

RNIB Sunshine House, Northwood

33, Dene Road, Northwood, HA6 2DD

Inspection dates 8–9 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 because:

- Teaching is outstanding and as a result, the majority of pupils make outstanding academic progress in the very early stages of reading, writing and the recognition of numbers.
- The majority of pupils also make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Teachers and other adults give the pupils very effective support. They know the pupils very well and challenge them consistently to do their best.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress because of excellent teaching and because activities are matched precisely to their stages of development.
- Pupils who are eligible for additional government funding and those who speak English as an additional language make progress at comparable rates to other pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They enjoy school, remain alert and respond very positively to adults and other children. Apart from a minority with serious medical conditions, their attendance is above the average for special schools. Pupils feel very safe and secure.
- Pupils find their activities interesting because they are set at the right level to enable them to make excellent progress.
- The head of school, who is extremely well supported by the executive headteacher, leads a team of very effective middle managers and dedicated teachers.
- School leaders check on all aspects of the school's provision and have driven significant improvement since the previous inspection.
- Governors have a secure understanding of the school's performance. They support the school very well and challenge the school's leaders to maintain and improve on the pace of development.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five lessons, all of which were joint observations with the head of school.
- Meetings were held with teachers, therapists, family support officers, parents, senior staff, governors and representatives of the board of directors of the school.
- The inspector took into account the school's parent surveys. There were too few responses to the on-line questionnaire, (Parent View) to be included. The inspector also looked at 42 completed staff questionnaires.
- The school's work was observed and a range of documentation was considered, including the school's self-review and development planning. Records of pupils' progress and behaviour since the previous inspection were scrutinised, as well as monitoring reports on the standard of teaching and the range of subjects offered. The inspector checked all the safeguarding arrangements for pupils and their attendance records.

Inspection team

Melvyn Blackband

Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils who are blind or partially sighted and who have additional profound and multiple and complex learning disabilities.
- The school is owned by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and managed by the board of trustees.
- Pupils are placed at the school by a number of local authorities. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- About half the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, reflecting the make-up of local boroughs. A minority of these pupils speak English as an additional language.
- An average proportion of pupils is eligible for additional government funding (the pupil premium) because they are entitled to free school meals or are looked after children. The local authority has not yet released the funding and the school has supported the eligible pupils through its own funds.
- The ratio of boys and girls is about the same.
- The school is in alliance with a local academy which comprises three other special schools. Sunshine House is not, however, part of the academy trust but has many links with the other schools. The executive headteacher is also executive headteacher of the academy schools. The head of school was previously deputy headteacher of one of the other schools, now assimilated into the academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure staff record precisely the progress that pupils make in lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- The pupils, on entry to the school, because of their blindness or limited vision and their additional complex learning and physical needs, are generally at the earliest stages of development, although this can vary widely.
- From these low starting points, almost all the pupils make excellent progress and an increasing majority make very rapid progress, much faster than might be expected of pupils with similar disabilities. Different groups in all years make comparable rates of progress, including boys and girls, pupils from differing ethnic groups, and those who speak English as an additional language.
- The few children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress because of excellent teaching and support. Activities are very well matched to their stage of development.
- The pupils make excellent progress in learning different ways of interacting with their environment. They learn to recognise familiar adults, sometimes by touch or the sound of their voice, to respond to sensory experiences. They learn to express their likes in appropriate ways such as by expression or eye movement.
- Over time, the most able pupils learn, for example, to match objects and pictures to sounds, to make marks in sand or in paint, and know the differences between bigger and smaller numbers of objects. This prepares them very well for potential future development in reading, writing and understanding numbers.
- Pupils who have some sight make very good progress in learning to respond to light and to track moving objects.
- Most pupils make exceptional progress in meeting their individual learning targets. These are precisely written for each pupil and ensure that they make outstanding progress in very small steps.
- Teachers and other adults record every minute improvement in pupils' achievement and build on these gains. Over time, records show that most pupils have made rapid progress. The trend of improvement has accelerated since the previous inspection.
- Over time, pupils make outstanding progress in academic achievement, in personal skills and in physical development. For instance, a parent was delighted that her child can now sit unaided and use a cup, developments she attributes solely to the school's teaching.
- Pupils who are eligible for additional funding make progress at the same rates as other children. Attainment can vary widely because of the pupils' starting points and their individual complex difficulties. The school checks their progress in detail and by Year 6, there are no differences in the progress made by these pupils in comparison to their peers.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Records show that since the previous inspection, standards have been improving consistently. This is a result of regular checks by senior staff and high levels of coaching and support for teachers, where appropriate.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' progress. The quality of teachers' checks on pupils' achievement is generally exemplary, although there are a few occasions when staff do not record the tiny steps in progress with as much clarity and precision as they could. As a result of the checks, teachers identify what the pupils need to do next and set challenging targets to which the pupils respond very well.
- The assessment of the pupils' progress is a significant strength of the school. Adults record pupils' achievements in their learning, in their physical skills and in their personal development and ability to make choices. Pupils' targets are precise and very clearly focused on the next small step. The multi-disciplinary team of therapists provides expert advice on the construction of targets, based on detailed observations of each pupil's progress.

- Communication is taught outstandingly well. This is achieved through an interactive process where pupils learn to discriminate between light and dark and to experience touch and the feel of different materials. Pupils learn to express their feelings and likes through appropriate means such as body movement or facial expression. One boy, for instance, made exceptional progress in using a switch to express his likes because it was attached to a foot massager which he was able to turn on and off and which he enjoyed greatly.
- These early stages can lead, for the most able pupils, to recognition of objects and symbols and so prepare them for understanding letters and numbers. A pupil made very good progress in recognising bigger and smaller numbers of objects by dipping his hand into containers containing different quantities of blocks. He was able to indicate, with careful questioning, which had the bigger number.
- The pupils receive continuous individual support in lessons. Adults are skilled in systematically checking the pupils' understanding and in reshaping their learning to ensure they make the best progress they can. The pupils are always made aware of when they have done well and how they can improve their progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They have extremely positive attitudes to their learning. They remain alert and interested in activities and this has a significant impact on their outstanding progress.
- Pupils are happy and relaxed. They are calm and responsive in the playground and dining room. They welcome the presence of adults and other pupils. Throughout the day, the pupils express their pleasure at the company of others. They smile often. Pupils enjoy school. The attendance of the majority is above average for the type of school.
- Parents are very positive about behaviour at the school.
- Bullying is unknown because pupils are extremely well supervised throughout the day. The pupils have very positive feelings towards other children.
- The school places great emphasis on supporting and caring for others. Adults provide excellent role models and show pupils on every occasion how to behave towards others.
- Pupils have many opportunities to socialise with pupils from the schools in the academy group. This teaches them how to manage their own behaviour and what is acceptable conduct.
- The school manages behaviour very well. There are very few recorded incidents. When a pupil displays unwelcome behaviour through frustration or discomfort, staff analyse the reasons for the behaviour and quickly put into place specific behaviour plans to alleviate the situation. These are regularly monitored and are very successful in restoring the pupil's well-being.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. There are exemplary standards of care, and safeguarding arrangements are secure. The school makes determined efforts to improve pupils' attendance and supports families very well at times of difficulty, for example through illness. On many trips out of school, including a yearly visit to Malta for some children, the pupils are taught how to keep safe and out of danger.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Through their experience and expertise, the executive headteacher and the head of school, who is in charge of the school, have developed a team of very able middle managers. Together they have driven consistent improvement. There is a culture of high expectations of both staff and pupils. Adults respond well to these expectations. Without exception, staff expressed their pride in the school and their own desire to play their part in improving provision.
- Senior staff maintain an excellent overview of pupils' achievements through very efficient tracking of their progress. Additional support or changes to targets are very quickly arranged if

pupils are seen to be not doing as well as they can. As a result, almost every pupil, including the more able, those who receive additional funding and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve very well. Every child has an equal opportunity to do as well as possible.

- The checks on teachers' performance are robust. Procedures are underpinned by regular review against challenging targets, linked firmly to national standards. Good performance is suitably rewarded by salary progression and weaker performance tackled appropriately. There are high levels of further training to support teachers.
- The school's leaders thoroughly and accurately evaluate the school's performance. For instance, they are aware of occasional variation in standards of recording the pupils' progress and have plans to combat this. Development planning is detailed and ambitious. Wherever possible, plans are linked to those of the academy so that resources may be shared and the expertise of staff fully utilised across the range of schools.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have been consistently improving pupils' levels of progress and the quality of teaching. The school has developed an impressive track record of sustained success and it is well supported by the RNIB and the governing body. As a result, the school's capacity to maintain improvement is outstanding.
- The range of subjects, therapy and specialised methods of interaction are very well matched to pupils' needs. Communication in various forms is emphasised in all activities, supported by an extremely high level of individual tuition and support. Pupils have access to after-school and Saturday clubs and many opportunities to celebrate different faiths and cultures.
- Additional government sports funding has been used well to introduce extra provision such as 'rebound' therapy and this has a positive impact on the pupils' interaction skills and physical confidence. The curriculum contributes very well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Partnerships with other institutions, such as the academy trust, are extremely effective. They bring added expertise to the school and provide pupils with a much wider mix of experiences, for instance in shared Christmas shows and celebrations and at the summer fair. Professionals such as therapists, who are employed by the school, bring valuable experience to setting pupils challenging but achievable targets.
- Parents report that they feel very satisfied with the school's work. They are confident that their children are safe and well looked after and that they are making very good progress. This is captured by one parent who commented, 'They give us hope for the future.'
- Safeguarding arrangements are very secure and meet current statutory requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are well informed about pupils' progress, including those eligible for additional funding, and how it compares with similar schools. The governing body examines all aspects of pupils' achievement and teaching quality and provides positive challenge to the school's leadership team. They have a clear role in overseeing performance management, although they do not have control of the school's budget, since this is managed by the board of trustees. Members undergo regular training in, for instance, interpretation of data and child protection. They are up to date in their knowledge of regulations regarding the safeguarding of children.

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	102463
Local authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	439454

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	The Board of Trustees
Chair	Deborah Hamlin
Headteacher	John Ayres (Executive Headteacher) Jackie Seaman (Head of school)
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 June 2011
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