

Southfield School

Travellers Lane, Hatfield, AL10 8TJ

Inspection dates 8–9 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in communication (using pictures, signing with their hands, pressing switches and speaking), reading, writing and mathematics because they are taught well. Work is mostly set at the right level for pupils and this helps to speed up their learning.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good gains in sitting still; looking at books; and making choices by pointing at pictures of what they want to do.
- Effective work between parents and carers and teachers supports families in contributing to their children's independence. For example, it supports them in helping their children to adopt good sleep patterns.
- Pupils feel safe. They become less anxious as they begin to develop communication skills and their behaviour improves, often significantly. As this happens, they begin to enjoy their learning.
- All leaders, including governors, are committed to removing obstacles that get in the way of pupils' learning. Thorough checking of teaching has resulted in changes which have contributed to good improvements for pupils. Consequently, opportunities to learn are increased for all pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always make sufficient use of their knowledge about what pupils already know to plan new and challenging work to move them on in their learning quickly enough.
- In a few lessons, pupils are not clear enough about what they are expected to do when moved from one activity to another or given the chance to take responsibility for their own learning.
- The most able readers and those pupils who are best at mathematics do not get opportunities to work alongside their peers in mainstream schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 11 lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Most of the lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors heard pupils read (using pictures, symbols and text).
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and governors. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a sample of statements, behaviour plans, assessment information, the school's plans for improvement, the school's monitoring information, a range of policies including safeguarding policies and governing body documentation. The lead inspector examined 33 staff questionnaires.
- There were eight responses to Parent View at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors, along with letters sent in to the school marked for the attention of the inspection team.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Keith Selby Thomas

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is designated as a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and associated complex challenging behaviours. Almost all of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 1 have complex autistic spectrum disorders. A few pupils have hearing impairment and very few have physical disabilities. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding from the government for pupils in local authority care, those from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those from families where the home language is not English is above the national average. These pupils are represented across all the different disability and special educational needs groups catered for by the school.
- The headteacher has been in post since September this year. The school is housed in purpose-built accommodation. It is to be re-located on a different site at the start of the next school year, while an incinerator is constructed in close proximity to the current school site. Following its construction and also that of a dual carriageway, it is planned to move the school back again to its current site.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all classes by:
 - making effective use of information about pupils' prior learning to plan work so that it is set at the right level for their different abilities
 - ensuring pupils are always clear about what they are expected to do and learn when they are moved from one activity in a lesson to another so that the pace of learning does not slow
 - involving pupils in taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Develop working partnerships with neighbouring mainstream primary schools so that the most-able pupils from this school in reading and mathematics have opportunities to work alongside pupils in those schools so as to raise their achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with exceptionally complex needs. Their behaviour is very challenging because of the frustration of not being able to communicate. On entry, they cannot sit still (even for a few minutes), finding it hard to take turns or share toys. They make good progress in making choices, often using pictures from their schedule (a picture plan of the events in their day). A few use words, and as they make their needs known, they calm down and their behaviour improves significantly.
- A few children, once able to communicate, take off with their learning. The most able sort objects by shape. They follow instructions and develop good readiness to learn skills. Effective work with parents and carers contributes to children eating regularly, drinking from a cup and adopting more positive sleep patterns.
- Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make good progress in reading. By Year 6, the most able pupils read simple text fluently. Some have a good understanding of what they read but others struggle to grasp its meaning.
- Achievement in writing is good measured against pupils' capability. The most able Year 6 pupils write stories independently and spell simple words with a reasonable degree of accuracy. All experience writing. For the pupils with the most complex needs, this involves an adult guiding their hand to support them in forming letters. All pupils make good progress in developing communication skills.
- Pupils' mathematical development builds step by step and as they move through the school, they make good progress. In Year 1, they explore numbers through touch and sight. By Year 6, some can solve problems carrying out simple calculations, construct graphs and tell the time. All pupils experience these mathematical activities. Although pupils make good progress in science, their rate of progress in this subject is slower than that in English and mathematics.
- In most lessons, pupils make good progress. However, a little inconsistency remains. In a few lessons, pupils' progress is slowed because they are insufficiently challenged. On rare occasions, pupils are not moved on quickly enough in their learning. Pupils working at the highest level in reading and mathematics do not have the opportunity to be extended by working alongside mainstream pupils.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to accelerate learning for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. It is used to pay for them to attend Saturday morning club which is held in school. It is run and staffed by school staff and makes a valuable contribution to the development of pupils communication and social skills.
- All groups of pupils, including those with moderate learning difficulties and those with speech and language difficulties, achieve equally well. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those learning English as an additional language, are treated as individuals and receive appropriate help and support based on their special educational needs. As a result, their progress is similar to that of their classmates.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is good and improving. This is because of the feedback teachers receive from the

headteacher following lesson observations and support through training. For example, the training teachers have received in working with the few pupils with hearing impairment has had a positive impact on those pupils' achievement.

- In good lessons, teachers skilfully use their knowledge of where pupils are in their learning to plan their next steps. They give pupils good activities to ensure that they achieve the targets set for them. In a good mathematics lesson for pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4, every pupil made good progress. Some challenged by a fun game speeded up their counting, while others supported by pictures matched the number of objects to large number cards.
- In contrast, pupils' learning slowed in a literacy lesson because the teacher had not planned specific learning outcomes and there was confusion about what pupils were expected to do when the teacher moved them from a whole class activity to working independently. Similarly, in a lesson which focused on sorting, pupils were not sufficiently engaged in their own learning early on in the lesson. More able pupils were not challenged quickly enough to sort objects using Venn diagrams.
- In almost all lessons, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. In an Early Years Foundation Stage physical education lesson, the teaching assistants engaged the children, developed their communication skills, and enabled them to improve their balance skills on the apparatus.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils have very challenging behaviour associated with their complex disabilities and special educational needs. Staff are very skilled at managing this behaviour and organising the furniture in their rooms to remove obstacles to learning for pupils.
- Structured work stations (individual learning cubicles) and schedules enable most pupils with autistic spectrum disorders to engage successfully with learning. Seen in the context of pupils' complex needs, their behaviour is good. Staff use verbal prompts, which successfully bring pupils who wander off from tasks quickly back to their work.
- Careful positioning of pupils in lessons maximises their learning. They are seated away from objects with which they are likely to become fixed through obsessive behaviours. For some, this is sitting them away from a window; for others, from a door; yet others, being aware of the temperature in the room; and being aware of how pupils react with one another in planning their work stations. Hence, pupils engage well with learning. Those able to speak using words are polite and keenly express their enthusiasm for learning.
- Pupils who speak using words say that they feel safe at school. They can talk freely about their worries with a trusted adult. Parents and carers agree that their children feel safe at school. Pupils say that teachers help them to sort out arguments quickly when they tell them 'that someone is not being nice to them'. Staff vigilance ensures that such instances are uncommon. Bullying is rare and dealt with swiftly and there are no racist incidents.
- Within their capability, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of different types of bullying and of how to stay safe. They have a good sense of road safety and know that they must not run along the side of the pool or dive in at the shallow end when they go swimming.
- Pupils understand why it is important to wear a helmet when they go horse riding and why they

must take special care when using tools in the school garden. They know not to get in a car with a stranger and that they need to be careful when using computers (they have a good knowledge of the risks associated with social network sites).

The leadership and management are good

- Since being in post, the new headteacher's relentless drive to improve teaching has had a positive impact on raising pupils' achievement. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching are checked rigorously and effective staff training supports teachers in improving their skills and knowledge in working successfully with pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. For example, it was observed that some pupils wandered off from tasks and it was identified that clear verbal prompts should be used consistently to direct them back. Following training, most teachers now successfully direct pupils back verbally, focusing their concentration and so physical restraints are rare.
 - A new appraisal system has been launched. A policy has been drawn up, involving the Chair of the Governing Body, to address deficiencies in teaching that are identified by leaders when they monitor lessons. Teachers falling short receive an improvement action plan and are given support. Failure to improve will not be tolerated in the philosophy of the 'one life chance for pupils'.
 - Self-evaluation is thorough and decisive actions result from it, which benefit pupils. Governors support leaders in funding training and developing more suitable ways to help the pupils. A close scrutiny of practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage led to improvements in the use of picture 'schedules' to support the children. Children's communication and confidence have improved as a result. Following scrutiny of science data, changes were made to the curriculum and standards in this subject are better as a result.
 - Currently, the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and the teachers who lead subjects and key stages are changing. The headteacher is re-organising the team to play to their strengths and improve, even further, the education for the pupils. The system for checking the small steps of progress pupils make has been reviewed but it is too early to evaluate what difference it has made.
 - The local authority has been effective in supporting the school in improving its Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and assessment procedures. It gives good quality support to governors and is helping the school prepare to move to a new site. This support is valuable because a few parents and carers are upset about this planned move.
 - The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. There are subjects specifically designed to help pupils with autism begin to play together and communicate with one another. Through a rich curriculum and assemblies, pupils reflect spiritually and within their capability participate willingly in the school prayer. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, including their awareness of cultural diversity through a link with a school in Zimbabwe.
 - Leaders ensure that different groups of pupils are given equal opportunity to succeed and rigorously tackle any discrimination. Every effort is made to foster good relations between pupils, and with parents and carers, and to make sure that the school is a warm and welcoming community. Much successful work has been carried out to support parents and carers in managing their children's behaviour and helping them improve their communication skills.
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■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good. The governing body is directly involved in evaluating the strengths and areas for improvement within the school. Its members help to shape the school improvement plan. Because of their active involvement, they know that this is a good school. They ensure that policies and procedures are in place to enable the school to run smoothly. There are regular meetings throughout the year when governors receive reports from senior leaders about pupils' progress and they do not shy away from asking tough questions. They also get into classrooms to see what is going on and look carefully at the assessment systems in place to check and record pupils' progress. They hold teachers to account for pupils' performance and actively participate in developing plans to improve teaching. Governors are tough advocates for the child and teachers' pay is linked to the difference they make in pupils' academic and social development. Through an appointed sub-group of governors, the headteacher's targets are regularly reviewed and new ones are set as appropriate. The governing body ensures that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. They have been trained in how to appoint staff safely. Currently, they are undergoing training to support the headteacher with the newly implemented appraisal system. Important financial decisions, including how the pupil premium funding is spent, are based on a careful consideration of what works effectively in helping pupils to achieve their best.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	130362
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402420

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community Special School
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Young
Headteacher	Libby Duggan
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2010
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