Any examples of very challenging behaviour, which are not uncommon for pupils with very complex special educational needs, are handled very well. The safety of all pupils is of utmost importance to the school. As a result, any outbursts do not interrupt the learning of others for more than a few moments. Many pupils learn how to control their anger or frustrations due to highly effective support and, as a result, they quickly return to class lessons.

Pupils exhibit strong moral and social values. Some have shown sustained improvement in behaviour over time due to support and through modifications to the timetable or curriculum. The new climbing wall has been a great success in channelling anger into positive rather than negative physical actions. Only rarely are pupils excluded from school as the school goes out of its way to support all pupils.

### **Leadership and management**

Inclusion for all encapsulates the ethos of this school. This is especially evident in the extremely impressive leadership by the headteacher and senior staff. Discrimination, throughout the school, is not tolerated. Leaders are at the centre of excellence for training local teachers in how to include disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The achievement of groups is improving, as is the proportion of outstanding teaching, although these features continue to be a focus for further development. The provision in Aspen has strengthened and, whilst already outstanding, leaders are highly aspirational to maintain improvements. For example, by expanding the outreach by developing further shared goals between different supporting agencies.

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The governing body supports school improvement by asking challenging questions about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements and are passionate about inclusion for all pupils. Senior leaders carefully analyse the progress being made by different groups of pupils and regularly monitor the quality of lessons and pupils' work. Informative professional development training, together with effective performance management, has had a good impact on improving pupils' use of phonic skills for reading and writing. There is a strong capacity to improve overall, but middle leaders do not check the quality of teaching and learning in an equally effective way.

The Aspen curriculum is very carefully planned to pupils' individual needs. The main school is focused on making learning interesting by linking subjects together, so that pupils are motivated, curious, reflective and hard working. The Learning Centred Class Project is at the core of the leadership's vision to lift teaching to outstanding. Already, elements of the curriculum are very inspiring, such as the use of ICT, the Forest School Project and the employment of a specialist environmental teacher.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. For example, pupils enjoy taking part in Nepalese dancing and have learnt much about what it means to be British, as part of the recent Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The school has close links with schools in Uganda and Norway. Pupils are helped to explore their emotions. The iPad Project, with the Turner Gallery, inspires art appreciation. The school has specialist music tuition and a brass band.

All of the safeguarding and child protection requirements are met and include careful checks for the safe recruitment of staff. There is a high profile focus on training for health and safety linked to medical needs and first aid training.



## 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](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.

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.**



30 June 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Whitfield and Aspen School, Dover CT16 3LJ**

I am writing to thank you for helping the inspectors to find out all about your school, especially for taking so much time to talk with us and for completing the questionnaire. You go to a good school that is really doing a great job at including so many people together. It is a very happy place and you enjoy learning and work hard. Teachers make sure that you have plenty of interesting activities to do and they link subjects well to make learning meaningful and enjoyable. We found that the Aspen pupils do outstandingly well and that those of you in the main school make good progress. We agree with you and almost all of your parents that you behave well, so please continue to be polite and helpful to others.

Your headteacher and other staff are always trying to improve things for you. We all agree that the following important things need to be done to help to make your school even better.

- Although teaching is good, we would like it to be outstanding. Sometimes this does happen, but it would be great if there were more lessons like this.
- Teachers will be making sure that there are more opportunities for you to do more reading, especially in Years 1 and 2. Also, we have asked your teachers to check that your reading books are changed as regularly as possible.
- Teachers will be making sure that those of you who find learning easy have plenty of challenges to help you to think hard and do as well as possible. This is especially so in mathematics.
- We have asked the teachers to mark your work as carefully as possible so that you know how to improve your skills. Please work hard on any comments that they make.

We do hope that you all enjoy the summer and continue to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons  
Lead inspector

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