

Heathermount, the Learning Centre

Devenish Road, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 9PG

Inspection dates

31 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- While progress has quickened since the last full inspection, students' achievement is not good because in the past, work has not been hard enough. More-demanding courses offered currently have not had time to improve students' achievement, especially in English.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Achievement is not good because only recently have students studied a broad range of suitable examination courses.
- English is not coordinated effectively across the school to help improve students' reading, writing and spelling in all subjects.
- There is not enough good or better teaching. Information on students' progress is not always used to plan lessons which provide the right level of challenge for all students.
- Although senior leaders check teaching and learning regularly, teachers are not always given detailed help on how to improve quickly.
- Planning is not complete in some subjects to ensure students cover the full range of topics.
- Although the governing body has overseen many improvements to the school since the last full inspection, it is not able to challenge fully the information it receives on students' progress or on teachers' performance.

The school has the following strengths

- The drive of the Principal and senior leadership team has raised expectations across the school since the last full inspection. This has had a marked impact on improving teaching and students' behaviour.
- Students who struggle with writing and spelling get extra support in smaller groups, which is helping them make faster progress.
- Staff form positive relationships with students. They manage anxious behaviour sensitively and treat students with respect. As a result, students feel safe in school, and their behaviour and attendance are good.
- Speech and language therapy is highly effective in helping students improve their communication skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five lessons, two of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Meetings and discussions were held with the Principal, staff, members of the governing body and the service director from The Disabilities Trust.
- The inspector met with a group of students, held informal conversations with students at lunchtime and heard some students reading.
- The views of parents and carers were gained through telephone conversations with two parents and carers and a meeting with a parent governor.
- A range of documents was looked at, including the school's plans for improvement, information on students' progress, lesson plans, work in students' books and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Information gathered from previous monitoring visits made since the last full inspection was also considered.

Inspection team

Andrew Redpath, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- In October 2011, the school was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading or governing the school were not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.
- Heathermount is a non-maintained special school owned by The Disabilities Trust. It provides education for students who have a statement of special educational needs for an autistic spectrum condition.
- Students attend from several local authorities in London and the surrounding area. The large majority are boys.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding made available by the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, are in the care of the local authority, or have parents or carers in the armed services) is above average.
- A small number of older students who have complex behaviour and social difficulties receive alternative education provided by Fleet Tutors, based mainly at an adult learning centre in Hillingdon.
- Since the last inspection, a new Principal has been appointed and several other changes have taken place in senior leadership positions. The school no longer admits residential students and it is now registered with the Department of Education as a day special school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in English by:
 - ensuring the subject is coordinated effectively across the school
 - sharing the features of good teaching and learning found in smaller groups with teachers more widely.
- Ensure there is more good or better teaching by:
 - planning lessons that build on what students already know and give them the right level of challenge
 - providing more detailed information to teachers on how they can improve their teaching with clear timescales for action
 - using examples of outstanding teaching in other schools to raise awareness of best practice.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - completing plans to ensure students cover the full range of topics in all subjects
 - providing training to the governing body on how to challenge more effectively the quality of teaching and learning and the rate of students' progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter the school with communication difficulties and with lower than expected levels of reading, writing and numeracy. In relation to their starting points, achievement is not yet good because it is affected by the students' previous underperformance.
- Students now make quicker progress because behaviour is managed well and there is a stronger focus on learning across the school. Expectations are higher and students produce more work.
- The school's data and information from lessons show that all groups are making better progress than previously. The small number of girls perform better than boys, and the achievement of students in Years 5 to 9 is better than that of older students. Students who receive extra help to develop their reading, writing and spelling skills are closing the gap with other students.
- The school is in discussion with local authorities to identify funding it should receive through the pupil premium.
- In the past, students in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, were not offered courses that were challenging enough. As a result, they did not gain enough higher level qualifications. Students now study a more suitable mix of GCSE, Entry Level and work-related courses.
- Performance in mathematics and science is better than in English.
- Students can make a clear choice between different courses leading on from Year 11 into the sixth form. Some older students complete apprenticeships at the school in hospitality and catering or in horticulture. Students are able to pursue individual interests, for example, by attending the local secondary school to gain qualifications in dance and sport.
- All students who left at the end of the last academic year found suitable places in education, further training or work-based apprenticeships.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has improved considerably since the last full inspection. It is not yet good or outstanding because as a first step, senior leaders have focused on eliminating inadequate teaching and improving the management of students' behaviour.
- Teachers manage behaviour consistently. Students enjoy learning and generally settle to work quickly in lessons. Questioning is used well to check students' understanding and to make sure lessons get off to a good start.
- In the best lessons, learning is broken into small steps and there are a variety of practical activities which keep students interested. A good example was seen in a science lesson when students measured their pulse rate after exercising, then discussed their results.
- The use of information on students' progress to plan lessons varies. Good examples occur in social skills groups run by speech and language therapists. In these sessions, activities are linked closely to each student's prior attainment, which helps students gradually develop effective turn-taking and speaking and listening skills.
- Teaching in small groups is effective in improving students' reading, writing and spelling. Students have an initial test which pinpoints their individual difficulty, and resources are carefully selected to tackle weaknesses. Work is marked in detail and targets for improvement are shared with the students.
- In a few lessons, work is not matched closely to students' previous knowledge or skills. This leads to poor concentration and slow progress.
- The use of marking has improved since the last full inspection. Students' work is marked regularly, sometimes using symbols, and suggestions are made for improvement. There are also good examples of students checking their own work. Occasionally, suggestions for improvement are not followed up.
- Teaching assistants circulate well in lessons to help and encourage students. However, in some

lessons, the teachers' planning does not state clearly how support can maximise learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students say they feel safe and recognise how much behaviour has improved since the last full inspection. Incidents of bullying are rare and students feel any problems are dealt with promptly by staff.
- The good behaviour and safety of students are underpinned by the understanding relationships with staff. The school provides a calm and orderly environment.
- Some students do display anxious behaviour, often linked to their learning and communication difficulties. These incidents are rare, due to the staff's improved knowledge of autism and their high level of skill in managing behaviour. Wherever possible, students are taught ways in which they can manage their own behaviour without disrupting others.
- A careful analysis of each student's individual behaviour and the introduction of an agreed approach across the school have resulted in a sharp drop in the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour. There have been no exclusions in the current academic year.
- Attendance has improved year on year and is higher than that in other special schools nationally.
- Students enjoy earning 'points' for effort and achievement at the end of each lesson. They use these to choose activities, for example to play pool or table tennis, or to listen to music.
- Students have several opportunities to take on responsibilities and to develop their independence, for example through the school council or when they complete jobs around the school. Older students, including those in the sixth form, benefit from work experience placements and part-time courses at college or at a local school.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet statutory requirements. Good arrangements are in place to tackle bullying, including cyber-bullying. Senior leaders make visits and receive regular reports from the alternative education provider to check students' attendance and to ensure their safety.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The Principal and senior leaders provide strong leadership and have united staff in a shared sense of purpose. They have tackled successfully the main areas of weakness identified at the last full inspection and have set the school firmly on course for further improvement.
- Information on students' progress is checked regularly, which has helped to raise expectations among staff and improve the achievement of students. Parents and carers report they are kept well informed about their children's progress and feel any concerns are dealt with sympathetically.
- Senior leaders are aware of the further work needed for the school to become good. For example, they have suitable plans to complete policies on reading and writing and to improve the coordination of English across the school.
- Teaching is monitored regularly and linked to targets for improving performance. Senior leaders have been successful in raising the quality of teaching. They have been less successful in raising teaching to a good or better standard because monitoring does not always produce detailed points for improving teaching and learning, with a clear timescale for action.
- Staff have received training which has given them a clearer understanding of the needs of students with an autistic spectrum condition and how to manage successfully their behaviour. The local authority has provided useful training, particularly in how to improve the teaching of reading and writing.
- The amount of time spent on teaching and learning has been extended. Profitable links with the

local secondary school have enabled students to take additional examination courses and to participate in a joint residential trip. Planning in some subjects, for example design and technology, does not cover all areas of the subject.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through the personal, social and health education programme, social skills groups, drama productions and weekly reflection time. There are, however, few opportunities for students' success to be recognised by the wider school community.

■ **The governance of the school:**

– The governing body and trustees of The Disabilities Trust share a clear vision for the school. Some governors are also trustees, which provides a direct link between the work of the school and the wider aims of the trust. Since the last inspection, the governing body has been strengthened with new members and all its statutory responsibilities, including safeguarding, are carried out effectively. It is not yet in a position to identify how the pupil premium will be used because funding arrangements have not been agreed with local authorities. The governing body has not had training on how to develop its understanding of students' progress or teachers' performance, and it is not able to challenge fully the school's performance in these areas.

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	133743
Local authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	408621

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	8 - 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Akester
Principal	Christine Edden
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2011
Telephone number	01344 875101
Fax number	01344 875702
Email address	info@heathermount.co.uk

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