

Uplands School

The Learning Campus, Tadpole Lane, Swindon, SN25 2NB

Inspection dates 15–16 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- In this happy and welcoming school, students including sixth formers make outstanding progress. They achieve highly and so are prepared very well for each stage of their learning.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have maintained the school’s strengths and improved governance and teaching.
- Teaching is outstanding. Close teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants ensures that activities are set at the right level so that students make rapid progress.
- The sixth form is excellent. Students have extensive opportunities to prepare for the next stage of their lives.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Students are proud of their school. Procedures to ensure safety are rigorous and thorough. Students feel very safe and parents and carers are confident that their children are well cared for.
- The leadership of the executive headteacher and operational headteacher are highly effective. They are fully supported by senior managers so that staff know their responsibilities and fulfil them with determination and vigour.
- Governors know the school well. They are highly effective in challenging and holding leaders to account.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons and two morning registrations and thinking skills sessions. Three lessons were observed with senior staff.
- Meetings were held with students, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors heard individual students read to teachers and where appropriate inspectors asked pupils to read to them. Reading included the use of text and symbols.
- The school’s work was observed and inspectors looked at various documents including those relating to keeping pupils safe, checks on pupils’ progress, school plans for improvement, and records of behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors analysed 43 questionnaires returned by staff.
- Ten responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire) were analysed, a letter and an email from parents or carers were also taken into account, and an inspector spoke informally to parents, carers and grandparents bringing children to school.

Inspection team

Michael Farrell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Taylor, Team inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of students have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties, about a third have autism spectrum disorder, and a small proportion have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The sixth form occupies two sites. Thirty of the sixth formers are educated at the Tadpole Lane site which also educates Key Stages 3 and 4 students. Twenty of the sixth formers are educated at the Stratton site, which provides exclusively for these students. The school does not use any other training provider.
- The school classes are 'needs based' so that students with the same primary need are educated together.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A smaller proportion of students than nationally are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is above average. The funding is used to support students who are eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after.
- Year 7 students receive literacy and numeracy catch-up funding.
- Girls make up about a third of students.
- The school does not enter students for examinations early.
- Since the previous inspection, the then headteacher has become executive headteacher with responsibilities including those relating to a school trust. An operational headteacher was appointed two years ago. Student numbers have increased considerably. The school has established a 'learning mentor' service for students who have been excluded from other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop stronger links with businesses and firms in the community and widen opportunities for work-related qualifications for Key Stage 4 and sixth form students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The attainment levels of students when they enter school are generally well below those typical for their age, and remain so throughout their schooling because of their special educational needs.
- In the sixth form, students make exceptional progress because the atmosphere for learning is highly positive and activities are relevant to daily life. Very effective arrangements help students transfer to further education or work.
- During the inspection, sixth form students were observed writing reports based around photographs of a visit to the seaside. This activity motivated them well because of the humorous exchanges between staff and students, and enabled them to reflect on and enjoy their learning.
- Motivated by the high expectations of staff, students from different starting points make rapid progress and achieve very well including in English and mathematics. They acquire knowledge and develop skills in reading, writing, communication, mathematics and a range of other subjects.
- Students read often, using text, symbols or sensory opportunities. Students apply skills widely in a range of situations such as the 'Garden Café', ensuring they are thoroughly prepared for the next stages of their learning.
- Older students take a range of examinations which the school continuously reviews. Well-considered programmes of work experience, including work in a local shop owned by the Trust, help the transition to work or further study. The school recognises that links with local industry and local businesses and the range of work-related examinations are not as fully developed as they could be.
- The school uses precise assessments to inform teaching and intervenes when there is a risk of a student slipping behind. Because of this, different groups of students achieve very well. This includes boys and girls, students with different types of special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups.
- Students on the learning mentor programme make rapid gains in achievement and attendance because of high levels of individual attention and relevant activities including work experience.
- Students supported through additional government funding make at least similar progress as their classmates. This is due to the targeted support from well-qualified teaching assistants.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Much teaching in all key stages is outstanding with none that is less than good. Staff take care that classrooms are welcoming so that students are encouraged to learn and try their best.
- In the sixth form, outstanding teaching is underpinned by careful planning and meticulous record keeping, helping ensure that activities are set at the right level. Staff regularly remind students of the relevance to daily life of what they are learning, which encourages their concentration.
- Students on the learning mentoring programme are helped to build their confidence and skills, to improve their behaviour and attend well. Records indicate some dramatic improvements in these areas.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught very effectively throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants work together as one. This enables them to be clear about what the students should be learning, and what evidence is needed to show that learning has taken place.
- Careful records are kept during sessions to inform future learning. Marking and detailed annotating of students' work provide thorough guidance about what needs to be improved.

- Skills are taught in a range of contexts to ensure they are understood by students, helping embed understanding more deeply.
- Staff have high levels of subject knowledge and understanding of child development. As a result, activities are always set at the right level in order to enable all students to make rapid progress.
- Staff use imaginative resources to enhance learning. For example, internet clips, pictures, photographs, objects and role play are employed to make learning interesting and fun. Strong practice is identified in the school and shared with other staff.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students show a love of learning which powerfully influences their progress. They can give many examples of activities they like. Asked what would improve the school, one student suggested, 'more lessons'.
- Parents and carers, students and staff express very positive views about behaviour, recognising that it is excellent and skilfully managed.
- Behaviour in classroom and around the school is excellent. Where challenging behaviour occasionally occurs, it is dealt with calmly and skilfully so that learning resumes quickly.
- Students attend regularly and are punctual because they enjoy school and recognise the importance of learning. Where students do not attend as regularly as others this is typically for medical reasons, and the school ensures that support is given during any absences.
- Skilled behaviour management contributes strongly to creating a highly positive atmosphere for learning. This leads to strong improvement in behaviour and attendance over time. There has been no exclusion in the past five years.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Arrangements for safeguarding fully meet current government requirements. Health care is a priority and the dignity of students is always remembered.
- Students feel safe. Parents, carers and staff express great confidence that students are safe; as one parent commented, 'Safety is very good.'
- Depending on their age and needs, students are aware of the meaning of bullying and name calling. They say that they are not aware of any occurring. If there was any bullying, students know they can go to a member of staff. One student said that if you fall out with another student, 'teachers get you to say sorry'.
- Students can give examples of how to keep safe in different circumstances, for example, a student said that when crossing a road, 'You should use the crossing button!' Several sixth form students explained why you should not use social networking sites if you do not know the person with whom you are communicating.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The skills of the executive headteacher and the operational headteacher make a powerful combination, complemented by the cohesive senior leadership team. They are fully supported by the strongly motivated staff in the pursuit of excellence for students' achievement and personal development.
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- In the exceptionally well-led and managed sixth form, highly relevant learning pathways have been developed for students having different needs.
- Leaders and managers are greatly ambitious for students to excel, using deep analysis of the school's performance and harnessing staff skills and their understanding of students' needs. Staff provide very good role models for students to emulate.
- The school's accurate self-evaluation is supported by clear evidence. A thirst for improvement

has led to significant advances since the previous inspection, indicating the school's capacity to improve further.

- Rigorous training and development are very effective. The management of staff performance is thorough and fair. Procedures for setting targets for teachers are rigorous. Leaders ensure that salary increases are not awarded unless staff have met their targets, based on students' progress.
- A relentless focus on training and monitoring has contributed powerfully to improvements in teaching and achievement.
- A stimulating range of subjects promotes learning extremely well. As a result, students' behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent.
- The local authority correctly judges the school's performance, providing effective support for example through visits to examine the consistency of what is provided in the sixth form across the two sites.
- Strong links with a wide range of services and schools enhance what the school offers, for example checking judgements about students' progress working with several other schools. Various therapies are carefully coordinated throughout the school.
- The school engages with parents and carers deeply, leading to them holding very positive views and expressing confidence and trust in the school. One parent or carer said of her daughter, 'I wish she had been here from the start.' Another said of her son, 'He is the happiest I have ever seen him.'
- Additional literacy and numeracy funding for Year 7 pupils is effectively used for employing well-qualified teaching assistants to work one to one on specific difficulties. This helps ensure that these students have equal opportunities to succeed.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The effectiveness of the governing body has improved since the previous inspection and governors hold the school to account with great vigour. Governors have specific responsibilities and visit the school with particular objectives. They have a clear understanding of achievement information, how it compares with similar schools, and the quality of teaching. Governors take great care over their safeguarding responsibilities. They carefully oversee the use of resources including staffing and are fully aware for example of the use and impact of pupil premium funding. Drawing on external advice, governors manage the performance of the executive headteacher and operational headteacher with rigour. They make sure that the performance management of other staff is conducted scrupulously. Governors carry out audits of their skills to inform their training, and review their own performance including during an annual reflection day.

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	126555
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	439478

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	138
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Derek Fry
Executive Headteacher	Jackie Smith
Operational Headteacher	Deidre Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 July 2011
Telephone number	01793 493910
Fax number	01793 493912
Email address	head@uplands.swindon.sch.uk

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