

# Heathlands School

Heathlands Drive, St Albans, AL3 5AY

**Inspection dates** 13–14 March 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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

- Teaching is typically good, with consistently good and better teaching in the lower and middle schools. The great majority of staff are very skilled communicators.
- Pupils make good progress. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those with additional learning difficulties.
- Attendance is high and punctuality is generally good. Pupils behave well and have a positive attitude towards learning.
- The subjects and courses taught are appropriate for pupils' ages and interests, and the link with a local college makes a good contribution to pupils' vocational education.
- The school is safe. All safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and applied consistently.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal development, in aspects such as independence and self-confidence. They also show good gains in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils feel that they are prepared well for leaving school.
- A depleted leadership team has done a good job to maintain an effective school while managing the movement of pupils onto a single site.
- School self-evaluation is thorough and so senior leaders have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and of the areas that need further development.
- Although the governing body has experienced major changes of personnel, the current group ensures that the school is run efficiently, with positive results for pupils.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching is consistently good. A few staff do not use sign language fluently, which affects the rate of learning, and not all learning support assistants are wholly effective.
- The school was not designed for secondary-aged pupils. The accommodation and resources for design and technology (resistant materials) and physical education
- The procedures for checking, analysing, interpreting and presenting pupils' assessment information are not robust enough for leaders to make detailed and precise judgements about how well pupils do in comparison with pupils in other schools.

are just adequate.

## Information about this inspection

- In excess of six hours were spent observing 15 lessons, involving 14 different teachers. Four of the lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders and other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, two groups of pupils and parents.
- Not enough parents and carers gave their opinion of the school through the online questionnaire (Parent View) for the results to be displayed.
- The views of staff were collected from the questionnaires that nine completed.
- A wide variety of documentation was examined, such as pupil assessment data, attendance records, self-evaluation procedures and development planning.
- One reading session was observed, although pupils of all ages were frequently seen reading in different subjects. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were seen practising pre-reading skills in different situations, and pupils of all ages were routinely observed using sign language as their preferred communication system.

## Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Tomkins

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Heathlands is a day and residential school, but the residential provision did not feature in this inspection. It was inspected last in April 2012, when it was judged to be outstanding.
- All of the pupils are deaf and have a statement of special educational needs that includes a requirement for the use of sign language. About a fifth of pupils have additional educational difficulties.
- The school was on three sites when it was inspected in 2009. One was for primary-aged Heathlands pupils only, while the secondary provision was based within two local schools; a mainstream secondary school and a community special school. The primary site was developed to become the sole site for all pupils with effect from September 2012. It is arranged into three departments: lower, middle and upper schools.
- There are equal numbers of boys and girls on roll. Around a sixth of them are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of service families) for around a quarter of pupils, which is around the national average.
- There have been big changes in the senior leadership team in the past year. The headteacher retired in August 2012 and the deputy headteacher was promoted to the post. Two of the three assistant headteachers who were in post in December 2011 have since left the school, and the third has been promoted to acting deputy headteacher. Two of these three assistant headteacher positions are being covered by lead teachers.
- The governing body has undergone significant change in the past eight months as governors have left and new ones have joined. The current Chair took over in October 2012.
- A partnership with Oaklands College enables a group of Year 10 pupils to follow accredited vocational courses.
- The school has received the full British Council International School Award since the last inspection.

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

- Raise the quality of teaching so that it is routinely good or better by:
  - ensuring that all staff have a fluency of sign language that enables them to communicate technical and subject-specific vocabulary and ideas easily
  - improving the effectiveness of a minority of learning support assistants' contribution to supporting pupils' progress.
- Make leadership and management more effective by:
  - developing the curriculum in the secondary school by improving the provision for those subjects that currently have very limited facilities, particularly design and technology (resistant materials) and physical education
  - introducing procedures for checking more rigorously the accuracy of teachers' assessments of the levels at which pupils are working, and for interpreting and reporting upon the extent of pupils' progress compared with that made by pupils of similar age and starting points in other schools.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils learn quickly in lessons and make good progress over their time at the school, particularly in developing numeracy and communication skills.

Historically, there has not been any significant difference in the attainment of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium and their classmates, and nor has there been any noticeable variation in the progress that they make in English and mathematics. Therefore, pupil premium income is being spent on items with potential benefit for all pupils, such as reading materials and on meeting the costs of additional activities that take place in and out of school in order to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to participate.

- Pupils make good progress in becoming competent readers. Good teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 give children pre-reading skills and, further up the school, the newly established reading programme is already beginning to accelerate pupils' reading capability through intensive daily sessions.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress and, in a good proportion of cases, outstanding progress, in acquiring language and communication skills. Children also make good progress in developing self-help skills and improving social interactions as they become increasingly aware of other children and adults.
- Pupils' performance in accredited examinations in Key Stage 4 indicates that they make good progress during their time in the secondary school. Following a peak in 2009, few pupils have obtained a grade A\* to C in GCSE examinations since. However, year groups are small and the range of attainment is very variable. Around half of Year 11 pupils pass five or more GCSEs at grade G or better each year.
- Because year groups are so variable, leaders took the decision to enter high-attaining Year 10 pupils for mathematics and science GCSE examinations for the first time in 2012. This proved to be very successful; over half of those who were entered achieved a grade C or better in one subject and more than a third did so in both.
- Key Stage 4 pupils achieve well in other award-bearing courses too. These include Entry Levels, BTEC food technology, accredited courses for speech and language therapy skills, and City and Guilds qualifications in construction and animal care that they study at college.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good in the lower school, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage. Extremely good relationships provide a very safe and sound base for learning, and staff exploit this well to accelerate pupils' progress. They plan carefully and they record pupils' achievements in detail.
- Lower school staff have high expectations of pupils' ability to participate and engage with others. They know very well what pupils have learned previously, and they have a clear view about which new activities are going to help pupils to learn even more. Teachers constantly check on pupils' learning so that they can amend tasks in response to pupils' answers.
- Teaching in the middle and upper schools is more variable. When teachers have both specialist

subject knowledge and the sign language skills to communicate well, pupils learn at a rapid rate. Whole-class teaching sessions have a good tempo and teachers ensure that they are inclusive, with all pupils encouraged to participate. Staff choose follow-up work carefully so that pupils are able to tackle it independently and, on these occasions, pupils rise to the challenge.

- Staff plan many activities that require pupils to work collaboratively. For instance, groups were seen sensibly discussing which two famous physicians from history they would save based on their contribution to world health by allowing them to stay in a hot-air balloon while the rest were ejected. Pairs of pupils in food technology had to think creatively, come to an agreement and then cooperate in preparing a dish in response to the challenge of making a unique and original product for a named group by using the ingredients that they had been given.
- While not inadequate, teaching is not wholly effective in a few instances because staff do not have the communication skills required, such as fluency in the use of sign language to maintain rapid learning throughout a lesson. In a few cases, learning support assistants do not show enough initiative or take enough responsibility for guiding and supporting pupils' learning.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Pupils go to school as often as they can. Attendance is high and there is virtually no unauthorised absence because pupils enjoy school. Consequently, they invariably have positive attitudes in lessons.
- Relationships throughout the school are generally good and pupils usually interact with each other in a pleasant and well-mannered way. Such high-quality interpersonal relationships and concern for others are indicative of the good progress that pupils make in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- By the time they leave school, Year 11 pupils have grown into mature, impressive young people with a positive view about the future. The school prepares them well for this transition by giving them the communication, social and self-help skills that support their academic achievements and which ease the transfer into college, training or employment.
- Staff ensure that pupils are safe in school, and the pupils themselves confirm this. They know about different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and they report that, although bullying does occur, it is rare and dealt with very quickly.
- Adults generally manage pupils' behaviour well. The behaviour management system that was introduced in the autumn of 2012 is already making a difference, as staff have the same expectations and they are consistent in the way that they use rewards and sanctions. As a result, minor disruptions cause little loss of learning time.
- Effective systems support the small number of pupils who have more challenging behaviour. Plans to help individuals improve their behaviour are applied consistently and, recently, pupils that the school judges are likely to benefit from the approach have been allocated a mentor. For younger pupils, this may be a Key Stage 4 pupil. This role-model approach is beginning to produce positive results. Furthermore, leaders now track behaviour more efficiently and this, too, is contributing to a more orchestrated approach to managing and improving the behaviour of all pupils.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The senior leadership team is much smaller compared with previously, including when the school was inspected last, and all pupils are now on one site. Therefore, fewer leaders are carrying out all of the tasks that were previously undertaken by a full leadership team.
- Leaders dealt very well with the substantial turbulence in 2012 that was created by senior staff and governor resignations and the relocation of all secondary pupils. They successfully retained the confidence of parents and carers, who were uncertain about the relocation on to a single site.
- Inevitably, there has been an impact on leaders' ability to maintain rigorous monitoring as well as driving forward improvements. Consequently, leadership and management are not outstanding, which they were when the school was inspected last, although leaders provide effective day-to-day management and good leadership.
- Senior staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weakness. Their evaluation of the school is entirely accurate and they know where they need to focus their attention to drive forward improvement.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment regularly. The validity of the judgements made about children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are tested at meetings with other schools, and local authority officers monitor testing in Key Stage 1, but there are no regular arrangements with other schools to confirm the accuracy of their judgements. Leaders use the information from teachers' assessments to measure pupils' progress, but they do not analyse the data to sufficient depth or make the most of it to compare pupils' achievement with that made by pupils of the same age and starting levels in other schools.
- The lower and middle schools' curriculum is well planned to develop pupils' learning and personal development. Limited provision for subjects such as design and technology (resistant materials) and physical education reduces the quality of the secondary school curriculum, although pupils are still offered an adequate range of experiences either in-house or via the school's links with a local college.
- School leaders and the governing body maintain highly effective systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils, and staff follow these guidelines closely.
- The local authority does not carry out any routine monitoring of this good school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The new governing body is working effectively to help leaders to establish a single school on a single site. It is fully aware of how pupil premium income has been spent, and it is conscious of the need to examine the impact of this expenditure on raising standards when it examines pupils' overall progress. However, governors are not presented with enough detail about how pupils' progress at this school compares with that made by pupils with special educational needs nationally. The governing body is developing understanding of the quality of teaching through its formal oversight of teachers' appraisal, making sure that better pay and staff promotion are closely related to classroom performance.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117685
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	408915

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	101
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Julia Trueman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Deborah Jones-Stevens
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4–5 November 2009
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