

Ivel Valley School

Hitchmead Road, Biggleswade, SG18 0NL

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and senior leaders provide strong leadership. Other managers and governors make a good contribution to the leadership of teaching, achievement and school improvement.
- Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe in school and there are good procedures for keeping them secure.
- Achievement is good and most pupils make at least the expected amount of progress.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children benefit from the facilities they share with the neighbouring nursery school and they make good progress.
- The sixth form is good. More-able students in the sixth form make outstanding progress. They benefit from excellent opportunities to take part in work-related learning and college courses. This helps them to prepare for the next stage of their lives.
- Teaching and the curriculum are matched well to pupils' needs and interests.
- Having a number of classes located in mainstream schools provides pupils with very good opportunities to socialise with mainstream pupils. The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always give pupils enough opportunity to develop their writing skills.
- Marking and approaches to assessment are not consistently good across the school.
- Assessment in the prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development) in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties does not capture very small steps of progress.
- Guidance to parents on how to support their children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is not as clear as it could be.
- In the sixth form, students with severe learning difficulties and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties have limited opportunities to learn about the world of work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 22 lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. As well as observing lessons on the school’s two sites, the team visited its classes at Lawns Nursery, Langford Lower School, Biggleswade Academy and Stratton Upper School. Inspectors also heard some pupils read and attended an assembly at the secondary site.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, other staff with responsibility for areas of the school’s work and with pupils. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body and spoke by telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team considered the 16 responses to the online survey (Parent View) and looked at parents’ comments in home-school books. Inspectors took into account 71 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documentation, including records of pupils’ progress and behaviour, and planning for individual pupils’ learning. They sampled pupils’ work, looked at records of leaders’ checks on teaching and at documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jackie Cousins	Additional Inspector
Debra McCarthy	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have complex needs and a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates on two main sites, serving the needs of primary and secondary-aged pupils. Additionally, there are five Ivel Valley satellite classes based at local mainstream schools. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and most pupils at Key Stage 1 are based at the neighbouring Lawns Nursery. A class of pupils at Key Stage 2 is based at Langford Lower School and a class of pupils spanning Key Stages 2 and 3 is based at Biggleswade Academy. Two classes, for students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, are based at Stratton Upper School.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is a little above average. (This is government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The school employs the equivalent of two full-time teachers who provide outreach support and an autistic spectrum disorders advisory service to mainstream schools on behalf of the local authority. Currently, the teachers are working with four upper schools, nine middle schools and 39 lower schools.
- The school works in close partnership with the Children with Disabilities Team, which is based at the Ivel Valley Hub on the primary site. The school manages the Early Years Support Service on behalf of the local authority.
- A number of students in the sixth form attend Bedford College or North Herts College for part of their time and undertake extended work experience placements for a day each week.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and build on existing strengths in teaching by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills
 - ensuring that all pupils' work is well marked and increasing pupils' involvement in evaluating their own learning
 - assessing children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the prime areas of learning and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties against smaller steps in progress
 - providing clearer guidance for parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage on how they could support their children's learning at home.
- Extend opportunities for sixth form students with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties to learn about the world of work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and makes sure that the school runs efficiently across its several sites. This is achieved partly by the clear delegation of responsibilities amongst the leadership team. The headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher, particularly in the thorough analysis of information about the school's performance. Other leaders with responsibility for areas of the school's work, including subjects, make a good contribution to its effectiveness.
- Leaders have successfully built on the many positive features found at the previous inspection. Plans for the school's future development are detailed and senior leaders are thorough in their approach to school improvement. This is evident in the range of changes introduced in order to raise achievement in reading and in the way leaders have carefully checked on how well the new methods are being put into practice.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Leaders conduct regular checks on teachers' work and provide them with clear information about their performance. Leaders are rigorous in following up development points and teachers are held to account for their pupils' progress. Staff have good opportunities to develop their effectiveness through training and teachers benefit from observing one another's teaching.
- The school continuously reviews its curriculum and develops it to make it relevant to the changing needs of the pupils. Subjects and courses support the academic and personal needs of most pupils well. Students receive good advice and guidance about what they might do when they leave school. The school is currently working to increase opportunities for less-able students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, so that they have more chances to learn about the world of work. Throughout the school, pupils have many opportunities to increase their self-esteem, confidence and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- The school has made a good start in developing ways of assessing pupils now that National Curriculum levels have been removed. It has already produced a series of draft statements that it intends to use to assess pupils' attainment and to set targets.
- The school uses its primary sport funding effectively. Its spending has given pupils greater access to specialist physical education teaching and increased the range of equipment available. This has brought about good improvement in pupils' technical skills and led to an increase in the number taking part in competitive sport with other schools.
- The outreach service is led and managed well and provides skilled support to mainstream schools. It receives very positive evaluations from schools about its impact on teaching and learning.
- The school works well in partnership with parents. The parent forum provides opportunities for parents to express their views, gain information and support. Parents are invited to attend workshops on specific aspects of their children's learning and the school regularly asks for their opinion about its work.
- The local authority has an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. It commissions services from the school in support of other schools in the authority. It encourages the school to make use of independent improvement partners and the local authority has worked with the headteacher in the development of some aspects of the school's work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body makes a good contribution to the school's work. Governors are ambitious for the school and provide a good level of challenge for senior leaders.
 - The governing body makes sure that the school is financially stable and keeps a careful check on the impact of spending, including pupil premium funding.
 - Governors have a clear knowledge of teaching within the school. They receive reports from the headteacher on teachers' performance and share information when external consultants work with leaders to check on the quality of teaching and learning.
 - Governors have a good understanding of how the school promotes tolerance and prepares pupils for life

in modern Britain. Through their visits to the school, governors collect information about the way pupils relate to one another and how well they are prepared to take a role in society.

- Governors meet their statutory duties well, including for the safeguarding of pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are happy and confident and their good attitudes to learning make a clear contribution to the progress they make.
- Staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour and there are good procedures for dealing with those pupils whose difficulties can give rise to challenging behaviour. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and they are particularly skilled in managing pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Leaders keep a thorough check on behavioural incidents.
- Pupils respond well to opportunities to contribute to the life of the school, for instance, as members of the school council. They also readily accept other opportunities to take responsibility and some pupils from the school were involved in the appointment of a new Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe in school and enjoy trusting relationships with the staff. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for example, when using computers. As pupils get older and develop greater independence, the school does all that it can to make them aware of how to keep themselves safe in the outside world. It conducts thorough risk assessments for students who spend some of their time at college or on extended work experience placements.
- Pupils know about bullying but say that they are not bullied. The school's records confirm that bullying is rare and that incidents are handled effectively. Pupils enjoy good relationships with one another and learn about the importance of treating others with care and respect. The school's focus on a different 'value' each term provides a focus for pupils' personal development and contributes to their good behaviour.
- The attendance rate is above average and nearly all absences are for medical reasons.

The quality of teaching is good

- Inspection findings, the school's own checks, and evidence of pupils' progress from their books and data show that teaching is good.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and have very positive relationships with their pupils. They know their pupils well, and encourage them to concentrate and apply themselves. Collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants is a strong feature across the school, with adults working as a seamless team to support pupils' learning.
- Teachers make good use of pupils' individual targets when planning their lessons, and nearly always provide the right level of challenge. Teachers question pupils well to check their understanding and encourage them to think more deeply.
- Signing and the use of symbols, pictures and objects are strong features in the teaching of communication throughout the school.
- Teachers provide pupils with plenty of practical activities, such as looking for geometric shapes in their environment or experimenting to see which fabric is the most waterproof. These activities motivate pupils and capture their interest. The teaching of basic skills as an integral part of enterprise activities is a major strength in lessons for older pupils.

- The school has done a great deal to raise achievement in reading and teachers provide pupils with plenty of opportunities to practise their reading skills and to show their understanding of what they have read. Displays around the school encourage reading with labels in both text and symbols.
- Raising achievement in writing is a current school development priority. Pupils' books show that those who are more able have some good opportunities to write and that less-able pupils practise making marks or record their ideas using symbols. Occasionally in lessons, pupils spend so long on practical activities that there is no time left for them to do any writing or they are only expected to produce a small amount of written work. When this happens, pupils do not make as much progress as they could in developing their writing skills.
- When teachers mark pupils' work and talk to them about how well they have done, they sometimes provide a good level of information and advice. However, marking is not always so helpful. At times, teachers just ask pupils whether they feel they have worked hard rather than getting them to say a bit more about their work and what they have learned.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good because nearly all pupils make at least the expected amount of progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics and a good proportion do better than this, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils whose classes are based at local mainstream schools make as much progress as those who are based on the school's own sites. Those pupils who are able to do so benefit from the opportunity to integrate into some mainstream lessons.
- More-able pupils make good progress throughout the school, including in English and mathematics. They become competent readers who enjoy books, are able to record information in writing, do addition and sometimes subtraction sums. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 and students in the sixth form, gain a range of qualifications. For the most able, this includes some GCSE passes at grades A* to G. Sixth form students who attend college and take part in extended work experience make excellent progress and gain valuable skills to help them prepare for employment and life after school.
- Pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding make at least as much progress as their classmates. This is because the funding is matched well to their learning needs, for instance, providing one-to-one tuition in literacy and numeracy, or speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.
- Through its thorough tracking of pupils' progress, the school has rightly identified that progress in writing is not quite as good as that in other areas. Raising achievement in writing is, therefore, a current priority.
- There is no marked difference in the progress of most groups of pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and severe learning difficulties.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties made similar progress to their classmates but less progress than other pupils in English in the last academic year. This is partly the result of the school not recording their progress in communication in small enough steps so that some aspects of their achievement are not taken into account.

The early years provision is good

- The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed well.
- Children make good progress in their learning, including in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school makes a good contribution to children's physical and emotional health, safety

and well-being.

- Being based in the neighbouring nursery school provides children with a curriculum that is stimulating, interesting and relevant to their needs. Those who are able to do so join in with mainstream activities, while those who need a high level of support benefit from the joint work of the teacher, teaching assistants and therapists.
- Teaching is good and the staff make use of a range of books, toys and equipment adapted to children's needs. For example, a child who was unable to stand and reach the water tray had a bowl of water incorporated into the tray of her standing frame so that she could join in with the activity. Staff make good use of signing, objects and pictures to support children's communication.
- A good system is in place for checking what children can do when they join the school and for identifying their individual needs. Staff regularly observe children's learning and keep detailed records. However, assessment in the prime areas of learning is not broken down into small enough steps to show on-going progress and help staff to plan more sharply the next steps children need to take in their learning.
- Home-school diaries provide very detailed information and advice for parents, and there are regular opportunities for parents to come in to discuss their children's progress. Although the school sends home information about how parents can help their children's learning at home, this is very wordy and not easily understood.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Students in the sixth form achieve well and they nearly all go on to further education when they leave school. More-able students, including those with moderate learning difficulties and some with autistic spectrum disorders, make outstanding progress. This is because they have excellent opportunities to develop work-related skills, as well as taking part in enterprise projects and preparing for life after school.
- Students gain a range of qualifications and more-able students attend college for one day a week, following courses, for example, in retail or small animal care, as well as undertaking a day's work experience each week. Further work-related experiences are available in school, including land-based studies on the Stratton Upper School site.
- The quality of teaching is good. A particular strength in teaching is the way that teachers integrate tasks that develop students' literacy and numeracy skills into practical, enterprise activities. Teachers and teaching assistants provide a careful balance of support and challenge for students.
- The behaviour and attitudes of the students are outstanding. They are exceptionally motivated, happy and confident. They gain great enjoyment from the activities provided and apply themselves extremely well. They say that they particularly enjoy their travel training because it enables them to be independent.
- The sixth form is led and managed well. The appointment of a new assistant headteacher with expertise in working with this age group has increased the school's capacity to improve the opportunities available to students. It is seeking to secure more supported work placements and visits for students with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Such opportunities are not as well developed for these students as for others.

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	109739
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	447943

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	142
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Grayston
Headteacher	Julie Mudd
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2012
Telephone number	01767 601010
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