

Ridgeway School

Hill Rise, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 7EB

Inspection dates 7–8 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good and sometimes exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Teaching is mostly good with some that is outstanding.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage gives children a first class start in school.
- The enthusiasm and commitment of senior leaders promote high expectations among staff.
- There are excellent relationships between staff and pupils and successes are richly celebrated.
- Information and communication technology is used creatively to help pupils with physical difficulties express themselves and make choices.
- Pupils are extremely well behaved and feel very safe. They help one another, are polite to adults and take part enthusiastically in lessons.
- The school has very good relationships with parents who are overwhelmingly supportive.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers are completely skilful in planning activities for the full range of abilities in the class, and in involving teaching assistants in planning lessons.
- In the sixth form, there is not a wide enough range of opportunities to learn practical work-related skills, and the method of assessing students' progress is not comprehensive enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons. Nine were taught by teachers, three by higher level teaching assistants and one by a nursery nurse. Eight were joint observations with senior members of staff. Additional information was gained through a learning walk.
- Inspectors held meetings with two groups of pupils, senior and subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, midday supervisors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work and records of their progress and a range of school documents, including its self-evaluation and improvement plan.
- They took account of 18 responses to the online questionnaire for parents as well as a recent questionnaire carried out by the school.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynda Morgan	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The majority of pupils attend Ridgeway School from within Bedfordshire, with some from adjoining counties.
- All have statements of special educational needs for their physical disabilities.
- Some very young children are admitted for assessment placements.
- Many have associated medical, learning and communication difficulties and require a range of specialist equipment and additional aids to help them access their education.
- A small number have additional complex difficulties, such as autism.
- The school shares a campus with Hastingbury School with which it has close links. Sixth form students attend a small number of courses at local colleges including Barnfield, Shuttleworth, Hinwick and Moulton.
- Pupils are mainly admitted at the beginning of the school year. A number have joined the sixth form from other local special schools.
- 14 pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional funding for use with those pupils known to be entitled to free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The local authority has given pupil premium money directly to the school for the first time this term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - make complete use of progress information to plan lessons for the full range of abilities in the class
 - involve support staff more fully in the planning for individual pupils in lessons.
- Improve achievement in the sixth form by:
 - reviewing current provision so that it offers activities that provide the students with a more extensive range of knowledge and practical skills relating to the world of work.
 - developing a comprehensive method of assessing students' progress across the whole range of learning opportunities offered.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress overall, across all subjects and key stages often from very low starting points. In some cases they make exceptional progress, particularly in their communication and social skills.
- Children make especially good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary department because of the safe, nurturing environment that allows them to flourish.
- Pupils' achievements are carefully followed as they progress through the school, and any slowing down of progress is quickly identified and addressed.
- Pupils who are able to read make good progress across the school. This is because reading is given a high priority and pupils access a wide range of reading materials. They use the school library, take reading books home and read to adults regularly in school.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 learn about letters and sounds in a fun way. By the time they reach the secondary department and sixth form, they are able to read across a range of situations.
- Pupils who are unable to read or have difficulties with their speech, are helped to communicate using a range of pictures and symbols, as well as technology such as switches. The school makes particularly good use of touch screen tablets that allow pupils to make choices, express their views and answer teachers' questions.
- Progress is good in the secondary department and pupils access a variety of subjects at entry level according to their abilities. Sixth form students make good progress in a range of courses at local colleges, including plumbing, enterprise, carpentry and animal care.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, and pupils with more complex difficulties such as autism, make the same good progress as others.

The quality of teaching is good

- As a result of good monitoring by senior staff, the majority of teaching is good with examples of outstanding practice, and brings about good achievement for all.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary department highly skilled teaching in a stimulating, well-resourced and carefully organised learning environment gives children an excellent start.
- All pupils benefit positively from their excellent relationships with staff.
- Teachers encourage pupils to be as independent as they can. They learn to work cooperatively in teams.
- Where additional care or medical support is needed, it is integrated seamlessly into lessons so that pupils stay involved. Specialist equipment and communication aids are used well to ensure they take part in the same activities as their classmates.

- In one well planned music lesson, involving outside visitors, Key Stage 2 children enjoyed using switches to make music through computer assisted technology. Teaching assistants gave pupils just the right amount of help.
- In most lessons the most-able pupils are given demanding work and those with more complex needs given time to join in. Most teachers keep the momentum of the lesson going while waiting for pupils who need extra time to respond giving everyone the chance to progress at their own rate.
- Questioning is mostly used well to check how much pupils have understood and make sure the next steps are appropriate. Pupils are encouraged to take time to think about their answers.
- Pupils' achievements are recorded regularly and information is mostly used effectively to decide what to teach next, although one or two teachers are not as effective in doing this.
- A few teachers do not plan as well as they could for the full range of abilities within the class. This means that some pupils have work that is too easy while others have work that is too hard.
- While teachers and support staff know pupils well and mostly work together to make the best use of lesson time. Occasionally, teachers do not include support staff enough in their planning, so that they do not have the right information to help pupils learn as well as they could.
- Teachers meet with one another regularly to check the accuracy of the way they record pupils' progress. They join with staff from other special schools to share their findings and are planning to develop this further.
- Teaching makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Because staff provide good role models, pupils learn to respect each other and their differences.
- Pupils benefit from strong links with other schools. This year two pupils are attending the adjoining secondary school for their GCSE coursework in mathematics, English, science and information and communication technology, with expected A*-C grades.
- In the sixth form, teaching is good but students' achievements are not fully recognised in every subject. The school is aware of this and plans to carry out a review of sixth form shortly.
- Although the teaching prepares students well for the next stage of their lives, the school is finding it hard to provide enough work experience opportunities. Staff are exploring different ways of providing access to practical, hands-on learning related to the world of work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are exceptionally well behaved in lessons, around the school and when off-site, for example at college. The opportunities at local colleges help shape exceptionally well their attitudes to work and personal development. Pupils are helpful to one another, polite to adults and welcoming to visitors, helping the inspectors find their way on more than one occasion.
- Where pupils find it hard to control their behaviour, well trained staff carefully manage the situation, helping them to calm and ensure the lesson is not disrupted.

- There has been only one fixed-term exclusion in recent years, and the school's policy is to use it only to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff.
- Pupils say there is no bullying at school and one primary pupil was able to describe to inspectors a 'bullying story' where he learned how children should tell an adult if they were worried. Older pupils learn about cyber- bullying and safety on the internet.
- When asked, pupils say they feel safe and are 'well looked after'. This view is supported through the questionnaires completed by staff and the responses by parents in the online survey.
- The school demonstrates a thorough approach to safety, with rigorous attention to detail to ensure pupils with mobility difficulties can move safely around the school. Risk assessments are meticulously carried out to ensure pupils' safety on and off-site, including their attendance at other schools and colleges. Safeguarding requirements are met.
- The school operates safer recruitment procedures. These are very well managed and governors have an active role in ensuring the correct procedures are followed.
- Attendance is good within the context of a school for pupils with serious medical conditions and the school makes good provision for pupils who are absent through illness.
- The schools' proximity to the Child Development Centre is instrumental in supporting its effective work with other agencies. Staff plan alongside therapists and other professionals to ensure a holistic approach to pupils' education.

The leadership and management are good

- The enthusiastic and committed headteacher is ably supported by a skilled leadership team of two assistant headteachers. They are resolute in their determination to continue improving the quality of teaching in the school, and to raise achievement further.
 - Despite a recent tragic event deeply affecting the whole school community, senior leaders have rallied together to maintain a happy, positive environment for pupils in very challenging circumstances.
 - The leaders are a highly visible presence on a daily basis. They are very well supported by staff, who share their high expectations and ambitious vision for the school. They know the schools' strengths and areas for improvements and plan appropriate actions. Sometimes the success criteria for planned actions are not as precise as they should be.
 - Pupils are joining the school with increasingly complex physical, medical and educational needs. The senior leadership team and subject leaders have responded positively to this changing profile of the pupils. Through effective use of the performance management systems, they have put in place appropriate training to help teaching and support staff to embrace the different teaching styles required.
 - Partnership with parents and the community is a high priority for the staff who make every effort to listen to parents' views, for example by consulting on how to spend pupil premium
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funding.

- The creative curriculum has given greater depth to pupils' experiences in school, through a richer, more thematic approach. During the recent London Olympics, pupils used computer technology to redesign the Olympic rings, mathematics to measure distances and combined English, history and geography lessons to compare Dickens' London with the present Olympic site, using computer software.
 - The school has improved its database of progress information and now uses national data about progress for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs to support its target setting process. This improvement is relatively new but is already having a beneficial effect on pupils' performance.
 - The school works closely with the local authority and employs an improvement partner through them to help it monitor and support the work it does. The headteacher has agreed funding with the local authority for a new sixth form provision, offering a wider range of practical and vocational activities to meet the needs of future students.
 - The school caters well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Successes are enthusiastically celebrated, for example, in one lesson where secondary pupils gave each other a round of applause when they remembered components of a spiral galaxy. Other pupils learn about the effects of deforestation on the rainforest and the effects this might have on their world.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides good support and challenge to the schools' leadership team. Governors visit the school regularly and have a good working knowledge of the schools' strengths and weaknesses. The school has provided them with training to help them judge the quality of teaching and achievement. They have a good understanding of pupil progress data, and know how well the school is performing in comparison to other schools. They have a good understanding of the budget and of the link between the management of staff performance and teacher's salary progression and promotion. Statutory duties, including safeguarding, are met. They know about the pupil premium and have consulted with parents and agreed to spend the pupil premium money on computers and other equipment to help disadvantaged pupils in school. It is too early to know what the impact of this will be.
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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	109742
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	401071

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Pursey
Headteacher	Graham Allard
Date of previous school inspection	9 March 2010
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