

# Ivel Valley School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	109739
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	377975
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 July 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Kathy Hooper

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>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	150
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	28
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Andrew Rutt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Julie Mudd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 September 2008
<b>School address</b>	Hitchmead Road Biggleswade SG18 0NL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01767 601010
<b>Fax number</b>	01767 600229
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<b>Age group</b>	3–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	11–12 July 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	377975



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Kathy Hooper

Additional Inspector

Janev Mehmet-Christofides

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Nineteen teachers were observed teaching 20 lessons on two sites and in three classes based in mainstream schools. Additionally, learning walks were carried out to observe pupils' behaviour and safety in a range of settings outside the classroom, and pupils' work and progress records were examined. Meetings were held with senior leaders, post-holders, governors and pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at evidence from monitoring and development planning. Inspectors took account of 63 questionnaires from parents, 47 from pupils, and 63 from staff.

## Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, difficulties on the autistic spectrum and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, many of whom have additional sensory and physical difficulties. Sunnyside School amalgamated with Hitchmead School for pupils with moderate learning difficulties in 2010 to form Ivel Valley School. The pupils in the unit for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties at Hitchmead were also integrated into the new school. The headteacher of Sunnyside continued as the headteacher for Ivel Valley. The school is on two sites, half a mile apart. Additionally, there are four satellite classes in mainstream schools, up to 2.8 miles away from the main site.

As is often the case in special schools, there are three times as many boys as girls. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is similar to that in other schools but the proportion who have English as an additional language is lower than average. A higher than average proportion of pupils is known to be entitled to free school meals. Just over one in ten pupils are looked after. All pupils are supported by a statement of special educational need. The school holds the International Schools award and has Healthy Schools status.

**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

- This is a good school and parents agree. Pupils achieve well. This is a notable achievement for a school that has experienced a complex amalgamation. It is not outstanding because achievement is not outstanding especially for older pupils. In addition, phonics (teaching of sounds and letters) is not taught systematically enough.
- The progress of children in the Early Year Foundation Stage is good. All Key Stage 2 pupils achieve at least the expected progress in mathematics and the majority in English. Key Stage 4 pupils and Post-16 students' good achievement is recognised through the increasingly well-matched range of accredited courses. All of them move onto further education and training.
- Teaching is good. The best lessons include a wide range of practical activities tailored to individual needs, and enable pupils to learn through all their senses. Pupils make most progress where adults help them to perform activities, as far as possible, for themselves. In some lessons, teachers rely too much on verbal instructions to the whole class and teaching assistants are not actively involved. The English language support needed for pupils with English as an additional language is not always recognised.
- Pupils enjoy school. Their typical good behaviour is due to well-established routines and high expectations. The exceptionally challenging behaviour of some pupils, due to their special educational needs, is well handled by staff. Older, more able pupils are particularly aware of how to keep themselves safe.
- Leadership and management are good. The leadership from the headteacher is outstanding. Effective performance management has brought significant improvements in the teaching and learning. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development well.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

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

- Improve the pupils' achievement:
  - in English by ensuring that the phonics programme is systematically taught
  - for secondary-aged pupils by making lessons more interactive and exciting.
  
- Raise the standards of teaching in all lessons to those of the best by:
  - increasing the range of multi-sensory approaches to learning and relevant activities that engage secondary pupils throughout lessons
  - enabling teaching assistants to take a more active role in lessons
  - providing resources to support the understanding of those pupils whose first language is not English.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Pupils' attainment on entry is well below that of their peers in mainstream schools. Their achievement, however, is good because the work is well matched to individual needs. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's good achievement is enhanced by opportunities to mix with mainstream peers in an on-site nursery designated a Centre of Excellence. Children are well engaged by activities such as a sensory circuit, where they develop their control and coordination of both small and large movements. The achievement of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 is good and for some it is outstanding. Key Stage 2 pupils with a wide range of learning needs, including those on the autistic spectrum, pupils with severe and moderate learning needs and those with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, developed a good working knowledge of 'estimation' by being taken through a series of activities that progressively reinforced and extended their understanding. The most able pupils were confident about estimating numbers and knew how to check their answers using linked blocks to count.

The achievement of all pupils with a range of complex needs by the end of Key Stage 4 is good. They make good progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 to develop their writing skills. Key Stage 3 pupils were using some good vocabulary to write about Charlie and the Chocolate factory. The reading of a Key Stage 4 pupil with severe learning difficulties was improved through a series of focused one-to-one phonics sessions. However, phonics is not taught systematically throughout the school. The relatively weaker progress of looked after children in mathematics has been addressed. The achievement in Key Stage 4 and Post-16 in literacy and numeracy is good, but is somewhat limited by some over-use of worksheets. Pupils with English as an additional language make progress in literacy and numeracy but resources are not always used productively to support learning. Post-16 students with profound and multiple learning difficulties were well supported to react to a range of stimuli and to anticipate events when putting plants into compost. The progress of pupils on the autistic spectrum is particularly good. Girls and boys make similarly good

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progress. Pupils throughout the school make good progress in literacy and numeracy through the good use of information and communication technology, such as switches and laptops, and good use of augmentative communication methods, such as signing and symbols, to develop early cognitive skills.

Pupils make good progress in their social, emotional, behavioural and physical development. The school's own speech and language therapist and outside agencies work well with staff to promote pupils' communication, social, emotional and physical skills.

The vast majority of parents and carers are delighted by their children's progress. A comment from the parent or carer of an autistic child with epilepsy commented, 'A brilliant school. My child has made great progress.'

### **Quality of teaching**

Teaching is good. Support for learning is very effective in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The best lessons are often on the primary site. They are well structured to teach specific concepts and activities are tailored to each pupil's needs and experience while reinforcing their literacy and numeracy. In a design and technology lesson, effective questioning, the use of the interactive whiteboard and a trip to the park helped pupils to identify the properties of a swing. More able secondary pupils made good progress in lessons where they are engaged in challenging activities. Key Stage 4 pupils enjoyed competing in a game using a Venn diagram to find the rule 'in the teacher's head', having been given a series of numbers. Most teachers make excellent use of assessment data. They skilfully use lots of different communication and behaviour strategies to engage pupils, including those on the autistic spectrum and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Effective implementation of the values curriculum helps pupils to develop a strong moral and social understanding. There is not yet a coherent approach to teaching phonics throughout the school to support reading.

In some lessons, particularly on the secondary site, teachers relied too much on verbal instructions and worksheets rather than using multi-sensory resources and activities to engage all pupils. In these lessons, pupils and teaching assistants were occasionally passive and disengaged for a short time so that the pace of learning slackened.

Parents and carers are very appreciative of the support of teaching and non-teaching staff. For example a parent/carer of a primary pupil with difficulties on the autistic spectrum commented 'I cannot be happier with my son's progress at Ivel Valley, especially using the TEACCH method. Staff are helpful and supportive in his learning.' The parent/carer of a recently arrived Key Stage 3 pupil remarked on her surprise at the great amount of progress her child has made since joining the school.

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

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Behaviour across the school is typically good because staff have been well trained and have an effective policy. Behaviour is carefully monitored and evaluations show significant improvement over time. This is due to good communication with pupils using a variety of strategies, such as a picture exchange system, well-rehearsed routines, and a strong focus on learning in lessons. As a result, pupils are confident, have good attitudes to learning and, those that are sufficiently aware, want to be successful. There is an effective reward system that encourages pupils to do the 'right thing'. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and secondary and Post-16 students benefit hugely from opportunities to mix with mainstream peers. The school has a warm and inclusive ethos and pupils are happy and willing to help. There are many examples of pupils with behavioural, social, and emotional difficulties willingly helping others in a range of settings. The impact of pupils' efforts to improve their school is evident in their decisions regarding school dinners, the organisation of the playground and the successful growing of vegetables.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and they are safe. The most able pupils are well aware of how to keep themselves safe. Secondary pupils were thoughtful and insightful when they debated issues concerned with violence in society. Staff and pupils are mutually respectful and the dignity of the most dependent pupils is well preserved. The school is vigilant regarding bullying, including cyber-bullying, any reports are immediately addressed. Pupils know what to do if they feel they are bullied. Attendance is satisfactory and a good range of strategies is used to immediately address absence.

Most parents and carers are delighted by their children's social and emotional development. It is evidenced in a typical comment from a parent or carer of a secondary pupil, 'My child has matured and developed academically in the last school year.' Behaviour, specifically the inclusion of pupils with behavioural, social and emotional needs alongside other more vulnerable pupils, is an area about which parents and carers have been most concerned since the amalgamation. This inspection found no grounds for their fears.

## **Leadership and management**

Leadership is highly ambitious and focused on achieving the best possible achievement for all its pupils. Strong and systematic monitoring ensures continuous improvements across the school. Relative under-performance of pupils is promptly identified and addressed through appropriate interventions. The lower achievement in the past of looked after children in mathematics, for example, was identified and successfully addressed. Teachers are successfully supported and professional development of staff is well focused on key areas identified through accurate self-evaluation and monitoring activities. As a result, there is good evidence of pupils' improving achievement and behaviour.

The curriculum is broad and balanced with good focus on pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. It meets students' needs successfully. The curriculum for the Early Years Foundation Stage has been well developed. There is

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more to do to establish a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics for secondary-aged pupils. The senior and middle managers are beginning to work as a team and are excited by the possibilities for their school. Although they are implementing well worked out action plans, the impact of these is yet to be fully evaluated.

The vast majority of parents are supportive and well engaged and have very strong and productive links with the school. A very small minority remains apprehensive about the amalgamation and the impact on their children of the wide spread of needs. Nevertheless, governors have been skilful in steering the school to its current strong position. Plans are in place to extend links with the community, but occasionally there is not enough emphasis on preparation of pupils for life in a culturally diverse society.

Safeguarding has a high profile and systems are robust throughout the school. The school does not tolerate any discriminatory behaviour. It effectively demonstrates its commitment to equality of opportunity by monitoring the progress of different groups and taking prompt action to address any issues that arise. The school's approach to equality and diversity is recognised by some parents. 'I feel my daughter attends a fully inclusive school which is full of opportunity for her.'



## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.**



13 July 2012

Dear Children, Pupils and Students

### **Inspection of Ivel Valley School, Biggleswade, SG18 0NL**

Thank you so much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed seeing you at your work and talking to you. Your school is a good one. The school has made great progress since it amalgamated two years ago.

We were particularly impressed by the way some of you take care of others. This is what gives your school such a good family atmosphere. Some of you have worked with staff to improve the playground and your school meals. We saw that your behaviour was good because you understand the rules and routines. You told us that you enjoy school and feel safe. You get on well with all the staff and trust them because they take care of you. We saw you working really hard in lessons and you told us what you had to do to improve your work.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked your teachers to ensure that you achieve as well in English as you do in mathematics on the primary site and to help the older pupils make as good progress as the younger ones. In order to do this, we have asked your teachers to:

- teach you how to improve your reading
- make lessons more practical and relevant on the secondary site
- give more support for those of you whose first language is not English.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Hooper  
Lead inspector

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